

COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

SUMMARY

Circumcision is similar to the Covenant of Adam: its promises are conditional on obedience to a command. Unlike the Covenant of Adam, Circumcision was “**added because of transgressions**” (Gal. 3:19). We invite you to read our paper on the Covenant of Adam.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old God came to him and proclaimed his name: “**I AM God Almighty**” on which basis he then commanded Abram, “**Walk before me perfectly**” (Genesis 17:1). If Abram’s walk had been perfect would this declaration have been necessary? Abram had strayed off the path of God’s will by obeying his wife’s Sarai’s command to marry Hagar, her Egyptian slave maiden, and father children through her. Abram and Sarai had stooped from believing the promise of a son and had tried by human means to obtain one. In so doing, they began a cycle of family in-fighting which persists to this day: the Arab – Israeli conflict.

Abram lost his way. God intervened and imposed new restrictions upon him in the form of a covenant. The cutting off of the flesh was to be a perpetual reminder of his duty to obey God. It was not a mark of honor – to proclaim Abram’s children were in some way superior, no it meant Abram’s children were sheep going astray – they needed God’s rule to keep them in line.

The LORD changed Abram’s name, which means ‘Exalted Father’, to Abraham, which means ‘Father of Many’ (Nations). The LORD changed the name of Sarai, which means ‘Princess’, to Sarah, which means ‘Queen’. These name changes were not complimentary. Abram and Sarai strayed from the spiritual stance of waiting for the kingdom of God and succumbed to the desire for a kingdom in this world: a family of offspring of the flesh only. They also undertook ill-advised means to obtain that human family. Yes kings and nations would come out of Abraham – but these would only be kings and nations of this world. These kings and nations were destined to perish before the end comes. Abraham had taken a step down from being the spiritual man Abram who was looking for the city whose builder and maker is God (see our paper on the Covenant of Abram).

THE KEY IDEA

A contract is an agreement between identified parties. A contract is a transaction.

A covenant is an agreement that changes the identity of the parties. A covenant is a transformation.

Western thinking has moved to the principle of inalienable human rights from birth regardless of age, gender or station in life. It was not always this way. The foundation of Western civilization is Judeo-Christian belief as taught in the Bible. In the Bible rights and privileges are not the same for all people and vary depending

on age, gender, and many other criteria. As we will see, the Bible shows it is possible to change one's identity through covenant. Changing one's identity changes one's rights, privileges, and station in life.

THE SINS OF ABRAM

Abram sinned before the LORD (J-H-W-H). How did Abram sin? Abram sinned in four ways:

- He put himself in submission to his wife (he obeyed her command)
- He married Hagar, who was a slave to his wife, a woman who was under his wife's authority not his
- He faltered in his faith in God's promise by obtaining a son through human effort
- He married an unbelieving wife from a race which was well known to dishonor the Lord God of Shem

The word 'sin' can mean either to transgress a clear commandment of the LORD or to act in unbelief towards God's promise. Abram was guilty of both kinds of sins. He broke the law and he ignored the prophets.

First Sin of Abram: He Put Himself in Submission to his Wife

This is a sin of breaking a commandment of the LORD God.



God spoke to Eve: **“Your desire will be for a husband, and he will rule over you.”** (Genesis 3:16). Adam, Eve, and the Serpent were all punished in the Garden. The Serpent was told to lick dust and wait for the time his head would be crushed, Adam was required to toil with sweat until he died, and Eve was put in subjection to her husband. The punishments in the Garden were everlasting, and therefore apply to the daughters of Eve (i.e. women) as well as to the sons of Adam (i.e. men) for all generations. These consequences continue to apply to Christians today (1 Peter 3:1 for women and 2 Thess. 3:10-12 for men).

Sarai spoke to Abram: **“The LORD has kept me from having children. Go sleep with my maidservant: perhaps I can build a family through her.”** (Gen. 16:2) Sarai gave Abram a command and he obeyed. Sarai had pushed herself up so completely in authority over Abram that she declared out loud without fear that the family belonged to her (“...perhaps I can build a family”).

