

GENESIS 17:12-14, 23-27 A UNIVERSAL COVENANT

¹² For the generations to come every male among you who 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. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

²³ 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. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, ²⁵ and his son Ishmael was thirteen; ²⁶ Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. ²⁷ And every male in Abraham’s household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

From the beginning all the people of the covenant were not descendents of Isaac, let alone the physical offspring of Abraham. The covenant sign of circumcision was given before Isaac was conceived and was required of every male in Abraham’s “household,” regardless of age, station or ethnic background. Even Ishmael, the son of an Egyptian mother, was circumcised. All of this is a reminder that there is absolutely nothing about us that determines God’s covenant promise. God is absolutely sovereign and his promise is the reality. Just as the proverbial tree that falls in the forest makes a sound (produces sound waves) even when there is no one there to hear, God’s covenant exists even if no one has the faith to accept it.

As all of the biblical covenants find their ultimate meaning and fulfillment in Jesus Christ, so also do the covenants inform our understanding of the Christ covenant. This is true because God is eternally consistent and absolutely sovereign. Therefore, we can rest assured that God’s promise through Jesus Christ is a reality that is available to all people. Like circumcision in the time before Jesus, baptism is the sign through which we dedicate ourselves to following Jesus and obeying his gracious will. So it is that Jesus says, “...whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned...,” and elsewhere, “No one comes to the Father except through me...” (John 5:24; 14:6). This also informs the great commission. “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 18:19).

Gracious God and Father, may my baptism serve as more than a ritual event in my life. Help me each day to live into my baptismal covenant, by both obeying your perfect will and witnessing to your glorious promise. Amen.