

GENESIS

Why The Beginning Matters

Study 14

The Covenant-Making God

Genesis 17

Part 1 of 4: Confirmation E-mail from God

Genesis 17:1-8

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

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, 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 now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

1) a) Objective question. Select all that apply. What are the similarities between the covenant in Genesis 15 and the covenant in Genesis 17 according to the video lecture?

- A. God initiates
- B. God determines the ceremony
- C. There are no conditions
- D. There are covenant obligations
- E. God makes a new covenant
- F. God makes the promise of land and descendants
- G. A sign

b) Objective question. Select all that apply. What are the differences between the covenant in Genesis 15 and the covenant in Genesis 17 according to the video lecture?

- A. God made the covenant in Genesis 15 and confirmed the covenant in Genesis 17
- B. God made the covenant in Genesis 15 and nulled it to make a new covenant in Genesis 17
- C. There are no conditions in Genesis 15 but there are obligations in Genesis 17
- D. There are covenant obligations in Genesis 15 but there are no obligations in Genesis 17
- E. God is the only one taking the oath sign in Genesis 15

c) Discussion question. Verse 1 says that Abraham should “walk before me, and be blameless”.

i) Fill in the blanks below on the word “walk” before God.

Who are the others who also walk with God?	What are the 3 facets or dimension of “walk” in the video lecture?	Explain or give more details on each of these
Enoch (Gen 5:24)	Obedience	Living in similar manner as God- in sync with God in terms of righteousness, holiness, faithfulness
	Relationship	It is an intimate communion such as through prayer
Noah (Gen 6:9)	Process	We’re journey through life situations together, and that’ll demand changes in different phases of growth

ii) What does being blameless mean? Does it mean being perfect?

No, not perfection

Background Information

“The works of monks and priest however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic labourer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.

Romans 4:9-10

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!

Part 2 of 4: Abraham’s Obligation (not quid pro quo)

Genesis 17:9-14

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

me and you. 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. 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. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

2) a) Discussion question. Verse 11 says “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.” What’s the difference between a sign of the covenant and a requirement of the covenant (quid pro quo)?

The circumcision is probably more like the chop and signature or thumbprint inked on a contract rather than a payment for the contract or condition for the items or blessings inside the contract. It is also an identifier to see who inherited and accepted the contract.

Background Information

quid pro quo- a favor or advantage granted in return for something.

Romans 4:9-10

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b) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture, fill in the differences between a Jew and a Gentile to show whether they accepted the New Covenant as a sign of faith or not.

Jews to display their faith will need	Sign of circumcision	Gentile believers to display their faith will need	(no circumcision needed)
	Life of faith		Life of faith

Part 3 of 4: What’s in a Name?

Genesis 17:15-19

God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a

hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

3) a) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture and slide, what is the significance of giving a new name?

Authority	The one who names another person has authority over the person named. (God over the new people, parents over children)
Ownership	God has right over our lives Abram->Abraham= Exalted father->Father of many nations Sarai->Sarah= Queen of Princess over the nations
Identity	God will be a dominant force and purpose in life-priorities Definition of success is defined by God The name tells how Abraham will be used by God: as the beginning of a nation through whom God would work
Status	Adopted into a family to be a legal heir, is a status change The status of the whole lineage for generations is impacted through him

b) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture, what is the significance of giving a new name?

Expansion of covenant (additional blessings)	Which verse shows this?
A. Global Dimension	Gen 17:4-5 “A multitude of nations”
B. Royal Status	Gen 7:6 “Kings shall come from you”
C. To His Descendants	Gen 7:7-8 “ to be God to you...you and your offsprings...I will be their God”
D. Eternal nature	Gen 7:7-9

	“Everlasting covenant...everlasting possession...throughout their generations.”
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Part 4 of 4: Circumcision

Genesis 17:20-27
 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.” When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

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 very day. And every male in Abraham’s household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

4) a) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture and slide, there were other tribes who were also circumcised. What are the difference between Jewish circumcision and other ancient circumcision?

Ancient circumcision	Circumcision-symbolism (eg for Jews)
Coming of age...puberty	Permanent dedication... eternal covenant
Fertility-sexual function (never as an infant)	Intimate...whole hearted and personal devotion
For consecration of Egyptian priests	Cut off... either follow whole-heartedly or be cut off

b) i) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture and slide, what else are circumcised?

