

Hymns: 19 The Light of the World Is Jesus 64 There Is Power in the Blood
Scripture: Psalm 148 Psalm 105:1-12, 42-45 Psalm 22:21-31

You'll never guess the topic that hit the newswire just a few weeks ago – circumcision. You heard right: circumcision was in the news.

October 1, 2013, The Jerusalem Post writes:

*A resolution that calls male ritual circumcision a “violation of the **physical integrity** of children” was passed overwhelmingly by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.*

...

*It also calls on **member** states to “initiate a public debate, including intercultural and interreligious dialogue, aimed at reaching a large consensus on the rights of children to protection against violations of their physical integrity according to human rights standards” and to “adopt **specific legal provisions** to ensure that certain operations and practices will not be carried out before a child is **old enough** to be consulted.”*

My question for these self-ascribed purveyors of higher morality is, “What's their position regarding the rights of the unborn?” I think you know the answer.

The Bible has words for these people:

Romans 3

*[13] Their throat is an open sepulchre; **with their tongues they have used deceit**; the poison of asps is under their lips:*

*[14] Whose **mouth is full of cursing and bitterness**:*

*[15] Their feet are **swift to shed blood**:*

*[16] **Destruction and misery** are in their ways:*

*[17] And the way of peace **have they not known**:*

*[18] There is **no fear of God before their eyes**.*

Today, we'll see when and why this ritual of circumcision started and try to get a better idea what it means. But before we do, let's quickly review what we've learned and map out where we're headed.

Review

We're continuing our study of a particular type of **promise** called a *covenant*. Specifically, it's the covenant that God made with Abram, then with Abraham, and confirmed with Isaac, and Jacob. It's the third in our series designed to pick up key Bible topics as specified in Bible summary passages. We've covered the resurrection of Jesus Christ and Israel entering into the Promised Land.

Two times back, we learned the definition of the word *covenant* as a binding, written agreement or **promise**. We learned the first usage in the Bible of the word *covenant* appears in **the** Genesis story of Noah. From that story we found the following **five key elements** associated with God's covenant after the flood:

To summarize the elements are:

1. The *parties* in covenant.
2. The *promise* or *terms* of the covenant.
3. The *duration* or *term* of the covenant.
4. The *type* unilateral vs. bilateral.
5. The *token* or *sign* of the covenant.

We moved on to start looking at the covenant that God made with Abram. From our summary passages, we found **four unique things** associated with it:

1. Soil (Promised Land)
2. Seed (descendants)
3. Sign (circumcision)
4. Savior (Jesus Christ)

With this background, we pressed on into this topic and took a look at chapters 12 and 13 of the book of Genesis. There we learned that the Lord promised to Abram:

1. Land
2. Great nation
3. Blessing to him
4. Blessing to his friends
5. Blessing to all nations (through Jesus Christ)
6. Cursing to his enemies
7. Innumerable descendants

Finally, we made it to the core principle:

Our faith in Jesus Christ marks Christians as recipients of the blessing of Abraham which is new life in Christ. (Galatians 3:14)

That's where we left off. Today, we want to consider – the *type* of covenant, the *duration*, and finally *sign* or *token*. We pick up our story of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis chapter 15.

Genesis 15

[1] After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying,

Fear not, Abram:

I love to read that. Just as Abram need not fear. Neither do we. Why?
Because the Lord is with us.

*I am thy shield,
and thy exceeding great reward.*

Then Abram asked the Lord whether his heir would be his steward Eliezer of Damascus

since Abram was old and the Lord gave him no children.

[4] And, **behold**, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This **shall not** be thine heir; but **he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.**

[5] And he brought him forth abroad,

and said, **Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them:** and he said unto him, **So shall thy seed be.**

Even with all of our technology, we still cannot number the stars.

[6] And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

That should sound familiar. Romans 4:13-15 cites this example to assure us the basis of our relationship with our Lord is faith plus nothing.

[7] And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

[8] And he said, Lord GOD, **whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?**

The Lord responded by giving him an assignment.

[9] And he said unto him,
Take me **an heifer** of three years old,
and **a she goat** of three years old,
and **a ram** of three years old,
and **a turtledove**,
and **a young pigeon.**

That's five animals.

[10] And he **took unto him** all these,
and **divided them** in the midst,
and **laid each piece** one against another:
but the birds divided he not.

[11] And when the fowls came down upon **the carcasses**, **Abram drove them away.**

These animals were slaughtered. This obviously involved a lot of blood which would naturally attract scavenger birds and birds of prey.

[12] And **when** the sun was going down,

a **deep sleep** fell upon Abram;
and, lo, **an horror of great darkness** fell upon him.

In verses 13-16, the Lord tells Abram of the coming slavery of Israel in Egypt before they return to occupy the Promised Land. He also tells him he will live a long time before he peacefully passes away.

[17] And it came to pass, that, **when** the sun went down,
and it was dark,
behold a smoking furnace,
and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.
[18] In the same day the LORD made a **covenant** with Abram,

Okay, it would have been nice if this were a little clearer. What is going on here?

