

# Signing the Covenant

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, keep your Bibles open there, Genesis chapter 17. Let's pray and ask God to help us understand his word well. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you to give us your life-giving word.

Thank you for these living words. We pray that you'd help us to understand it well this morning and so to be encouraged to live for you and your glory. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm not sure what your experience of waiting for things is like. Waiting on the phone makes you reluctant to ring up any large organisation.

My ability to wait has been diminishing over the years, I'm sure. Our world wants everything now, sooner than later.

It's fast fashion, it's fast food, it's fast photos these days. Long gone are the days when you took a photo and you waited for the thing to be developed and you'd come back and you'd buy it and you'd come back and open up the packet and see what you'd got.

[ 1 : 03 ] Long gone are the days when you put something on lay-by at the shops and paid it off before you opened the packet. Now it's buy now, pay later. Long gone are the days when sexual intimacy was saved until marriage.

Now it's almost unheard of. Long gone are the days when you waited for a letter to arrive. Now it's waiting for you to open it up in email.

Now long you have to wait to go to a shop to buy a book. You can actually push a button and it'll download and you have it on your Kindle now. Then you've got to read it.

Now long gone are the days when it was Christmas Day and kids would get their desired toy to open up and play with.

Now it's almost Christmas Day every day. At least it can be like that for me. You know, you buy something on credit card and the man turns up in the white truck and out comes this nice package for you.

[ 2 : 03 ] Fantastic. Instant gratification of my desires makes waiting for things so much harder. Experiments have shown that those children who can delay gratification do much better in life.

Now I'm not sure what your capacity to wait for something like has been for promises made to you but how would you go if you had a promise made to you and 25 years later it still hadn't been fulfilled?

What would you think of the one who made the promise to you? Would you still be waiting for that promise? Or would you have long given up?

I mean, the Proverbs speaks about this, hope deferred makes the heart sick but a desired fulfilment is a tree of life. We come to Genesis chapter 17 today and it's another one of those key parts of the Scriptures and we move forward 13 years from Genesis chapter 16.

You might not have picked it up, right? But have a look at Genesis chapter 16 verse 16. And Hagar bore Abram a son and Abram called the name of his son whom Hagar bore Ishmael.

[ 3 : 29 ] Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. So we learnt last year that Ishmael was the one who came because Sarah's womb had been closed and there was no child.

Chapter 17 verse 1, when Abram was 99 years old, now simple mathematics, 13 years later on, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless that I may make my covenant between me and you and may multiply you greatly.

God appears to Abram, not quite sure how he appears and God tells Abraham who is talking to him. Did you hear who's talking to Abram?

God Almighty is talking to him. It's the first time in the Scriptures that we hear God call himself El Shaddai, God Almighty.

We only hear it a few times, seven times in the Old Testament and it's in contrast to the weakness of the situation that people are found in. And he is the one who has the power to do anything. [ 4 : 53 ] Almighty. Nothing is impossible for God. And he commands Abram to walk before him, that is to live before him in a way which is acceptable to God.

To conduct himself in a way which pleases God. To live in a way which wins God's approval. That's how he's to live, right? And how is that? Well, trusting the promises of God, believing his word, obeying his word.

And Abraham has demonstrated his faithfulness, though it's been waxing and waning. Will he live faithfully now? Thirteen years has happened already.

How much longer before this promised child is to come? And we see God is going to make a covenant with him, verse two. That I may make my covenant between me and you and may multiply you greatly.

Now a covenant is like a contract between two parties. That's what a covenant is. It's looking forward, right? And involves consequences for breaking covenants.

[ 6 : 00 ] In this case, it's between an infinitely powerful God and a finite human creature. Far, far weaker party, Abram.

And unlike human contracts, God is one part and he will not break it. And the covenant that God is talking about is built on the promises that have gone before in chapter 12 and chapter 15.

The bedrock essence of the covenant is that God Almighty will be Abram's God. That's the bedrock of the covenant.

He will be Abram's God forever. And nothing will ever change that. God will not only be Abram's God, but he'll also be the God of Abram's offspring as well.

And God being God will then fulfill his promises and give him the land. And through Abraham, he will be a blessing to others. And those who curse Abraham will be cursed.

[ 7 : 08 ] There's blessings for obediences and curses for breaking them. Blessings for those who submit to Abram's God and curses for those who do not submit to Abram's God.

