

Abraham 4 - Faith, Ishmael, Circumcision, Sodom

In previous discussions, God had asked Abram to leave Ur and Haran and come to the land of promise. He had promised Abram that if he would do that one thing God said He would:

N I will make you a great nation	P I will bless you
P I will make your name great	P You shall be a blessing.
P I will bless those who bless you	P I will curse him who curses you
S in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed	

Personal Promises(P) given directly to Abraham as a reward for his service.

Nation/Posterity Promise(N) that Abraham's seed would become a great nation and would become as the stars in heaven or the dust of the earth.

Land Promise(L) that Abram's descendants would be given the land of Canaan.

Spiritual Promise(S) that all nations of the earth would be blessed through Abram's seed.

This portion of the covenant has been ratified and confirmed. God is now bound by this covenant since Abraham did all that God had asked him to do in order to receive these things.

After Abram's return from Egypt and Lot's leaving God again appeared and said Gen 13:14-17

L Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are — north, south, east, and west.
L All the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.
N I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth;
N Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."

After Abraham brings back Lot victorious over the four kings, God again makes promises to Abram. This is the first of over Two Hundred times the term "the word of the LORD" is used. Here it is used to describe the promise given to Abraham like it will be delivered to many future prophets.

P Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.
N One who will come from your own body shall be your heir. Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, So shall your descendants be.
L I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.
N Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.
N And also the nation whom they serve I will judge;
N afterward they shall come out with great possessions.
P you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.
L In the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.
L To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates — the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Abram believed God

The very essence of the gospel, God's means of saving all men is revealed here. When God makes a promise and Abram believes that promise, God takes that faith and "accounts" it as righteousness.

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." 5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."6 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. Gen

15:4-6

The term "account" in the OT carries the thought of thinking, deeming or esteeming on the one hand and counting and calculating on the other.

chashab OT:2803, "to think, devise, purpose, esteem, count, imagine, impute." This word appears 123 times in the Old Testament, and it implies any mental process involved in planning or conceiving. ... can be translated as "devise" in association with the sense of "to think and reckon." A gifted person of God "devises" excellent works in gold and other choice objects Ex 35:35. The word may deal with evil, as when Haman "devised" an evil plot against the Jewish people Est 8:3. ... The word may mean "think." Some "thought" to do away with David by sending him against the Philistines 1 Sam 18:25; Judah "thought" Tamar to be a harlot Gen 38:15; and Eli "thought" Hannah was drunk 1 Sam 1:13. ... Translated as "count," the word is used in a number of ways. It had a commercial connotation, as when land was being redeemed and the price was established, based on the value of crops until the next year of Jubilee: "Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus..." Lev 25:27. ... Those who seek to live for the Lord are "counted" as sheep for the slaughter Ps 44:22. The foolish person, when he holds his peace, is "counted" as wise Prov 17:28. A theological emphasis exists in God's reward of Abraham, when the patriarch believed God and His word: "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" Gen 15:6. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, OT 2803.)

God both esteemed and considered on the one hand and would ultimately pay the price to make it true. This is the first indication that God intended to use faith and the method and some form of payment as the means.

Paul chose this passage in Romans to explain this very thing.

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. 5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, Rom 4:1-6

It is also revealed that this was stated here not only for the purpose of revealing it about Abraham, but also about us. Just as he was accounted righteous for believing God's promise regarding his descendants and the stars of the heavens, but also to us who believe his promise regarding Jesus.

Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, 24 but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Rom 4:23-25

Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 16)

At Sarai's noble and self-sacrificing (but short sighted) suggestion, Hagar is offered as a second wife to Abram. Since the seed must be of Abram's body, and she is unable to bear that seed, instead of waiting upon God, Sarah takes this step.

This is the first example of polygamy among the patriarchs. The consequences offer strong testimony as to the folly of this mode of lifestyle. Their plan to help God, but God didn't want or need their help. The only results were unhappy feelings of jealousy on the part of Sarai, and the final loss of his son to Abram when he had to be sent away after the birth of Isaac.

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. Gal 4:21-26; 28-31

Covenant / Sign/ Seal of Circumcision Gen 17:1-27

Abram was 75 when he first fulfilled the conditions for the covenant. At this time 24 years have passed and Abram is now 99. God again affirms the covenant but in different words:

P I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.
N I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.
N My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.
N/S your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.
N/S I will make you exceedingly fruitful;
N/S I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.
L Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger,
L all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Personal(P) **Nation/Posterity(N)** **Land(L)** **Spiritual(S)**

As the fulfillment of the promised son draws near, two very important changes occurred. First, God changed the names of both Abram and Sarai to reflect the honor he had giving them.

