

Major Event: CALL OF ABRAHAM

Lesson #3: Memorial Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant

Scripture: Genesis 17

Central Text: Gen. 17:10,11

Suggested Subjects:

God's covenant faithfulness, and His requirements of His servants. Promise of seed (Isaac).

Suggested Attributes:

1. Of God: Omnipotence (El Shaddai), Veracity, Love

Suggested Home Study:

Romans 2:25-29 cf. Romans 3:10, 23 cf. Romans 5:8

Notes: God reveals Himself as “El Shaddai” or God Almighty in this passage, as an assurance to Abraham that He is able to accomplish what He has promised. God changes Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of a multitude). Note that God is setting up an impossible situation, from a human perspective. Yet he keeps on promising Abram many descendants, almost upping the ante every time, as it looks less and less likely to occur (again from an earthly perspective). Only God Almighty could fulfill such a promise. The sign of circumcision was a physical symbol of a heart commitment to Yahweh (Deut. 10:16), and a “set apartness” from the Gentiles.— Teacher, this is a major motif in both Old and New Testaments, so use your best judgment. Verses 1-10 and 15-22 may be most appropriate. **Do not elaborate on the physical ritual. Defer questions on circumcision to parents.**

The Commandment Given (Gn 17:9–14).

Abraham and his descendants must “keep the covenant” (17:9). The outward sign of the covenant was the circumcision of every male child. Abraham, even though he was ninety-nine, must set the example and circumcise himself. The rite of circumcision *particularized* Abraham's experience with God. The importance of circumcision is indicated by the amount of space devoted to it in this chapter. Nine verses set forth the commandment, and five verses describe the obedience to it.

Circumcision was to be performed on the eighth day. The law applied to both native Israelites and slaves who might come among the people of the Lord. A male who refused to submit to circumcision was to be “cut off from his people.”

Chapter Summary: 1. Part of God's blessing would depend on Abraham's maintaining the covenant of circumcision, though the Abrahamic Covenant as a whole did not depend on this (vv. 1-2). 2. Many nations would come from Abraham (vv. 4-6). 3. The Abrahamic Covenant would be eternal (vv. 7-8). 4. God would be the God of Abraham's descendants in a special relationship (vv. 7-8). 5. Sarah herself would bear the promised heir (v. 16). 6. This is also the first time God identified the Promised Land as Canaan by name (v. 8). "Abraham's experiences should teach us that natural law [barrenness] is no barrier to the purposes and plans for [sic] God."

Summary from Tom Constable's Study Notes (www.soniclight.org)