And from God being Abram's God, will flow offspring, land, and blessing to the nations through him. Now in Genesis chapter 15, God established a covenant with Abram in secret.

Abram's in a deep sleep and he has a vision of God walking through the cut animals. It's privately established with Abram. Abram here now has his name changed in verses 3 to 7.

Confronted by God Almighty, Abram falls on his face in worship, recognises that he's come before the true and living God.

I wonder if we have that experience when we hear God's word and we come into the presence of the Lord God Almighty.

[ 8 : 25 ] James chapter 5 talks about weeping and wailing and recognising who we're before. Abram and Sarai were promised offspring back in chapter 12 verse 4 when Abram was 75 years old.

It's been almost 25 years now of waiting. That's a long time. Our church has been going about 25 years.

It's been 25 years of disappointment. As month by month goes by, there's no child on the way and Sarai's getting older.

It's heartbreaking for those who long for a child to go for years on end having hope dashed. Let alone 25 years of it being promised that you'd have one.

the temptation is to give up and doubt God and that's understandable. Now, just on a side note, for those here who have struggled with infertility or are struggling with infertility, it's a great pain.

[ 10 : 01 ] I know it is. It's a source of ongoing sadness and disappointment. It's a loss and a grief that largely goes silent but noticed and not spoken about.

It's a loss and grief of ongoing loss and grief. It's difficult for the ladies, the women, the mothers who would like to be mothers.

And it's painful for the men, the husbands as well. There's great complexity and it's difficult to endure.

And like all struggles, it is better if you're not going through it alone. But who do you talk to? When do you talk to?

Who talks to who first? So if you're looking for someone to talk to and this is the kind of thing going on in your life at the moment, there are some women in our church who are willing to talk to you and

there are some men who are willing to talk to the men as well.

[11:11] So if you want to talk to a woman, you could talk to someone like Judy Rice, you could talk to someone like Amy Webster, you could talk to someone like Chen Fu, someone you trust.

If you want to talk to a bloke, you can talk to someone like Stuart Webster or me or we can put you in touch with a couple of people. Let us know in the Connect today if you'd like to take that option up.

So back to the passage before us. To rub salt into the wound, Abram's name is changed. From Abram, which means father, notice, to Abraham, which means father of many nations.

Every time someone speaks to Abram now in the street, sees him face to face and uses his new name, it will reinforce his situation.

Abraham, you've got no kids, but you're going to be the father of many nations.

[12:22] It will reinforce the situation. There's no kids yet, but Abram says, well God says, I have spoken and I will make it happen.

It's as good as it's already happened when God speaks. God has determined it, promised it, decreed it and so it will be. Notice the emphasis and the forward nature here, the repeated word, I will, I will, I will, verse 6, I will, have a look with me, chapter 17, verse 6, I will make you sitting fruitful and I will make you into nations and kings.

Verse 7, I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring and your generation for everlasting covenant to be God with you and your offspring after you and I will give you and your offspring after you the land of your sojournings and the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession and I will be their God.

God has determined it, said it, it's going to happen, he will. Nations will come from Abraham, kings will come from Abraham, see that in verse 6.

Abraham has now had his status elevated to royalty. He is almighty king, who is the king, he's a mighty king, who is the king of kings now.

[13:56] From him kings will come and many nations will come from him. Verse 7, I will, this covenant that God has made with Abraham is one which will be an everlasting, eternal covenant.

God will always be the God of Abraham and his offspring. He will never forsake Abraham's offspring. And verse 8, I will, I will, not only will he have great offspring, he will also possess the land and everywhere he walks in Canaan, everywhere he steps, right, in Canaan, will remind him that God has said, I'm giving you this land.

This land will be the land for his offspring as well forever. God almighty says, he will. And the covenant then is signed.

The covenant is signed in verse 9 to 11. God's signature of the covenant with Abraham promising that he will do what he do is the sign of circumcision.

There in verse 11, that's the sign. Circumcision is the external sign of the covenant, right? The external pledge or the token of the covenant.

[15:19] Like the rainbow was the sign of the covenant with Noah, circumcision, right? Circumcision is the sign that God is the God of Abraham and of his offspring forever.

That is the essence, the bedrock essence of the covenant being made. God is to be the true and living God, the Lord, the God almighty, creator of heaven and earth is going to be Abraham's God and Abraham's offspring's God forever.