Verses	What items or parts are circumcised
Ezekiel 44:6-7	Heart and flesh
Jeremiah 6:10	Ears
Leviticus 19:23-25	Fruit

Colossians 2:11-12	Colossian Christians circumcised not performed using hands
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ii) Discussion question. Based on the verses and video lecture, what can we conclude about circumcision?

Circumcision is more than a physical thing, it is a moral and spiritual dedication.

c) i) Discussion question. Why did Abraham get the whole household circumcised and not just himself?

ii) Fill in the blanks. What is the importance of a community according to the video lecture

Identity	Support	Accountability	Direction
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d) Reflection question. In the video lecture, Dr. Peter equates Baptism in the New Testament to Circumcision in the Old Testament because it signifies a belonging, discipleship, and covenant obligations. Go around and share what “belonging, discipleship, and covenant obligations” look like in the modern context.

e) Why do some Christians believe in baby baptism (pedobaptism) and some do not?

Those who promote infant baptism believes in a future faith of the child, those that believe in adult baptism believes in current adult faith.

Take Away

Part 1 of 4: Confirmation E-mail from God Part 2 of 4: Abraham’s Obligation (not quid pro quo) Part 3 of 4: What’s in a Name? Part 4 of 4: Circumcision
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Case Study

Case 1 – Unconditional Covenant Bong Dee is a development company that has done badly as they had resorted to

underhanded techniques of bribing officials from the government, underpaying workers, providing subquality parts, embezzlement of funds and sometimes outright cheating customers. It has become an embedded culture in the company. Their outstanding debt is USD 1 billion and their assets are worth USD 3 million only. Their annual profit is only USD 500,000 at the best of times before their current crisis.

A very ethical and powerful multinational company First Atlantic wanted to take over the company.

There are three options ahead for the management:

Option 1: The employees of Bong Dee and the management have to clean up their act, pay off the debt which is due in 3 years, get the company to profitability, and turn it around to meet international standards to which First Atlantic adheres, then the First Atlantic will acquire the company and set it global as equal partners.

Option 2: The alternative route is for First Atlantic to acquire the company with its debts and employees unconditionally and then because it owns the company it will set its own standards which the employees and management will have to follow because they belong to First Atlantic. No one will be fired. They will have to undergo retraining and agree to undergo counseling and follow the company's standard operating procedures. Those employees who do not agree to adhere to the program will have to leave. First Atlantic will set the business plans for the management to follow. First Atlantic has full control. Bong Dee company will be renamed First Atlantic to reflect the new ownership. Bong Dee will no longer exist.

Option 3: The last alternative is for First ATLANTIC to buy the company, pay off its debts but leave it alone and allow it to continue its current practices in the hopes that the company will turn itself around. It is an unconditional buy with no pressure to perform. The company will still be called Bong Dee. However, if there is no profit in three years, the company will be liquidated and all will lose their jobs.

1) a) Discussion question. Which option is closest to the model of God's covenant with Abraham? Which option is closest to salvation by works and which option is totally unrealistic?

Model Answer

Option 1 - this is **salvation by works** and it will not work because they owe 1 Billion USD and

due in 3 years. Based on current asset value and profits, they will never be able to pay off their debts and restructure their company in time.

We can never pay off the penalty of our sin and reach God's standards of righteousness

Option 2 - This is **closest to the model of covenant and it is unconditional** in the sense that First Atlantic sets no standards or conditions for Bong Dee to achieve before acquiring the company. They just buy it up and pay off all the huge debts and this is by grace because going by the past record of Bong Dee, they do not deserve this and are a very, very poor buy for First Atlantic.

Their staff are incompetent or corrupt. The purchase is by grace and grace alone. The Bong Dee management only has to have faith that First Atlantic will pay off its debt and bring them to profitability again. They bring nothing but their debts to the table.

