

PART THIRTY

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM: THE OLD COVENANT

(Genesis 17:1-27)

1. *Synopsis of Chapter Seventeen*

“Again thirteen years rolled away, and still the Promise was not fulfilled. But when hope might almost have ceased to hope, God appeared once more to Abram, recapitulated the main outline of the Covenant-Promise, changed his name from Abram (*a high father*), to Abraham (*the father of a multitude*), and assured him that at length the long-expected time was well-nigh come. But in prospect of the peculiar blessing about to be bestowed upon him, he himself, and all his seed after him, must carry about with them a perpetual pledge of their covenant relation to Jehovah. The rite of Circumcision must now be adopted by him, and instead of being the badge of any favored class amongst the nation destined to spring from his loins, was, on pain of excommunication, to be open to the lowliest member of the Hebrew commonwealth, even to the bond-servant and the stranger. At the same time it was intimated to the patriarch that his wife Sarai, whose name also was now changed to SARAH (*princess*), and no other, was to be the mother of the promised child, that he would be born during the next year, and be called Isaac (*Laughter*); while Ishmael also, for whom Abraham had prayed, would not be forgotten, but be a partaker in the Divine blessing, and become the father of twelve princes, the ancestors of a great nation. Thereupon Abraham complied with the Divine command, and was circumcised, together with Ishmael, now thirteen years of age, and all the male members of his household” (COTH, 38-39).

2. *The Covenant-Promise (17:1-8)*

1 *And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am God*

Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. 3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee. 6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. 8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Leupold (EG, 511): "The basic fact to be observed for a proper approach to this chapter is that the covenant referred to is not a new one. For 15:18 reports the establishment of the covenant, whose essential provisions are the same as those here outlined. Consequently this chapter marks an advance in this direction, that the things previously guaranteed are now foretold as finally coming to pass: the one covenant promises certain blessings, the other the realization of these blessings when their appointed time has come. Criticism confuses issues by claiming that our chapter gives P's account of the covenant which was covered by J's account in the somewhat different fashion in chapter 15. Consequently it need not be wondered at, that the critical approach continually magnifies incidental differences and tries to set these two chapters at variance with one another. Furthermore, the distinct importance of our chapter is readily discerned. A man who has long been obligated to wait in unwavering faith certainly re-

quires clear promises of God upon which to build such faith. For faith must have a foundation. Here these promises, covering the essentials of numerous posterity and possession of the land, and involving by implication the Messianic features found in v. 12, now specify Sarai as the mother who is to bear the son, and also establish a covenant sign. Immediately before the birth of the son of promise these distinct features are, of course, most in place. Aside from this, to have all these promises featured as parts of the covenant seals everything for the faith of Abram which is now under necessity of hoping and believing against all hope."

"God's making a covenant here, and in many other places, denotes the enlargement, renewal, establishment, or confirmation of it. It cannot be imagined that, in various instances in which this phrase is used, He had not respect to His former declarations of the same kind as still in force." (SIBG, 239). (Psa. 105:8-10, Gen. 15:18, Exo. 34:10-27, 1 Ki. 8:9, Jer. 31:33, Hos. 2:18, Gen. 6:18, Exo. 6:4, Lev. 27:9, Deut. 8:11-20, Ezek. 16:60, 62, etc.) It should be noted that this is God's covenant with Abraham *in the wider sense*, that is, it included Abraham's posterity ("thee and thy seed after thee," v. 7). V. 4—"the father of a multitude of nations." This was fulfilled to the letter. Abraham was the progenitor of the Ishmaelites, the Israelites, the Midianites, the Edomites, and their kings (v. 20; Num., ch. 31, Gen., ch. 36, Matt., ch. 1) but chiefly Christ and His spiritual subjects (Gal. 3:23-29; Psa. 45:16; Rev. 17:14, 1:6, 11:15, 15:3; 1 Pet. 2:9, etc.). Isaac and his Israelite descendants were properly the *natural seed* with whom this covenant was established, v. 21. By it, God in Christ, became to the Israelites in general, the head of their nation and assumed them for His peculiar people (Exo. 19:5-6, Deut. 14:2, Eph. 1:11), bestowed on them the land of Canaan as His land, in the enjoyment of which they tasted His goodness, and had access to contem-

plate the glories of the new covenant state, and of the heavenly blessedness of spiritual Israel in Christ. (Note the parallelism between Exo. 19:5-6 and 1 Pet. 2:9-19). (Cf. Gen. 12:3, 3:6-9, Rom. 9:6-9, John 8:56, Heb. 11:8-16).