¹ Source of image: www.avidly.com

Sarai had, like Eve, boldly rejected a commandment of God. Eve was told not to eat the forbidden fruit. Sarai was told to submit to her husband. In both cases, the results of disobedience were disastrous.

The Bible is rife with accounts of men who submitted to their wives and knew the error of their ways:

- Adam obeyed his wife Eve which led directly to a life of painful toil followed by death
- Abram obeyed Sarai which led directly to lying in a bed of pain with his foreskin cut off
- Samson obeyed Delilah which led directly to his eyes being poked out and being crushed by stones
- Solomon obeyed his wives which led directly to his kingdom being cut in two²



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Second Sin of Abram: He Married the Slave of his Wife

This sin is like unto the first. The woman Hagar was the slave of Sarai, so when Abram married her he could not take up his authority over her because her first obligation was to obey Sarai. We see this in the account:

“Then Sarai said to Abram ‘You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms and now she knows she is pregnant she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.’ ‘Your servant is in your hands’ Abram said ‘Do with her what you think best’.” (Gen. 16:5-6)

Third Sin of Abram: He Faltered in his Faith in God’s Promise

God has spoken directly to Abram in dreams and visions. The LORD had *appeared* to Abram. The LORD had provided a miraculous sign to Abram when the flaming torch and the smoking fire pot appeared and walked between the pieces of the dead animals (see our paper on the Covenant of Abram). Repeatedly God told Abram that a Seed would come out of his body and his descendants would be numerous.

Abram had been living in Canaan for ten years by this time. Abram had no fellowship with other believers since Lot had disappeared. Abram’s wife was in rebellion and had given up on God’s promise. Abram had no one around him to encourage him in the faith. He was advanced in age, surrounded by idol worshipping Canaanites, and beset and harangued by an increasingly belligerent and demanding wife. Abram faltered in

² All you men out there thinking of marrying women who will not submit to your authority: prepare to have your kingdom divided in two! This women will become your adversary. The conflict will often only be resolved through divorce, at which time in most Western countries you will lose half your possessions when she goes her separate way.

³ Source of image: www.christculturenews.com

his faith, gave up waiting for God's promise of descendants as numerous as the stars in the skies, and attempted to obtain a son by the most ill-advised means of marrying and sleeping with a slave woman.

Fourth Sin of Abram: He Took an Unbelieving Wife

Hagar was an Egyptian. Egyptians were the descendants of Ham through his second son Mizraim. Ham was notoriously the son of Noah that told his brothers Shem and Japheth of his father's nakedness in his tent. Ham despised the honor of his father Noah by going into his tent and then brought a bad report to others. The descendants of Ham, including Nimrod, were the people the most prone to idol worship.

Noah had laid down a marriage guideline for Shem: "...**may Japheth dwell in the tents of Shem and may Canaan be his slave**" (Gen. 10:27). To 'dwell in the tent together' was the privilege only of a married couple. Noah advised that Shemites not marry Hamites. This had nothing to do with racism, it had everything to do with preserving the faith. It was not the black skin of Hamites (Africans) that was the problem in ancient times, it was the tendency of that race to worship idols and to despise the authority of the patriarchs in spiritual matters. The father of the Hamites despised the authority of Noah, and Noah correctly predicted the children of Ham would do likewise. To prevent the influence of Hamite thinking from entering into the homes of Shemites and influencing their children, Noah advised Shemites to marry Japhethites (Europeans and Asians).

Abram was a Shemite. It was highly inadvisable for him to marry an Egyptian. He did so because he was under the authority of Sarai – but he of all people should have known better. His marriage to Hagar was a very poor choice, not because she was from a dark skinned race but because she was an unbeliever⁴ and came from a heritage of people who worshipped idols. Poor Hagar, she had no choice in the matter and suffered as much as anyone for the sins of Abram and Sarai.