Now, circumcision is the removal of the foreskin from the penis. The covenant that was made with Abraham in Genesis 15 was cut in private with him in his dream, in his vision and now that covenant is going to be cut in the flesh with all of his household, written indelibly for all generations and this covenant is written in, is cut in the flesh of his body.

It's the covenant of circumcision which will be written for all generations reminding him, reminding them that God promised to multiply Abraham greatly.

Which will be written for all generations reminding them of God's promise to give Abraham and his offspring the land forever. Now, the covenant in chapter 15 had been sealed with sacrifice, was private and personal.

[16:56] It's now made public at least 13 years afterwards and Abraham is as good as dead.

I mean, he's 99, 100 years old. And verse 10 we see that the covenant is extended to generations beyond.

This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins. It shall be a sign for the covenant between me and you. And it's going to be a covenant you see there he who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised.

Every male through your generations whether born in your house or born with your money from any foreigner or who is not of your offspring both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money shall be circumcised.

[ 17 : 55 ] So shall my covenant be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. God's sign of favour is indelibly marked by circumcision on every male.

And to be absolutely clear here it's not female circumcision. Female genital mutilation is an abhorrent practice promoted by godless and wicked religions and the idea is to remove any kind of pleasure from sex treating women as objects only for the pleasure of men.

No, no it's covenant circumcision for men only. And this covenant is for all nations you notice born or bought slave or free those outside the household of Abraham people not born of Abraham were grafted into God's people from the beginning foreigners all nations can join the family.

Now in other nations circumcision was a puberty right but here it's different it's for infants too. So long before the infant can say what the Lord has done for them God Almighty is saying something about the child they are mine.

This covenant is of being in the family of God of the offspring of Abram and to refuse the covenant you notice verse 14 is to break the covenant and forfeit the promises and so be cut off from God and so God will not be your God.

[ 20 : 01 ] To have God as your God requires obedience and it stems from faith trust reliance on God resulting in appropriate obedience and action to God's word.

God and this is going to push us down into the line of God's promises again being made it's going to be Isaac not Ishmael so as God changed Abram's name to Abraham and changes his status so he changes Sarai's name from Sarai to Sarah both mean the same kind of thing princess so it's a good name for a woman good name for a girl princess it's just a newer name for an older form of the name Sarah is prophetically given a name looking to the future she will have a son and together with Abram nations and kings of people will come from her and for the second time Abram falls on his face and this time he laughs it's just too impossible to believe how could it possibly be I mean Sarah she's 90 years old and I'm 100 God come on surely Ishmael will do can't he be the one I mean he exists already can't Ishmael do the job now I'm no doctor but I'm sure that Abram had good reasons to believe that Sarah's body was beyond childbearing age and we see here Abram's real struggle to believe faith's not always easy it takes resolve to believe the promises of God it just seems absolutely impossible right impossible for Abraham to believe to bring new birth from a dead body a body as good as dead how could that possibly happen but verse 19 God is absolutely adamant Sarah will have a child and his name will be

Isaac and his very name means laughter he laughs which is God's divine play on words which the Jews are so good at writing comedy scripts and God will establish his covenant with him and his offspring as an everlasting covenant what God promised Abraham by covenant he promises to Isaac as well verse 21 it's definitely Isaac three times Sarah will have a son his name will be Isaac it's going to happen through Isaac get the drift Abraham Isaac is the one not Ishmael and God says again I will bless her verse 16 I will bless her verse 16 verse 19 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant verse 20 I will bless Ishmael and he will have 12 princes and verse 22 I will but it's not

Ishmael it will be Isaac I will establish my covenant with Isaac he will now be born and notice the thing next year this time next year Isaac will be on the scene God's covenant will be established with him and God can say that he will do it because God is God almighty powerful the one person in the universe who can guarantee what's going to happen tomorrow and guarantee what's going to happen next week and guarantee what's going to happen in two weeks and two months and one year he's the one it's not for us we say God willing God says I will because he's almighty and in obedience Abraham and all the males in his household circumcised including himself you can read about there in 22 to 27 those born in it including