V. 1—Abram was *ninety-nine* years old when *all* the details of the covenant were made known to him. The long interval between this age and that given in 16:16 should be noted carefully. It marks a long delay in the fulfillment of the Promise, a tarrying on God's part; this, however, corresponds to the undue impatience and haste of Abram (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9).

V. 1—*El Shaddai*, "meaning *God Almighty*, from the root *shadad* (be violent, irresistibly strong). Some accept another interpretation, 'God of the mountain,' which is not to be taken as worship of nature (animism) but that God appeared to Abram on the mountain. *El Shaddai* appears to Abram when he is ninety-nine years of age, and when the birth of an heir seems literally impossible. The mighty God steps in and does the impossible" (HSB, 28). It should be noted that it is Yahweh, according to the text, who says, "I am *El Shaddai*." (This Name is found six times in Genesis and thirty-one times in Job). *Elohim*, according to Delitzsch, is the God who causes nature to be and to endure; *El Shaddai* is the God who constrains nature and subdues it, "so that it bows and yields itself to the service of grace." "*Walk before me, and be thou perfect,*" said Yahweh to Abraham: "the one command demands a God-conscious life of the best type; the other, faithful observance of all duties. The one is sound mysticism; the other, conscientious conduct. The one is the soul of true religion; the other, the practice of it" (EG, 514). That this was another *theophany* is clear from v. 22; hence, "*Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him,*" etc. Abram fell on his face "in token of his fear and reverence, as being afraid and ashamed to look

upon God" (cf. v. 17; Exo. 3:6, Lev. 9:24, Num. 22:31, Josh. 5:14, Judg. 13:20; Ezek. 1:28, 3:23, 9:8, 43:3; Dan. 8:17; Matt. 17:6, Rev. 1:17; cf. also Psa. 89:7, Deut. 4:24, Exo. 24:17; Heb. 10:31, 12:29; Gen. 28:16-17; Psa. 96:4, 9; Psa. 91:9; Rev. 15:4).

VV. 5, 15. *New names.* "God's giving names to persons imports His making them to correspond with them in their condition or usefulness" (Gen. 32:28; 2 Sam. 12:25; Isa. 62:2, 4:5; Rev. 2:17; Jer. 20:3, 23:6, 33:16; Matt. 1:21). Lange (CDHCG, 422): "The Hebrews connected the giving of names with circumcision (ch. 21:3 ff.; Luke 1:59, 2:21). The connection of the giving of names, and circumcision, effects a mutual explanation. The name announces a definite human character, the new name a new character (the new name, Rev. 2:17, the perfect stamp of individual character), circumcision, a new or renewed, and more noble nature." Jamieson (CECG, 151): "In eastern countries the name given in infancy is sometimes in the course of life altered: a change of name is an advertisement of some new circumstance in the history, rank, or religion of the individual who bears it. The change is made variously—by the old name being entirely dropped for the new, or by conjoining the new with the old, or sometimes only a few letters are inserted, so that the altered form may express the difference in the owner's state or prospects. It is surprising how soon a new name is known, and its import spread through the country. In dealing with Abraham and Sarai, God was pleased to adapt his procedure to the ideas and customs of the country and age. There was no way, according to prevailing notions, in which the Divine promise would be so well remembered, and the splendid prospects of the patriarch became more widely known than by giving him and his wife new names, significant of their high destiny. Instead of Abram—*Ab* or *Abba*, father, and *ram*, high, 'a high father,' he was to be called—*Ab-ra-hamon*, father of a great multitude; and

