

## Genesis 17: Covenant Sign of Circumcision

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In Genesis 17 God makes the ultimate covenant agreement with Abram. While God has made promises before (and mentioned a covenant in Genesis 15:18), this is the moment where the clear terms of the covenant are revealed. God reveals Himself as *El Shaddai* (Exodus 6:3). From previous studies we see that in Scriptures, covenants are composed of two parts: the law and the promise. God's rules are (1) that Abram walk before Him blamelessly and (2) that he circumcise all of his household. The promise is that his descendants will receive the land of Canaan. As part of this sign, Abram and Sarai receive new names: Abraham and Sarah. Abraham becomes the Father of Multitudes, and Sarah becomes the Queen.

Covenant name changes are not unusual in the Bible. Consider God and Jacob (Israel) in Genesis 35:10-14. As well, Covenant Symbols are seen in Scriptures. There is the rainbow sign with God and Noah in Genesis 9:12. In Genesis 31:44-45 Jacob and Laban establish a covenant sign in a Stone Pillar. But the covenant sign here is important in the next covenant as well: Circumcision (the cutting off of the foreskin). This became the command of God in Leviticus 12:3, although on many occasions the Israelites failed at this (Joshua 5:2). Its importance can be seen in Luke 1:59; it was at that moment that John received his name. Circumcision is identified with joining the covenant.

But there was a deeper truth here. *"Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live"* Deuteronomy 30:6. *"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God"* Romans 2:28-29.

Circumcision was actually a physical representation of a spiritual truth. It was a manifestation of the idea of cutting off the worldly part of ourselves; it was about a transformation from the heart.

What is the covenant sign in Christ? In Colossians 2:11-12 we are told that repentance and baptism are that covenant sign in Christ. Again, baptism is the reference in Romans 6:3-6 with the death of the fleshly self. Finally, in Galatians 3:27 (Revelation 3:12, Isaiah 62:2) the new covenant includes a new name that we receive when we have this circumcision without hands, the putting to death of the fleshly self at baptism.

In repentance and baptism God calls us and we answer Him (1 Peter 3:21). Because it is a spiritual act as much as a physical, we remove our fleshly mindset and we receive a new name. As Jesus stated in John 3:3, baptism is the moment where we are born into the covenant of Christ.