

GENESIS 17:1-11 THE COMMITMENT TO OBEDIENCE

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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 their God."

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you."

Thirteen years after his misstep with Hagar, Abram again hears from the Lord. Once again, God repeats his covenant with Abram, but God also adds the command for Abram to be obedient. The command adds nothing to the covenant or its surety. The command of obedience is given as the way in which the full blessings of the covenant might be enjoyed. As the Israelites found in the wilderness, obedience is obligatory if one is to receive the promise.

Furthermore, God claims Abram as his own by renaming him, the ancient symbol of dominion and ownership. And then God provides a mark that when voluntarily taken serves to demonstrate God's ownership and remind the bearer of God's promise. The power of the sign of circumcision is that it is indelible and permanent; just like God's promise. The sign is so powerful that God calls it "my covenant."

God's promise to us is totally based on his grace; an unconditional act of God and one in which we make no contribution. However, if we are to enjoy the promise we are required to live in a manner that is pleasing to God. In baptism we have been marked as Christ's own, for ever. We are branded and the One whose brand we bear will be affected by the way we live our lives. If we are to be the Lord's; if we are to live in the hope of fulfillment, then we need to be committed to his way, and that commitment is manifested by our obedience. We are to be committed to walking before God and being blameless in this life. That is the mark of a child of the Promise.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and guide my feet along the path of righteousness – which is obedience. Amen.