this has been verified, whether he has been considered as the ancestor of the Jews, Arabs, etc., or as the Father of the Faithful." (Cf. Neh. 9:7-8). "For the ancients a name did not merely indicate, rather it made a thing what it was, and a change of name meant a change of destiny, cf. v. 15 and 35:10. *Abram* and *Abraham*, it seems, are in fact just two dialectical forms of the same name whose meaning is 'he is great by reason of his father, he is of noble descent.' In this place, however, *Abraham* is interpreted on the strength of its similarity with *ab hamon*, 'father of a multitude'" (JB, 33). Note also in this connection, Sarai's change of name to *Sarah* (v. 15). This new name "bears no different meaning from her former name but marks an added dignity nevertheless because of the circumstances involved" (EG, 526). As in the case of Abraham, "such a change is viewed as the external sign of an important turn in the life or function of the bearer. . . . The underlying concept was probably much the same as in a king's assumption of a special throne name. The event marked a new era" (ABG, 127). "Sarah and Sarai are two forms of the same name, which means 'princess'; Sarah is to be the mother of kings, v. 16" (JB, 33). The meaning that some attach to the name in saying that it means "the contender," is hardly appropriate. "'Sarah' means 'princess' or 'the princely one.' Without a special divine blessing it would, of course, have been a physical impossibility for Sarah to bring forth this son [Isaac]. Consequently this potent blessing of God is twice referred to: once in connection with this son, then in relation to 'the kings of peoples' that shall in the course of time spring from this son. But she who thus becomes the mother of kings certainly merits the name 'Princess'" (EG, 526).

Note carefully: "*thy seed after thee, throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant*" (v. 7), "*all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession*" (vv. 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 19). *Everlasting*—how long? (1) Note how

modern analytical (destructive) criticism deals with this phase of the Promise: "With this cf. Ps. 105:44-45, where the possession of the land is regarded as necessary if Israel is to keep God's statutes and observe his laws. The chosen people was no abstract idea. Israel was a concrete reality, a people, however unique, among the peoples of the earth. To be itself and to achieve its destiny it needed its own land, in which would be the center of its religion—the temple—and within which it could freely order its life in accordance with the divine law. . . . This insistence on the part of P was in part an expression of the natural love of a people for its home. It was in part a consequence of the fact that Israel had as yet no adequate belief in life after death, so that God's promise had to be realized, if at all, here and now on this earth. Nevertheless, in insisting upon the importance of the natural community he was on sure ground for, without this insistence, belief in the supernatural becomes little more than a world-escaping piety" (IBG, 611-612). *Note well that under this view the spiritual (antitypical) aspect of this phase of the Promise, which indeed permeates the Bible throughout, in the Old Testament as anticipation, in the New as fulfillment, is utterly ignored. The critics seem to be completely blind with respect to the unity of the Bible as a whole. (2)*

"This covenant, as it respected the Hebrew nation, together with the possession of Canaan, and the various ceremonial ordinances by which they were marked the peculiar people of God, and in the observance of which they were to enjoy their rest and prosperity in Canaan, is represented as *everlasting* or *for ever*; but in these passages no more than a long time is meant (Gen. 48:4; Exo. 12:14, 17; 21:6, 31:17; 32:13, 40:15; Lev. 16:34; 25:23, 40, 46; Num. 10:8, 15:15, 18:9, 25:13; Deut. 4:40, 15:17, 18:5; Josh. 4:7, 14:9, etc.). But as this covenant respected Christ, and believers in him, it, and all the spiritual blessings contained in it, are everlasting in the strictest sense (Heb.

