

## **“I Belong” Genesis 17:1-14**

### **Read Text:**

### **Introduction:**

When Abram was 65 years of age God came to him and said that he would be blessed, he would be the father of a great nation and all nations would be blessed through him.

Of course that was a wonderful promise, and this changed the trajectory of Abram’s life. He moved to a new land and did away with foreign gods. But as time passed, and Abram could see no progress on God’s promise, he took matters into his own hands. You see, Abram sees a problem that God does not seem to be addressing: Sarai, his wife, has born him no children, so how can they be the parents of a great nation?

After 21 years of waiting on God to give him a son, Abram got tired of waiting. Sarai, his wife, came up with the plan to take a second wife, her servant, and have a child through her. The plan works, and Hagar gets pregnant and she does bear a son. But what a mess this makes of things, a mess that is still being sorted out.

Another 13 years pass and God again visits Abram. God has not forgotten his promise, and God is more than able to fulfill his side of the covenant. Now Abram will be tested once again... It will cost him something to be the father of God’s nation. It costs something when we commit to follow a holy God. We will come back to that in a little bit.

### **1. God’s Visit**

Chapter 17 starts with a visit to Abram by God. We are told that Abram is now 99 years old. It has been 34 years since he received God’s promise that he would be the father of a great nation. Abram is not getting any younger, and no doubt the age reference at the start of the chapter is to highlight for us the fact that we are now needing God to work a miracle if this is going to happen.

But notice how God introduces himself here: “I am God Almighty.” Or some translations may have a transliteration of the Hebrew which is “El Shaddai.” El was the common word for god in that area, but this was no ordinary god. This is the one true God, the Almighty God, the God who can do anything. Yes, if Abram will walk before God faithfully and blamelessly then God will greatly increase his numbers.

It is good to pause and ask ourselves, “Do we believe we serve the God who can do anything?” Do we serve El Shaddai, the Lord God Almighty? Or do we serve a God who is stumped by COVID, handcuffed by Cancer, surprised by the violence around us? Abram is confronted by the God who says he is Almighty – he can do anything. Do we serve the same God today? Some of Jesus’ last words to his disciples were these, “All power has been given to me...” El Shaddai!

How do you respond to the one true God who holds all power in his hand? Abram gets it right as he falls on his face before God. Humility and submission and worship are all appropriate responses to God.

Then God says these things to Abram:

1. I will make a covenant with you. A covenant is a promise, or contract, or pledge between two parties and details what is expected of each of them.
2. God says that on his part He will make Abram a father of many nations. And because of that, he will get a name change. His name for the past 99 years has been Abram, which means "Exalted Father." It is a good name, but it is time for a new name, a new identity. The new name will be "Abraham" which means "Father of many."

We know that names are important in scripture. They describe who that person is – in God's eyes. Jacob is the heel grasper. Moses is the one drawn out of the water. Peter would be the rock. Paul was the little man.

With this name change God was declaring that Abraham would be the father of many nations. It was a token of God's faithfulness to his word. And notice what God says, "I have made you a father of many nations." With God, if he says it, it will be it is a done deal.

3. God says the covenant he is making is an everlasting covenant.
4. God will also give all the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants.

These are great promises from God to Abraham. Family, land and a future. All this is promised in the covenant God made with Abraham.

I wonder if we realize how generous our God truly is? We look at all God promises Abraham and we are in awe. But think about what God promises you and I – forgiveness, eternal life, relationship with him, a home in heaven... All this God promises to those who will enter into the new covenant with him, a covenant established by the death and resurrection of Jesus. If we humbly come to God and by faith trust God when he says these things are for all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will discover God is always true to his word.

## **2. Abraham's Part – circumcision**

Now God gives Abraham a chance to express his commitment to living in covenant with God. Abraham and every male from his family, and his servants and even those who are outside the family but want to join in the covenant as God's people, will have to be circumcised. Every male born into this people of God will be circumcised on the eighth day. And if a person is older when they come under the covenant as God's people, they will be circumcised then!

I hope I do not have to explain to you today what circumcision is, and I leave it up to the parents to tell their children! But we do know it is a procedure that involves cutting. There will be pain, and there will be a lasting sign to all that these people are God's people.

And yes, Abraham was willing to pay the price, to count the cost to enter that covenant with God. It tells us in verse 23 of this chapter that at 99 years of age Abraham was circumcised, along with Ishmael and all the male servants.

This was God's seal to show these were his people. And God made it very clear that if you did not want to take this sign then you were not a part of his people. But what a wonderful thing – to be marked as God's people! To know you belong, that you were welcomed into the community because you had this sign of faith.

And Abraham would now get the news he most wanted to hear. He would be a father within the year. It was so unbelievable that Abraham laughed at first – he at 100 and Sarah at 90 would become parents!? So his son is called Isaac by God, which means “He laughs”.

Who did Abraham worship? El Shaddai. With man these things are impossible, but with God all things are possible! We would hear these words once again when a virgin is told she will become pregnant and bear a son who will be called Immanuel.

### 3. A New Sign

So we are left with a question today: if we want to be a part of God's people, and walk in faith with God, do we also have to undergo the ritual of circumcision?

Of course that question confronted the early Church. The very first followers of Jesus, the twelve disciples and the greater group of disciples were all Jewish. At eight days old they were circumcised. So they had the mark of being God's people.

But soon the Holy Spirit was drawing Gentiles into the church. People were coming to faith in Jesus for salvation who were not Jewish and were not circumcised. Did they need to be circumcised to be Christians? The answer the Jerusalem council came to by the Holy Spirit's direction is recorded in Acts 15. The answer was simply, “No!”

So was there a new sign or seal to show that we belong to God, we are his people?

The answer is “Yes.” Listen to what the Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Galatia:

**<sup>26</sup> You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. <sup>1</sup>**

What is the sign of belonging to God now? Baptism. And this is for all believers, no matter what your background – Jewish, German, English, Filipino, Canadian... What was the response of the early church to those who wanted to know what they needed to do to be saved? “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ... repent and be baptised...”

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New International Version\*](#). (1984). (Ga 3:26–29). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Baptism will not save you – but it is the outward sign to the world that you have been saved. Can I ask you, have you truly repented of your sin and asked Jesus to forgive you and come into your life? If you have, did you testify to his saving grace by being baptised? If you have not, why not? Jesus was baptised, he commanded his disciples to baptise as they go with the Gospel, and the mark of God’s people throughout the book of Acts was baptism. If you have not been baptised and want to be baptised, please let me know and we will plan a service. Every believer should be a baptised believer – because every believer belongs to God.

## **Conclusion**

So Abraham is given again the promise of being the father of a great nation, and the promise of land. As a sign that Abraham was willing to enter a covenant, or relationship, with God, he underwent the ritual of circumcision as God said he must.

So does circumcision have any meaning to us today?

Let me read you two passages – one from the Old Testament and One from the New Testament.

**Deuteronomy 30:6** The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

**Colossians 2:9-13** For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup>and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. <sup>11</sup>In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, <sup>12</sup>having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup>When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Both these passages speak of a “circumcision” God wants to do in our lives – cutting off anything that gets in the way of our relationship with him. There is a cost to following Jesus, and that is HE wants to cut off from our lives those things that entangle us, and keep us from running the race set before us.

Yes, even Christians will need a circumcision, but it is of the heart, God removing those things in our lives that make us look more like the world than like a member of God’s holy family. The question is, will you let him? Will you surrender to what he wants to do in your life? Abraham, we are told, believed God... even if it cost him something. Will you also walk by faith? Will you let God perform the circumcision of your heart so that you can truly love him with all your heart?