

At this point, how long has it been since God last talked with Abram? At least thirteen years

God's silence has a purpose. What might some of those reasons have been in this instance? Testing Abram's faith, a timing issue, consequence of serving God in the power of the flesh

Application: Have there ever been times in your life when God seemed to be silent—maybe regarding some issue you've been praying for? How do you handle those times? When the Lord is silent and apparently inactive, it is a real test of faith. It's easy to grow impatient and take matters into our own hands like Abram and Sarah did with Hagar. We see the problem, but we also see an obvious solution, so we force the issue and get ahead of God.

Note: God is called "God Almighty" for the first time in the Bible here in Genesis 17:1. The Hebrew name is El Shaddai.

What is the significance of God changing Abram and Sarai's names? Abram means "exalted father" while Abraham means "father of a multitude." The importance is that the sovereignty of God was upheld. It is always the master, the greater figure, who has the authority to name those inferior to him. In the Garden of Eden, Adam was told to name the animals. Since he was to have dominion over the earth, he was the proper one to give names to all the animals. Parents have authority to give names to their children. Since God had authority, He gave Abraham and Sarah new names.

How many covenants did God establish with Abraham? Two

Remember the last covenant in chapter 15? What did God promise? Land

What kind of covenant was it? Unilateral and unconditional

What did God promise here in the covenant of chapter 17? Descendants

What kind of covenant is this? Conditional: I will ___ and you must ___. Both participants have a role and responsibility

What is God's side of the agreement? "As for me..." verse 4. Provide an heir, descendants

What is Abraham's side of the covenant? "As for you..." verse 9. He and his descendants must keep the covenant—and be circumcised.

What does it mean to walk before the Lord and be blameless (verse 1)? Walk not in perfection, but in purity. Total consecration, obedience, devotion. It's a condition of the heart. It is probably significant that God withheld specific duties (didn't provide a checklist of things to do in order to be blameless) until long after Abram's belief was evident, so that works would not appear to be the basis of the covenant but a by-product of it

What was the role of circumcision in the covenant? It was a sign of the covenant.

Had any other biblical covenants been marked by a sign? The sign of the rainbow given to Noah in Genesis 9:12-17

How was circumcision a sign? It was a physical sign that the person belonged to God's chosen earthly people. Abraham, his descendants, and all who knew God through him were to carry the physical mark that announced they were slaves of the Lord, owned by the Lord in a unique and significant way. They were identified with Yahweh, the God of the Israelites. Circumcision of infant sons did not save them but evidenced the faith of the father and mother in the God of Abraham.

It was a personal reminder. As that young child grew up, his circumcision was a sign to him that he was different from other boys—he belonged to God. It was not the circumcision that saved the boy, but the sign which would forever remind him of what God required to enjoy the benefits of His covenant.

God has not commanded circumcision of the flesh for Christians.

- “No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.” Romans 2:29
- “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.” 1 Corinthians 7:19
- “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.” Philippians 3:3
- “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ.” Colossians 2:11

The New Testament talks about a different kind of circumcision. How is it described? In the New Testament we no longer read of circumcision of the flesh but rather circumcision of the heart. The covenant hasn't changed, but the sign of the covenant has.

How would you describe the meaning of heart circumcision? The believer's heart is totally Christ's, to use as He wills—all of the believer's emotions, mind, intellect, and will are dedicated and available, ready at the command of Jesus Christ to be used for His purposes. We are to have no reliance upon ourselves, but rely totally upon Him. Every thought, every imagination, is taken captive for Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). That is the circumcised life. Not a physical act but a supernatural, spiritual act done by God.

Put yourself in Abraham's shoes. For thirteen years God has been silent and Abraham has set his hope on Ishmael (Genesis 17:18). Now God steps in and upsets Abraham's apple cart by announcing the heir would not be Ishmael.

Application:

- **Has God ever suddenly changed a situation you thought was secure and predictable?**
- **As you make plans are you willing to let God come in and change them dramatically?**
“Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.” Proverbs 19:21

Why did the Creator choose the eight-day mark for circumcision? Vitamin K, a naturally occurring clotting element in blood, has been measured and determined to be at its highest level on the eighth day.

How would you describe Abraham's behavior in verse 23? Immediate obedience

Application: Have you ever received a prompting of the Holy Spirit, but still you lingered, hem-hawed, put it on the back burner, or ended up not following through—only to realize later the lost opportunity?

Why was the covenant established with Isaac in Genesis 17:19? Wasn't the covenant with Abraham in 17:7? Isaac was the heir, the promised one. The statement is made to distinguish between the blessings of Isaac versus Ishmael and eliminate confusion. The covenant was with Abraham as traced through Isaac.

Application:

- A woman past menopause, a couple that has been infertile for decades—it is very unlikely that they would ever have children—but they did! **Do you believe there is something in your life that is too difficult for the Lord to do?**
- **Have you set aside some issue because you have seen it as impossible, you're discouraged, and you've quit hoping?**
e.g. repetitive sin, spiritually lost relatives, etc. One of Satan's greatest tools is the tool of discouragement.