13:20; 9:12, 15; 1 Pet. 1:4, 2 Pet. 1:11). And it is perhaps chiefly because the covenant of peculiarity with Israel, and the ordinances and blessings thereof, prefigured these eternal relations and privileges that they are represented as *everlasting*" (SIBG, 240). (3) Jamieson (CECG, 152): "It is perfectly clear that this promise was meant to refer to the natural descendants of Abram, who, by the election of grace, were to be separated from the rest of the nations, and to the temporal blessings which it guaranteed to them (Rom. 11:16, 15:8). They were in their collective capacity to form the visible external Church; and in the sense of their being 'a chosen generation, a peculiar people,' though many of them were unbelievers, they were to be called the people of God, as is manifest from the words 'in their generations.' In this sense partly the covenant is called 'an everlasting covenant'; for it is continued in force down to the promulgation of the Gospel, when the national distinction ceased, by the admission of all mankind to the spiritual blessings contained in the Abrahamic covenant (Eph. 2:14). But further, in a spiritual point of view, it is called 'an everlasting covenant.' The promise is a promise made to the Church of all ages; for He who is not the God of the dead, but of the living, made it to 'Abraham and his seed' (Cf. Gal. 3:17). The sign of circumcision was annexed to it under the Jewish dispensation (cf. Acts 2:38, 39; Gal. 3:6, 7, 9, 14, 22, 26, 29; Heb. 8:10), and that of baptism under the Christian." (This writer goes on to justify the connection of fleshly circumcision with baptism as "spiritual circumcision," a notion which we shall give attention later. Suffice it to say that in the foregoing exegesis, although much of it is Scriptural, there are three obvious errors: (1) To say that the phrases under consideration here were meant to refer chiefly to the natural descendants of Abraham is contradicted in the latter part of the quotation by the applica-

tion of these phrases to the *spiritual* seed of Abraham: the Scriptures teach that the spiritual seed of Abraham were included, by Divine ordination, in the original promises to Abraham and his *seed*, i.e., the term *seed* included *from the beginning both the fleshly and the spiritual, the typical and the antitypical, the latter being of far greater import than the former* (John 8:56, Gal. 3:8, 29). (2) To speak of the Old Covenant people as a Church is utterly erroneous. The Church is the Divine institution which was established on Pentecost (Acts 2) and is used always in Scripture to designate God's people under the New Covenant. (3) *There is no Scriptural justification whatever for identifying baptism with spiritual circumcision.* The indwelling Holy Spirit, not baptism, is the sign and seal of the New Covenant (Acts 2:38, Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13, 4:30). (Spiritual circumcision is Scripturally explained *infra*.)

The simple fact of the matter is that these terms, *for ever* and *everlasting*, as used with respect to the land (Canaan) and the covenant, means *as long as the Old Covenant continued to be in force*: hence the import of the phrase, "throughout their generations." The Abrahamic Covenant, of course, was enlarged into a national covenant at Sinai, under the mediatorship of Moses (Exo. 19:5-6, 24:18, 34:28; Deut. 5:2, 9:9; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9, John 7:19; Gal. 3:15-22, etc.). That this Old Covenant would be abrogated and superseded by the New is expressly announced in the Old Testament itself (Jer. 31:31-34, cf. Heb. 8:6-13; Hos. 2:11; Amos 5:21, 8:10, etc.). The New Covenant, it should be understood, is not a continuation or enlargement of the Old: it is the New Covenant, mediated by Messiah Himself, and established upon better promises (John 1:17; Heb. 8:6, 9:15, 12:24), in which Jews and Gentiles come together by induction into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29, Eph. 2:11-18) to form the *one new man*.

By His death on the Cross, our Lord at one and the same time abrogated the Old Covenant and ratified the New (Col. 2:13-15, Heb. 9:11-22).

The Covenant-Promises: these were first stated in Gen. 12:1-3, then variously amplified as repeated in Gen. 13:14-17, 15:1-2, 17:1-27, 22:15-19, etc. From careful analysis of these various passages we find that we have given here what may be regarded as *four distinct elementary promises*. These are (1) that Abraham should have a numerous offspring (Gen. 13:16, 15:3-5, 17:2-4, 22:17); (2) that God would be a God to him and to his seed after him (Gen. 17:1-8); (3) that He would give to Abraham and to his seed, an everlasting possession (Gen. 12:7, 13:15, 15:18-21, 17:8); that He would bless all the peoples of the earth through him and his seed (Gen. 12:3, 22:18). "But nevertheless they may all in harmony with Scripture usage be regarded as but elementary parts of one and the same promise, made to Abraham and his seed (Acts 2:39; 13:23, 32; 26:6; Rom. 4:14, 16; Gal. 3:18, 22, 29, etc.); each part having a double reference: that is, looking to both the typical and the antitypical side of the Divine economy. The first element, for instance, was a pledge to Abraham that he would have a numerous family, first, according to the flesh, and secondly, according to the Spirit; the second, that God would be a God to both of these families, though in a far higher sense to the latter than to the former; the third, that each of these families would become heirs to an inheritance; and the fourth, that through each of them the world would be blessed" (Milligan, SR, 75-76). Through the fleshly seed of Abraham, the worship of the living and true God (monotheism) and the basic principles of the moral law (the Decalogue) were preserved and handed down to posterity; through the spiritual seed of Abraham, eternal good news of redemption through Christ Jesus is proclaimed to all nations for the obedience of faith (Exo. 3:14, Deut. 5:26, Acts 14:15,