Abram(exalted/high father)	became	Abraham(father of a multitude)
Sarai(princely one)	became	Sarah (princess)

Second, God added circumcision. While Stephen and Genesis call it the covenant of circumcision, the later part of Genesis and Paul in Romans called it a sign and a seal.

*And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall **keep my covenant**, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 **This is my covenant**, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: **Every male among you shall be circumcised**. 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and **it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you**. Gen 17:9-12*

*Then He gave him **the covenant of circumcision**; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; Acts 7:8*

*Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. 10 How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. 11 And **he received the sign of circumcision, a seal** of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. Rom 4:9-12*

This was a very special and wonderful day for Abraham! The days of waiting and hoping were drawing to a close. The promised son would soon be granted. He listened carefully to God's instructions and revealed its importance by complying the same day they were given.

So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him. ... 26 That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael Gen 17:23-24, 26

After a careful study of God's words to Abraham it is clear why he did it the same day. Circumcision was to be the token of the covenant. Every male circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin had the sign proving he had entered into a covenant with God.

'ot OT:226, "sign; mark." Cognates of this word appear in Aramaic and Arabic. It occurs 78 times in biblical Hebrew and in all periods of the language. ... The first occurrence of 'ot is in Gen 1:14. Here it refers to the stars, indicators of the time of day and seasons. ... This word represents something by which a person or group is characteristically marked. ... The word means "sign" as a reminder of one's duty. This usage first appears in Gen 9:12: "This [the rainbow] is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature..." (cf. vv. 4-15). (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, OT 226)

Just as the rainbow was a sign (same word Gen 9:12-13) that God would never flood the earth again and Moses hand and staff were a sign (same word Ex 4:8-9) to Israel that God had sent him to deliver them, even so circumcision was a sign that this person was in covenant with God. Without it, there was not only no proof of a covenant. There was no covenant. From that time forward the soul of any male who did not have the token of circumcision was cut off from Israel and had broken God's covenant.

So when Abraham received this command he considered it to be a matter of the utmost urgency. It is repeated twice that Abraham was circumcised "in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him."(Gen 17:23, 26)

Though these facts are important to us as historical information. They become much more so when we realize that a much greater circumcision is being practiced today. Every Christian is circumcised through baptism. Hence circumcision is a type of baptism just as Noah's ark was.

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, Col 2:11-14

Hospitality to Strangers Gen 18:1-33

Let love of the brethren continue. 2 Forget not to show love unto strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Heb 13:1-2

The chapter opens with Abraham sitting in the door of his tent(in the shade but with hopes of a breeze), when three men appeared before him. Although Abraham did not know it, it was God, accompanied by two angels who had appeared to him in the form of men. Without any knowledge but simply seeking to practice hospitality Abraham asked if they would like to enjoy a good meal.

Sarah at 89 is asked to oversee the making of cakes while he rushes to his herd to select a good calf and have it prepared by the young men. As the men are eating the meal, one of them(the Lord) asked about Sarah.

They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." 10 The Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."Gen 18:9-10

This statement confirmed what God had promised in the previous chapter when he changed their names and gave the covenant of circumcision. When they used that name, it should have brought all of that to mind. Unfortunately, Sarah did not believe these words yet. Her laugh was different from Abram's in the previous chapter(and he did not laugh here).

And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" Gen 18:10-12

In a mild rebuke, Abraham is asked why Sarah laughed and she lied to cover it up.

The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."Gen 18:13-15

The Destruction of Sodom

Before these "men" leave, God chose to reveal to Abraham exactly what was about to occur.

Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."Gen 18:20-21

God then allows Abraham to intercede in behalf of Sodom. Abraham choose to plead with God on the basis of mercy. He asked if God would consider sparing Sodom if he could find 50 righteous. God's answer reveals that God is vitally concerned about the fate of the righteous even in severe judgement.

Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" 26 And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."Gen 18:24-26

Abraham follows this with 45, 40, 30, 20, and finally 10. God promised Abraham if he could find 10 he would spare this city. Later God modified this principle:

If I send a pestilence into that land and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast, 20 even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness Ezek. 14:19-20