[ 24 : 31 ] Ishmael those bought by him from foreigners These this covenant is for the whole household of faith and the covenant is signed before God and with God God will be the God of Abraham and God will be God to his offspring after him for all generations well let's consider God's

covenant with us there is another signing come forward to Colossians chapter 2 you can find it in the New Testament Colossians chapter 2 so after the book of 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians you've got Galatians Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians there's two key places where this comes up Romans 4 and Colossians 2 we have to look at two verses really in Colossians chapter 2, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians chapter 2 verse 11 and 12 the question is what do we make of Genesis 17 and for a start it's important for us to note that a mighty king has come from Abraham's line and his name is Jesus the Christ

Jesus the king the king of kings the anointed king of God that is Jesus has come from Abraham's line and we're told the scriptures also make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus all scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work so the scriptures make us wise for salvation they are profitable for us so what is Genesis 17 and Colossians going to do for us the Bible is the best interpreter of the Bible what does the New Testament make of the Old Testament right and we're talking about covenants and we're talking about circumcision so what matters now is that Christ has come and there is a new circumcision to consider a circumcision that Jesus brings that's made without hands have a look at Colossians chapter 2 verse 11 and 12 in him that is Jesus also you were circumcised so he's speaking to believers followers of the Lord Jesus Christ in him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ having been buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised him from the dead we can keep going to verse 13 and you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh God made alive together with him having forgiven us all our trespasses by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands this he set aside nailing it to the cross he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him so what matters is the circumcision of Christ but what is the circumcision of Christ it's not his physical circumcision of eight days as an obedient parents would have looked after him when he was eight days old after birth it's not that we're talking about circumcision was the sign of belonging to the household of Abraham and so the latest sign of belonging to the household of the Israelites Colossians chapter 2 verse 11 is talking about dying the new sign is being one of the Lord God Almighty's people that's what it's talking about that we have our God is the same God as Abraham who is God Almighty and we are one of his people so the sign of being one of the Lord God's Almighty people is now not a physical circumcision in the flesh but is union with Christ that's what it is in his death and in his resurrection and in his Almighty reigning glory death to self as we take up the cross following Jesus as he took up his cross for us and just as Jesus died we die to self in his death that's what we do and again it's something that is done for us in us we don't do it ourselves see the word putting off in verse 11 is better at stripping away of the body of flesh that's the idea as Christ had his flesh stripped away from him in the flogging before his crucifixion the circumcision of Christ here is the circumcision of crucifixion that is what Jesus does that is the circumcision of Christ the cross and believers have died with Christ in his death not only that believers have been buried with him in being baptised into that death not of water a baptism into his death

Romans chapter 6 verse 4 speak about as he was laid in the tomb we were laid in the tomb with him not like him but with him the old life is dead and buried now it's over it's gone and we have been raised with Jesus now from the dead new life from the dead living with Jesus our king and we have that by trusting in the almighty power of God who can not just give life to a barren woman but can raise the dead from the grave we too are raised from the dead now in Christ Jesus and just as Jesus is alive and reigning in glory now we too are alive spiritually reigning in glory with him today and so we are now to walk before him in newness of life distinctively different to the world around about us because

[ 32 : 32 ] Jesus is now our Lord and so the sign of physical circumcision is no longer the sign to be in the household of Abraham to have God almighty as our God it's no longer the sign of being one of God's holy people no amount of religious rites done to anyone will save them or save anyone else baptism confirmation fasting prayer vigils last rites pilgrimages self-flagellation asceticism none of that makes anyone one of God's holy people it's God almighty who does the impossible for those who trust in the risen Lord Jesus and submit to him as Lord and Saviour see God almighty has cut another covenant a new covenant this one has been cut in the body of Jesus written in his blood his

sacrificial death

God raised him from the grave and he now bears the scars in his hands in his feet and his side which is a testimony for all time we now have new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fail which is kept in heaven for us and we are still waiting we have to wait for it wait patiently wait faithfully wait expectantly for that blessing to fully and finally come it may be soon maybe a week maybe a month 25 years who knows but wait we must because God

Almighty has promised promised that Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead and to bring those who are waiting for him safely into his heaven it's a hard wait waiting for God to keep his promises but that's what we his faithful people will do we will stand on every promise in his word because we serve the Almighty God who will do it let's pray our Father in heaven we thank you for your faithfulness we thank you for the covenant that's been written for us in Christ Jesus please help us to submit to him to trust him to rely on him and to walk before him as we walk before you help us to wait patiently as we long for the day when you bring us fully and finally into your presence and to walk in the new heaven and the new earth amen we to