1 Thess. 1:9; Heb. 9:14, 10:31; Rev. 7:2; John 1:17, Exo. 20:1-17; Matt. 5:17-18, 22:34-40; Rev. 14:6-8; Matt. 24:14, 28:18-20; Eph. 3:8-12, 1 Tim. 3:15; Rom. 1:16, 10:6-17; 1 Cor. 1:21-25, etc.)

3. *The Covenant-Sign (17:9-14)*

9 *And God said unto Abraham, And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations.* 10 *This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised.* 11 *And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant betwixt me and you.* 12 *And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner that is not of thy seed.* 13 *He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.* 14 *and the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.*

Flesbly Circumcision: "The Greeks had two words for covenant, viz., *suntheke* and *diatheke*. The former was used to denote a solemn agreement made between equals; and the latter, to denote any arrangement made by a superior for the acceptance and observance of an inferior. And hence it is, that all of God's covenants are expressed in Greek by the word *diatheke*. The word *suntheke* is not found in the New Testament; but *diatheke* occurs in it 33 times; and *b'reeth* is used 267 times in the Old Testament" (Milligan, SR. 77, n.). The former word indicates a contract; the latter, the distinction between a covenant and a contract.

The time has now arrived for the details of the Old Covenant to be set forth. "How could a rite of this sort be inaugurated at all in a satisfactory manner without clear directions a) as to what manner of operation it was to be (v. 11); or b) as to at what age it was to be administered (v. 12a); or c) as to who falls under its provisions, whether only the direct descendants of Abraham or also the slaves of the household (v. 12b); or d) as to the absolute or relative necessity of this rite for all those enumerated (v. 13). To impose the rite and leave all these problems open would merely have caused grievous perplexity to those entrusted with the duty of circumcision. Consequently, all such critical remarks as 'the legal style of this section is so pronounced that it reads like a stray leaf from the book of Leviticus,' are just another case where the nature of the circumstances that call for just such a presentation is confused with the problem of style. The question of various authors (J, E, and P) does not enter in at this point. No matter who the author is, the case in question calls for this kind of presentation of the necessary details" (EG, 522).

The details are, therefore, made very clear. Lange (CDHCG, 423): "1. The act of circumcision: the removal of the foreskin; 2. the destination; the sign of the covenant; 3. the time: eight days after the birth (see ch. 21:4, Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59, 2:21; John 7:22, Phil. 3:5; Josephus, *Antiq.* I, 12, 2); 4. the extent of its efficacy: not only the children, but slaves born in the house (and those also bought with his money) were to be circumcised; 5. its inviolability: those who were not circumcised should be cut off, uprooted." Note also the clear specification here, v. 12—"every *male* throughout your generation," etc. Females were considered as represented in the males: thus the patriarchal authority was divinely confirmed and the unity and integrity of the family as well. The provisions of the Mosaic Law were directed toward the preservation

of the family as the social unit. Circumcision served to cement all families into a single family or people of God. (A people is rightly designated a nation.) It was the sign that set the national family (people) apart as belonging exclusively to the living and true God.