What are the racial regulations in Christian marriage? There are no Christian instructions regarding the advisability or inadvisability of a marriage based on race. However, the Bible instructs believers not to marry unbelievers: "**Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.**" (2 Cor. 6:14)



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⁴ We know Hagar was an unbeliever at the time she married Abram because the account of her conversion is recorded later, when she was sent away with Ishmael into the desert (Gen. 16:13)

⁵ Source of image: <http://pam-intheshadowofhiswings.blogspot.ca/>

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As a result of all these sins God appeared to Abram and declared:

“I am the God Almighty. Walk before me perfectly!” (Genesis 17:1)

The word ‘God Almighty’ occurs for the first time in this verse. The personal name of God, LORD (J-H-W-H) does not appear in this name. God is not revealing himself here as he would to believers (those who know his personal name). God is revealing himself as he would to unbelievers and sinners. By choosing to father a son through an unbelieving slave woman to obtain a family in the flesh (but not in the spirit) Abram now discovers how God will deal with the fleshly but unspiritual sons of this ill-advised union. God becomes the impersonal judge and ruler of the affairs of those descendants and reveals to them his capacity to violently and utterly destroy them if they chose to despise his authority.

The word ‘God Almighty’ comes from the Hebrew word ‘el’ (אל) meaning God or Lord together with the Hebrew word ‘Saday’ (שׂדַי) which is often translated ‘Almighty’ but in truth comes from the root word ‘Sadad’ which means ‘to destroy’ or ‘to despoil’. Thus a more correct translation of this name is ‘God – The Destroyer’ (of sinners).

The message to Abram is:

I am God the Destroyer (of sinners)! (Implication: you have sinned!)

To you (and all your offspring in the flesh) I say: (Repent!) Walk correctly before me!

The gematria of the words ‘God the Destroyer’ is 365.

- The number 365 is equal to 3 x 115. The spiritual meaning of the numbers in this name is: TRUTH (3) of DEATHLY SILENCE (115), or POWER (3) of DEATHLY SILENCE (115), or GOD (3) of DEATHLY SILENCE (115). The message is: “Verily, verily I tell you the truth! I am God: I possess power! I possess the power to impose deathly silence!”
- The number 365 is also equal to 15 x 23. The spiritual meaning of the numbers in this name of God can also be interpreted: COVENANT (15) of DEATH (23)!

This is the covenant:

“Abraham fell facedown, and God said to him: ‘This is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be your God.’” (Genesis 17:4-8)

“Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after

you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and **it will be the sign of the covenant between you and me.** For the generations to come every male among you that is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner – those who are not your offspring. **Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised.** My covenant in your flesh is an everlasting covenant. **Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people, he has broken my covenant.”** (Genesis 17:9-14)

The Covenant of Circumcision is addressed to Abraham as representative of the kings and of the nations who will be born from him – *peoples who are the physical offspring, not the spiritual offspring.*

To these people God says:

- I will be your God: God the Destroyer of Sinners
- I will make your offspring kings and populous nations
- I will give your offspring the whole land of Canaan as an everlasting possession
- This promise is conditional: you must keep my covenant
- My covenant is every male in your household must be circumcised
- Any uncircumcised male will be cut off from his people
- Any uncircumcised male breaks the covenant

These kings and nations are sworn to obey God. If they disobey they will be destroyed. If they obey they will survive to perpetuate the test of obedience in further generations of offspring. If every generation of offspring is obedient, they will possess the whole land of Canaan forever.

In the context of God’s appearance to Abram and his command to walk before him perfectly, it is implied that obedience under this covenant includes the duty to obey all of God’s commands: for example, the duty of a wife to submit to her husband. Yes, circumcision is required under the covenant too – but it is primarily the sign of the covenant. The Covenant of Circumcision does not set aside the Covenant of Marriage, the Covenant of Noah [to command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth], or the Covenant of the Serpent which replaced the Covenant of Adam. Please see our papers on all those covenants.

Eternal life in heaven and all other spiritual promises are absent from this covenant. The reward for obedience to this covenant is not being destroyed as a king or as a nation on earth. There is no promise of any spiritual blessing. The physical descendants of Abraham have no access to the Tree of Life under the promises of this covenant. The promise of this covenant relates to God not destroying the physical descendants of each generation subject to the obedience of the current generation.