In the culture of Abram's day we're told that when people made solemn covenants, they participated in this rather elaborate scene. You've heard the expression "Over my dead body." That means that you are **so committed** to your position, that you would **die** to defend it. The same kind of thinking relates to this custom.

The participants in the covenant walked between halves of dead animals to indicate that **if** they break their covenant, they should also be killed and cut in half. While this sounds a bit extreme, perhaps something like this in our day and age might help hammer home that covenants are not to be taken lightly or entered into with the intent of exiting them on a whim.

So we know what's intended with the carcasses split in half. We know from verse 18 that the covenant was between the Lord and Abram. And in verse 12 we're told that Abram was in deep sleep. Abram was not sleep-walking. The only one left to walk through was the Lord.

Does the Lord fit the description of "a smoking furnace" and "a burning lamp"? In three places in the Bible, the Lord is described as a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3; Hebrews 12:29) and His word is a light and lamp (Psalm 119:105). Based on that, we can answer the question, "Yes." Those are fitting symbols for the Lord.

The key things to note here are:

1. This covenant involved *blood*
2. The *type* of this covenant was *unilateral*. Only the Lord walked through.

Now let's move on to Genesis 17.

Notice this passage contains thirteen references to the word *covenant* and ten instances of the word *circumcise*. It has much to say about those two terms. We won't hit all of the verses, but as we go through this, see if you can recognize **new things** related to this covenant.

[1] And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.
[2] And I will make **my covenant** between me and thee,
and will multiply thee exceedingly.

[3] And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,
[4] As for me, **behold, my covenant** is with thee,

and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

That's new. Before he was promised a great nation but now *many* nations from him.

[5] *Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.*

That's something else new – a new name which means *father of a multitude*.

[6] *And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.*

That's new. He's the root of a royal line.

[7] *And I will establish **my covenant** between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*

Here we see the *parties* of the covenant: God ↔ Abraham, descendants

as well as the duration or *term* of the covenant: Everlasting

Next we'll pick up a piece of the *promise*: The Promised Land

[8] *And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, **the land** wherein thou art a stranger, all **the land of Canaan**, for an **everlasting possession**;*

Do you remember that most secure deed? Does it ever expire? No!

and I will be their God.

We've covered the type of this covenant (unilateral – depending only on God's faithfulness) and the duration of this covenant (eternal). Now we'll pick up that *symbol* or *token*.

[9] *And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep **my covenant** therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.*

[10] *This is **my covenant**, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be **circumcised**.*

[11] *And ye shall **circumcise** the flesh of your foreskin; and it **shall be a token** of the **covenant** betwixt me and you.*

[12] *And he that is **eight days old** shall be **circumcised** among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.*

[13] He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Unlike the Council of Europe, apparently the Lord (who both designed and created our bodies by the way) had no problem with the idea of mandating this surgery performed on all eight-day-old boys.

To summarize circumcision involved:

1. Cutting away flesh – We're exhorted to cast off the works of the flesh.
2. A member of the body directly associated with producing offspring – We're charged with sharing the gospel.
3. A permanent change – Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.
4. A constant reminder – We have God's abiding presence within us through His Holy Spirit.
5. Blood – Our salvation was purchased by the precious blood of Jesus.

...

Then the Lord told Abraham that a year from that day, his wife Sarah would deliver a son named Isaac. When the Lord left, Abraham circumcised himself, his son Ishmael, and all the other men in his house that same day. (vv. 21-24)

In Genesis 26, the Lord confirms this covenant with Isaac.

Speaking to Isaac the Lord said **not** to flee to Egypt to avoid the famine but to stay in the Promised Land.

[3] Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father;

[4] And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

[5] Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

Finally, in Genesis 28, the Lord confirmed this same covenant with Jacob in a dream. You may recall the story of Jacob's ladder where he saw

the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

[13] And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

[14] And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

When Jacob awoke, he was afraid and thought that he had found the gate to heaven. Of course, in a manner of speaking he did, because from that covenant and in that land God provided the Savior.

God made a covenant promise to Abraham and his descendants that He alone guarantees will happen and will never be withdrawn. The covenant involves soil, seed, symbol, and it revolves all around a Savior. We directly benefit from that great promise of a Savior.

Application

Do you remember George Zimmerman? He's the one who was demonized and politicized in the press relating to his fight and subsequent shooting and killing of Trayvon Martin in self-defense. Zimmerman's wife supported him through the racially charged ordeal and trial, but now that he's been acquitted, his wife has decided to take him back to court by initiating a divorce. What was her stated reason for the divorce? "Disappointment."

Thankfully God keeps His covenants despite the many disappointing things we do in our lives. He proved His sincerity with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. Just as there was blood involved with God's sealing His covenant with Abraham, and with the token of circumcision, Jesus Christ willingly bled and died for you and for me shedding his own blood on the cross that we might secure eternal life through His righteousness imputed to us by faith in Him.

Benediction

*Now the God of peace,
that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the everlasting covenant,
Make you perfect in every good work to do his will,
working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight,
through Jesus Christ;
to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)*