Skinner (ICCG, 293): "The *Berith* is conceived as a self-determination of God to be to one particular race all that the word God implies, a reciprocal act of choice on man's part being no essential feature of the relation." (Why say it was so *conceived*? According to the text it was a self-determination on God's part.) Concerning vv. 6-7, "*kings shall come out of thee*" (cf. Mic. 5:2), "*I will establish my covenant . . . to be a God unto thee.*" Jamieson writes (CECG, 151-152): "Had this communication to Abram been made at the time of his call, it could have conveyed no other idea to the mind of one who had been an idolater, and was imbued with the prejudices engendered by idolatry, than that, instead of the ideal fictitious deities he had been accustomed to look to and worship, the true, living, personal, God was to be substituted. But he had now for a long series of years become familiarized with the name, appearances, and educational training of Him who had called him, and therefore he was prepared to accept the promise in a wider and more comprehensive sense—to understand, in short, that to 'be a God unto him' included all that God had been, or had promised to be to him and to his posterity—an instructor, a guide, a governor, a friend, a wise and loving father, who would confer upon them whatever was for their good, chasten them whenever they did wrong, and fit them for the high and important destiny for which he had chosen them. It is perfectly clear that this promise was primarily meant to refer to the natural descendants of Abram, who, by the election of grace, were to be separated from the rest of the nations, and to the temporal blessings which it guaranteed to them (Rom. 11:16, 15:8)." Note again v. 7, "to

be to thee a God." "The essence of the covenant relation is expressed by this frequently recurring formula" (Skinner, ICCG, 293).

Leupold (EG, 522): "So then, first of all, since a mark in the flesh might be cut into various parts of the body, the divine command specifies what man's thought might well have deemed improbable, that this cutting was to be 'in the flesh'—euphemism—of their foreskin. Such a *peritome* will then certainly be 'a sign of a covenant' between God and a member of the covenant people. So little does the unsanctified mind appreciate the issues involved, that in the eyes of the Gentiles circumcision was merely an occasion for ridicule of the Jews." Again (p. 524): "It certainly is passing strange to find critics referring to this solemn rite which God ordained as a 'taboo'—'the taboo of the household required the circumcision' of the purchased slave child (Procksch). Taboos are superstitious practices: here is one of the most solemn divine institutions of the Old Testament."

History of Circumcision. Speiser (ABG, 126): "Circumcision is an old and widely diffused practice, generally linked with puberty and premarital rites. In the ancient Near East it was observed by many of Israel's neighbors, among them the Egyptians, the Edomites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, and certain other nomadic elements (cf. Jer. 9:26). But the Philistines did not follow it (cf. 2 Sam. 1:20), and neither did the 'Hivites' (*i.e.*, Horites) of Central Palestine (Gen. 34:15). Nor was the custom in vogue in Mesopotamia. Thus the patriarchs would not have been likely to adopt circumcision prior to their arrival in Canaan, which is just what the present account says in another way. . . . Eventually, the rite became a distinctive group characteristic, and hence also a cultural and spiritual symbol. To P, however, it was essential proof of adherence to the covenant." (P, of course, is the Priestly Code, to which this chapter is assigned by the critics.) Toy

(IHR, 68 ff.): "The most widely diffused of such customs of initiation is the gashing or the complete removal of the prepuce. It existed in ancient times among the Egyptians, the Canaanites, and the Hebrews (for the Arabs, the Syrians, and the Babylonians and Assyrians we have no information), not, so far as the records go, among the Greeks, Romans, and Hindus. At the present time it is found among all Moslems and most Jewish communities, throughout Africa, Australia, Polynesia and Melanesia, and, it is said, in Eastern Mexico. It is hardly possible to say what its original distribution was, and whether or not there was a single center of distribution. As to its origin many theories have been advanced. Its character as initiatory is not an explanation—all customs of initiation needed to have their origins explained." This author goes on to list these various theories as to the origin of the practice, giving also the objections to them as follows: 1. "It cannot be regarded as a test of endurance, for it involves no great suffering, and neither it nor the severer operation of sub-incision (practiced in Australia) is ever spoken of as an official test." 2. "A hygienic ground is out of the question for early society. The requisite medical observation is then lacking, and there is no hint of such a motive in the material bearing on the subject. . . . The exact meaning of Herodotus's statement that the Egyptians were circumcised for the sake of cleanliness, preferring it to beauty, is not clear; but in any case so late an idea throws no light on the beginnings." (Cf. Herod. II, 7). 3. "Somewhat more to the point is Crawley's view that the object of the removal of the prepuce is to get rid of the dangerous emanation from the physical secretion therewith connected. . . . But this view, though conceivably correct, is without support from known facts. . . . There is no trace of fear of the secretion in question. . . . nor does this theory account for the custom of subincision." 4. "As circumcision is often performed shortly before marriage,