Abram fell facedown when God spoke to him. There is no promise of a personal face-to-face relationship with God in this covenant. The personal name of God (J-H-W-H) is absent from the terms of the covenant. The position of being facedown to the ground emphasizes the point this covenant only deals with physical descendants (our bodies our composed of the dust of the ground) and physical promises (not being destroyed – continual existence on the earth – with possession of the physical Promised Land as a hope).

THE COVENANT OF DEATH

Abraham lay on a bed of pain beside his son Ishmael:

“On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them as God told him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen; Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day.” (Genesis 17:23-27)



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The Covenant of Circumcision is a like the Covenant of Adam – the right to live (in this case among the people who subscribed to the covenant) depends on obedience to a command. **The uncircumcised male is cut off from his people: in that way, he dies.** Abram was in Canaan ten years when Ishmael was born (Genesis 16:3) and Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised (Genesis 17:23). Therefore, Abram was in Canaan twenty-three years when he was circumcised. The spiritual number twenty-three means DEATH (23).

Should Christians be circumcised? The answer is no! We are parties to another covenant, the covenant of life through faith in Jesus Christ. Our covenant provides us spiritual promises us a face-to-face relationship with God through the Holy Spirit while we are still living on the earth, resurrection from the dead and eternal life in heaven. Our covenant is not based on our obedience it is based on the merits of the life of total obedience Jesus lived and his death to pay for our sins on the Cross. Yes, Jesus was circumcised (Luke 2:21) but he was circumcised on our behalf as our representative. We are not to be circumcised:

“Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourself be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to any man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.” (Galatians 5:1-3)

⁶ Source of image: www.yourislamicfuture.com

THE COVENANT OF SLAVERY

The piercing of skin is the mark of a slave. Consider this passage of Scripture:

“But if your servant [an indentured slave in the context of this verse] says ‘I do not want to leave you’ because he loves you and his family is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.” (Deut. 15:16-17)

Make no mistake about this the Covenant of Circumcision is a covenant of slavery. The members of the community of the circumcision are the slaves to the Law of God, sold to obey the Law on pain of death if they do not. **Importantly, they are not the slaves of God – they are the slaves of the Law of God** – they obey the rules of the Master, but they do not know the Master or ever even see the Master face to face and they have no inheritance with the children of the Master.

When Abram married Hagar, who was the slave of Sarai, he ensured that the offspring of that union, Ishmael, would also be a slave. **Even Abraham himself was submitted to slavery by taking the mark of circumcision in his flesh.** As a result of this transformation, Abram’s name changed to Abraham to reflect his new status. He was the ‘Father of Many’ (Nations), specifically the nations sold as slaves to the Law of God.

The Old Testament covenant between God and the children of Israel instituted at Mount Sinai is an expansion and a continuation of the Covenant of Circumcision. The Law of God expounded to the children of Israel and laid out in detail in the Books of Moses represents only a refinement of the terms and conditions of slavery to the children of Abraham.

There is a way to exit the Covenant of Circumcision:

“Before faith came, we [people of the circumcision] were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified [before God] by faith. Now that faith [in the death of Jesus to forgive sins] is come, we are no longer under the supervision of the [Adamic and Noahic and Mosaic] law.” (Galatians 2:23-25)

The benefit of entering the New Covenant in Christ is great:

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ. If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham’s Seed and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:1-29)

Hallelujah! Amen.

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The covenant transformation:	<u>from one walks astray from God's commands without care for the consequences</u> (see the four sins of Abram in Genesis 15 as an example of going astray) <u>to one who walks before God in obedience to God's law conscious of the penalty for disobedience</u> (destruction and ex-communication)
Signs of the covenant:	<u>cutting off the foreskin of the male</u> (a sign in blood)
The new authority / role / position:	<u>slave to the law of God</u>
The new responsibility:	<u>obey all of God's commands perfectly;</u>
The new privileges / rights:	<u>continuing in the community of the circumcised;</u>
The new destiny:	<u>for the community of the circumcised to possess the whole land of Canaan</u> (subject and conditional upon the obedience of each generation of the community of the circumcised to obey all of God's commands – that thing which is in fact impossible, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God – total obedience to his law)