However once acquired by First Atlantic they must let the multinational company take control of the operations. They have to do business in the First Atlantic way. They must cooperate with the counselors who will help them reach this standard. If they refuse and continue in their old ways they will be fired

Option 3 - This last option is a **nonsensical option** as no sane company will buy a failing corrupt useless company, pay off the debt for nothing, and yet have little to no control. Bong Dee employees get to continue on their own path to destruction and First Atlantic gets to pick up the tab on all their shenanigans. One would hardly think God would be so foolish.

b) Discussion question. If you were the CFO of Bong Dee or one of its employees, which package will you opt for? Discuss why you chose this option.

Case 2 – Externally Religious

Kar Lim is 58 years old and attended an Alpha course. At the end of the course, he said the Sinner's prayer just before the celebration dinner. He had been suffering from cancer and just completed surgery for the tumor and apparently it was all gone according to the surgeon. He was really happy about that blessing and wanted to change his name to a "Christian" name. He chose Dexter.

He then wanted to officialize it by having undergone baptism by immersion, which he requested. He was supposed to have undergone a set of follow-up classes prior to his baptism but he was not free to attend. He had become tied up at work. He was a very successful real

estate agent. He just had enough time to go to church every other week.

When the leaders called him and wanted to visit, he turned them down. He diligently read his bible once a week and prayed and insisted that he be baptized.

When the leaders brought up the idea of discipleship by going to Gamma classes or life groups, he got upset and felt they were pressuring him. He even offered to donate more money to the building fund. He was however interested in the end-of-year pilgrimage to Jerusalem, organised by the church and enquired about this.

2) a) Discussion question. What do you think of his desire to choose a new name “Dexter”?

Model Answer

Dexter is a Western name, not a Christian one. He thinks Western = Christian. Choosing a biblical name would reflect his desire to be like one of the Christian figures as they serve the Lord. The change in name will reflect his change in direction in life. He might not have known much about this and needs to be guided.

b) Discussion question. What issues does he have in his spiritual life? Was he relying on his own efforts again after his baptism?

Model Answer

His initial excitement about his faith was because of gratefulness for the Lord’s help with his cancer and now that it has passed, he has gotten back to his old way of life and seems no longer to be in such need of the Lord. Self-effort has again taken over and he has resumed his old direction of life.

c) Discussion question. Did Kar Lim focus on devoting his life to Christ? Or did he focus on the externalities to show he is religious

Model Answer

Kar Lim is focused on externalities because it is much easier to just comply with a minimal set of rituals to satisfy his religious credentials. He does not want to let God into the real center of his life at the present moment. He is just interested to do the bare minimum as he does not want devotion to Christ to interfere with his real goals in life.

d) Discussion question. If you are Kar Lim’s leader, how would you handle the situation? Will you baptize him?

Model Answer

We should first of all pray for him and encourage him to at least come on a Sunday to hear the sermon. Further pressure will push him away and this is not going to work. Allow the HS to speak in his life. Keep in contact with him on a social basis to ensure that he has at least minimal fellowship and does not get entirely into just secular fellowship.

Case 3 – Spiritual Depression

Say Tiong is a young Christian who is struggling with his spiritual life. He had an initial high when he first accepted the Lord at a camp 6 months ago and for those few months, he was really earnest in growing in the Lord. He was then retrenched from his job and had trouble finding a new job. He only found one which paid less and worked him harder after 6 months of hunting. He was also down with newly diagnosed diabetes during this time.

When Christians called on him, he avoided them. Whenever he took up his bible to read, it was confusing and he could not understand much and it all got boring and stale. He did not go to church much because he never wanted to be a hypocrite as he did not feel very much like worshipping God. He wished he were like the others in the church who were faithful and joyful but he just felt cold inside.

3) a) Discussion question. What is wrong with Say Tiong?

Model Answer

Say Tiong is undergoing a spiritual depression, he has lost his zeal for God. He does not feel like worshipping God. He is feeling spiritually unresponsive to God and his mind is not really interested in understanding His Word.

b) Discussion question. Say Tiong doubted God's love. What are the factors that have contributed to his situation and why?

Model Answer

His job frustrations- losing his old job and having a new and horrible job, coupled with the pain of diabetes will cause him to doubt the love of God. It's one thing to hear about the love of God when Jesus died on the cross for us, but as humans, we need tangible every day proofs of God's love to really reassure our hearts of His love to feel His love. This has now all gone. He has not a lot to hang on to.

c) Discussion question. Is he a true Christian? How can we know?

