

ABRAM: RESPONDING TO GOD'S COVENANTS
Part II: The Covenant Confirmed (Genesis 17:1 – 18:15)

If you are new or visiting; *a special warm welcome to you.*
 We trust you enjoy your time with us.

Today we will be having communion. If it is your practice to participate in this we welcome you to join with us in celebrating the Lord's Supper. If this is not your custom or if you are unsure of what to do please just pass the emblems (bread and wine) to the person next to you.

INTRODUCTION

In Gen.15:1-16:15 an inviolable covenant was established with Abram – not only would Abram have a son, but he would be given possession of Canaan. Abram believed God and on this basis was considered righteous. Faith in the promises of God, for all time, for all peoples, has always been the basis upon which men and women are returned to a right relationship with God. For those who believe, sin, past, present and future, is wiped out.

As time passed, Abram and Sarai still had no son and heir and thus sought their own solution to the problem. They arranged for Abram to father a son (Ishmael) through Hagar (Sarai's maidservant). After 13 years of silence from God, years of a household filled with bitterness, rivalry, and resentment, God reconfirms his earlier promise.

By WORD (17:1-8)

"I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers". This is the first OT use of the phrase "El Shaddai" - a name that means powerful and mighty, one who is able to supply abundantly. The call is to walk blamelessly (i.e., be holy) before him – c.f., I Pet.1:15,16.

Note the four elements of the covenant that he confirms

"You will be the father of many nations"(v.3). His new name was to be a perpetual reminder of this..

"I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you and kings will come from you" (v.5,6)

"I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendents for the generations to come, to be your God –" (v.7)

"The whole land of Canaan, ---, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendents after you, and I will be their God". (v.8)

By SIGN (17:9-27)

"You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and you." (v.10)

The practise of circumcision is here given new meaning – it was to be the physical mark of this covenant.

Are Christian males, as spiritual descendents of Abraham, required to be circumcised? **No**, because (a) The covenant was between God and Abraham and his physical descendents – we are not Jews, and (b) It symbolised a life that was to be lived under, and measured by the Mosaic law (c.f., Galatians 2:3-5; 5:1,2). Believers in Jesus Christ are free from the demands of the law.

v.15,16 God now promises a son Sarah. Abraham not only laughs in disbelief, but then, in an act of defiance, asks that Ishmael (the fatal consequences of his own disbelief), might be the one through whom the promised blessings flow. God's reply is an emphatic, "No". Abraham will have a son to be called, Isaac, meaning, *'he laughs'*. Note how Paul, in Gal. 3 and 4, uses these events to illustrate crucial spiritual truth. We observe:

That Abraham had periods of disbelief, weakness, and even defiance. He sought to hold on to Ishmael, the product of his own disobedience.

