

## Covenants and Christ • Genesis 17:1–27

---

Ryan Perz • March 10, 2024

---

Try to think back to what you were doing 13 years ago. Year 2011.

For many, life looked very different.

-Maybe you were not married to your husband or wife.

-Maybe no kids, or just a few.

-Perhaps you were still a student, or in a different house or state.

- The point is that, 13 years can be a long time; a lot can happen.
- 13 years is the time gap between Gen. 16 & 17. In fact, it's now a total of 24 years that have passed since Gen. 12.
- In one sense, there are 13 quiet years, then suddenly God makes some *major moves*.

*The major moves in Gen 17 show us the vital role that the covenant plays.*

Covenants, and understanding them, play such a major role in understanding the Bible and God.

One definition of covenant: “*a relationship based on the surrender of control*”. (Ian Duguid)

- This accurately describes how they worked in the ancient world—a weaker king surrenders control.
- They also describe how God comes to us—saying: *You need to surrender control*.

Today we are going to look at one covenant that shows Majors Moves of God:

3 Moves: sovereign, supernatural, symbolic

### **Sovereign Move (1-14; 22-27)**

- The LORD appeared to Abram in an sovereign way: “I am God Almighty” —*El Shaddai*.
- The interesting thing about this name for God is that it occurs 48 times in the OT, 31 of those are found in Job.

*What’s the major view of God in Job? God is sovereign.*

One commentator: “describes the God who makes things happen by the means of his majestic power and might”. (Youngblood)

- Abraham would have understood God as the Sovereign King of the universe coming to him...promising that things will happen.

The sovereign move has a few elements:

#### God calls for commitment (1)

- The first words from God are a call to commitment — whole-life commitment, to “walk before me and be blameless”.

The importance of “blameless”:

This is not a term you hear anyone talk about much, even Christian people.

I don’t think I have ever heard someone say to me, “Pray that I will be blameless.”

What exactly is “blameless character”?

- The idea is that there is *wholeness in relationship* and *integrity in character*.

First, it’s not just for a certain few “super-saints”.

#### **Deuteronomy 18:13–14 ESV**

You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.

Here also that living aimlessly is *not imitating the values of the surrounding culture*.

- *Twice we see it prayed for:*

**Psalm 119:80 ESV**

May my heart be blameless in your statutes,  
that I may not be put to shame!

**Philippians 1:9–10 ESV**

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,

We follow the same God; a God who *expects commitment for people who are in covenant*.

- › *Blameless should be our baseline standard if we follow the Covenant God.*

God establishes a covenant (2-8)

- This is not God making a new or separate covenant; not something different from Gen. 15. Everything God says builds on the initial promises made in Gen. 12.
- In fact, all OT covenants can be summed up under the category: “Covenants of promise”. (Eph 2:12)
- What is distinct is the narrowing of the Son and Sign.
- Another thing that comes into particular focus that we’ve not seen before: (v6) “kings shall come from you” —there is going to be royalty.

*This covenant is very much building a kingdom.*

Notice one thing in particular with this covenant—it’s tied to Abram’s name change (v4-5).

- This was also a control surrender aspect of covenant.

Gospel: The idea is that he would not just be the father of Jews, but multitudes of people.

In other words, this promise is not just setting up the nation of Israel, but creating a people of faith—from every tribe, tongue, nation.

One thing we need to guard against is reading the OT and thinking it has nothing to do with us. “Oh, that’s for Israel...I’m not Jewish”.

Gospel: If you are saved...Gen. 17 has everything to do with you!

- › This is how God brought our Savior into the world—it’s about the grace and guarantee.

Romans 4:16–17 (ESV)

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”

God commands circumcision (9-14; 22-26)

- What will mark the Abrahamic covenant—and all of Abraham’s descendants, is circumcision.

Notice that it is a “sign” (v11).

Circumcision also represented something. It symbolized the cutting off of further descendants if the covenant was not kept.

As we were going through this with my family, they asked: why circumcision; why not cut the tip of earlobe.

Circumcision is done on the male reproductive organ.

- V14 is important: covenants can be broken.

This actually circles back to the first item — blameless. Why is it so important?

Well, because God does not take covenant breaking lightly; he requires full commitment.

**Psalm 15:1–2 ESV**

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?

Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

He who walks blamelessly and does what is right  
and speaks truth in his heart;

## Supernatural Move (15-21)

- The second move of God we see is a supernatural move.
- God will supernaturally take a 100 year old man and 90 year old woman—and give them a child.

We believe that there are many times that God has made supernatural moves.

—Like, splitting a major sea in half so that a few hundred thousand people can pass through safely.

—Or like having a disobedient prophet saved by being swallowed up by a large fish

—Or another supernatural move in the womb: Virgin Birth

—Or yet another: an empty tomb

Or how about every sinner who repents and trusts in Christ for eternal life: supernatural move.

When a dead soul comes to life.

When there is victory of sin.

When someone comes out of the thick of depression and despair.

When the marriage turns the corner

We can be tempted to lose sight of the supernatural or just keep it in the pages of our Bibles.

› *Supernatural moves is the stuff of real life, with a Living God!*

## Symbolic Move (22-27)

- This last point we look at answers the question: What does it mean to be in covenant with God today?

Abrahamic covenant is where the major line of division is drawn. Do we baptize babies or not?

## Why I think being Baptist is Biblical

I have a lot of presbyterian friends who are dear to me.

—I spent about 18 months preaching for a PCA church that did not have a pastor...dear faithful friends.

—I read a lot and learn a lot of theology from those who hold to infant baptism.

Presbyterian friends: Circumcision foreshadows baptism

Baptist view: Circumcision foreshadows regeneration.

### **Deuteronomy 10:16 ESV**

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

- Later in Dt—we see this work has to be done by the LORD (Dt. 30:6).

### **Deuteronomy 30:6 ESV**

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Regeneration is *never* a work that any human does...it's what the LORD alone does.

Sum: circumcision marked the people of God under OT; regeneration (Spirit's Work) marks people of NC.

- Even the 8th day reference is foreshadowing that points to New Life/Resurrection.

### Romans 2:28–29 (ESV)

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.

### **Colossians 2:11 ESV**

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,

**Colossians 2:13 ESV**

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

The New Covenant is a call to surrender control of our sin to the Lord Jesus Christ—who is the only one who can forgive us, and make us blameless.

It's surrendering control of our dead heart to the only one who can make it alive!

*This new heart is exactly what the OT prophets predicted.*

**Ezekiel 36:26–27 ESV**

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

So what does it look like to be in covenant with God today?

Well, look at your heart. Has it truly been changed? Does sin break you? Is your conscience becoming more tender and sensitive so that you desire a life of careful obedience?

Do you have a new affection, desire, and love for Christ.

Only a regenerate heart can say YES.

There was so much good stuff in Gen. 17, it's hard to know what to leave out.

Like going to a great restaurant and trying to decide what's best.

What's best: *Through God's covenant that brings us Christ, we get God as our God.*

(7-8)

Let's turn and worship him in his greatness.