Model Answer

I believe he is a true Christian as he still has the desire to be faithful. He has not rejected the faith. He is not self-delusional about his faith and not focused on externals like others. He feels far away and cannot come close. He does not want to be a hypocrite and perhaps even has feelings of guilt because of letting the Lord down and offering cold unenthusiastic worship. He knows what is required of him but he cannot honestly do it

d) Discussion question. As his Christian friends what can you do to help him out?

Model Answer

- Pray for him
- Encourage him to come to church and worship even though he may not feel like it.
- Explain to him how faith and feelings work
- Faith and our understanding of Him leads to feelings and not the other way around. Attending worship and singing with others who are enthusiastic has a way of stimulating our own faith. Placing himself away and isolating himself until his feelings for God to return is just about the worst thing he can do.
- Invite him out for meals, and show him, love, in practical ways like helping him track down a new job more suitable for him. Perhaps introduce him to some doctors at church to give advice on his diabetes.
- Invite him to events in church like Treasure Hunt or concerts. Gradually the Lord will work on him and he has to struggle with his trust issues with God to finally see the light and come out of his depression.

e) Discussion question. Can you share if you have undergone a period similar to Say Tiong's life? How did the Lord minister to you?

Case 4 – Parenting by Force

Melissa and Joe were church-going Christians with three children. They were faithful believers and leaders active in their church and community. They had brought up their family as best as they could. They had family devotions once a month. They had twins Emily and Ally who were 8 years old and attended Sunday school enthusiastically.

Their son Jordon at age 14 years, did not want to go to the youth service. He kept waking up late and said he could not attend the service. He started to hook up with some unsavory elements in school and started acting tough. He started shouting back at his mother Melissa

and Joe found it hard to discipline him. He was not afraid of the cane.

Joe, the head of the family had to lay down the law. As long as Jordan was in the family, they had to go to church, it did not matter if he enjoyed it or not, he had to go. Joe would drag him out of bed in the morning to ensure he was at church on time. There was a youth camp at the end of the year and Joe signed his son up despite his protests to the contrary.

He banned all contact with his usual bunch of friends who had started introducing Jordan to smoking and drinking. Joe also arranged for his son to be baptized after the camp. He reasoned that Abraham had all his offspring circumcised on the 8th day without their consent or faith hence it is a covenantal issue and he can do the same for his boy and perhaps this will save him from his rebellion.

His church pastor came and was quite shocked at Joe's strict discipline and warned him that his actions were alienating the rebellious teenager. He advised Joe to back off and let him find his own way.

4) a) Discussion question. What do you think has gone wrong with parenting?

Model Answer

Every child that goes bad is not necessarily the result of poor parenting. No parent on the other hand is perfect and I am sure his parents aren't either. Perhaps he would have felt the pressure in the church from other kids and parents as his parents were leaders and as their son, much more is expected of him. This pressure alone is sufficient to turn many against the faith. We find this often in pastors' kids who rebel against the church. Many times, adolescence is a time when kids have to develop independent thinking even if the thinking is flawed. At least it is their own.

b) Discussion question. What do you think about Joe's actions? Are they all justified?

Model Answer

He should not force baptism on the child who rebels. He has taken the story of Abraham out of context and applied it to his son.

We live under the new covenant where baptism has replaced circumcision and there is no evidence that the early church practiced infant baptisms. In the book of Acts, it was believer's baptisms that were emphasized.

As for the other actions, there is a place where parental digression over what is right for the child is reasonable. We must not let a child make adult decisions. Going to church and youth are not unreasonable activities and disciplines and with time he may gain benefit from them. Allowing him to slide further away will make things even worse.

c) Discussion question. Compare them with the pastor's advice to leave him alone. Do you agree?

Model Answer

The pastor probably does not understand all of Joe's actions as he just comes into the scene without much knowledge or context. If we let the child alone he will stray away, especially with his unsavory friends.

He should be proactive and get him in contact with the youth fellowship teenagers or the youth pastor to form relationships that will be helpful in building up the boy and allowing him to work out his issues with the help of older kids. Often older kids become role models of spirituality and provide an alternative example to the pressure of conformity from the regular kids from secular society.

d) Discussion question. How would you advise them to handle the situation at home?