it has been suggested that its object is to increase procreative phimosis. . . . Such an object, however, is improbable for low stages of society—it implies an extent of observation that is not to be assumed for savages.” 5. “There is no clear evidence that the origin of circumcision is to be traced to religious conceptions. It has been held that it is connected with the cult of the generative organs (phallic worship). . . . But each of these customs is found frequently without the other: In India we have phallic worship without circumcision, in Australia circumcision without phallic worship; and this separateness of the two may be said to be the rule. The cult of the phallus seems not to exist among the lowest peoples.” 6. “The view that circumcision is of the nature of a sacrifice or dedication to a deity, particularly to a diety of fertility, appears to be derived from late usages in times when more refined ideas have been attached to early customs. The Phrygian practice of excision was regarded, probably, as a sacrifice. But elsewhere, in Egypt, Babylonia, Syria, and Canaan, where the worship of gods and goddesses of fertility was prominent, we do not find circumcision connected therewith. In the writings of the Old Testament prophets it is treated as a symbol of moral purification. Among the lower peoples there is no trace of the conception if it as a sacrifice. It is not circumcision that makes the phallus sacred—it is sacred in itself, and all procedures of savage veneration for the prepuce assume its inherent potency.” 7. Nor can circumcision be explained as an attenuated survival of human sacrifice. “The practice (in Peru and elsewhere) of drawing blood from the heads or hands of children on solemn occasions may be a softening of an old savage custom, and the blood of circumcision is sacred. But this quality attaches to all blood, and the essential thing in circumcision is not the blood but the removal of the prepuce.” 8. “The suggestion that the object of detaching and preserving the foreskin (a vital part of one’s

self) is to lay up a stock of vital energy, and thus secure reincarnation for the disembodied spirit, is putting an afterthought for origin. The existence of the practice in question is doubtful, and it must have arisen, if it existed, after circumcision had become an established custom. Savages and other peoples, when they feel the need of providing for reincarnation, commonly preserve the bones or the whole body of the deceased."

Lange (CDHCG, 423, 424): "The Epistle of Barnabas, in a passage which has not been sufficiently regarded (ch. 9) brings into prominence the idea, that we must distinguish circumcision, as an original custom of different nations, from that which receives the patriarchal and theocratic sanction. 'The heathen circumcision,' as Delitzsch remarks, 'leaving out of view the Ishmaelites, Arabians, and the tribes connected with them both by blood and in history, is thus very analogous to the heathen sacrifice. As the sacrifice sprang from the feeling of the necessity for an atonement, so circumcision from the consciousness of the impurity of human nature.' But that the spread of circumcision among the ancient nations is analogous to the general prevalence of sacrifice, has not yet been proved. It remains to be investigated, whether the national origin of circumcision stands rather in some relation to religious sacrifice; whether it may possibly form an opposition to the custom of human sacrifice (for it is just as absurd to view it with some, as a remnant of human sacrifice, as to regard it with others, as a modification of eunuchism); whether it may have prevailed from sanitary motives, or whether it has not rather from the first had its ground and source in the idea of the consecration of the generative nature, and of the propagation of the race. *At all events, circumcision did not come to Abraham as a custom of his ancestors; he was circumcised when ninety-nine years of age. This bears with decisive weight against the generalizing of the custom by Delitzsch. As to the destination of*

circumcision to be the sign of the covenant, its patriarchal origin is beyond question." Again, Gosman (CDHCG, 424): "As the rainbow was chosen to be the sign of the covenant with Noah, so the prior existence of circumcision does not render it less fit to be the sign of the covenant with Abraham, nor less significant." Murphy (MG, 310): "The rainbow was the appropriate natural emblem of preservation from a flood; and the removal of the foreskin was the fit symbol of that removal of the old man and renewal of nature, which qualified Abraham to be the parent of a holy seed. And as the former sign foreshadows an incorruptible inheritance, so the latter prepares the way for a holy seed, by which the holiness and the heritage will at length be universally extended." Again, Lange, *ibid.*, p. 424): "See John 7:22. Still it was placed upon a new legal basis by Moses (Exo. 4:24, 25; Lev. 12:3), and was brought into regular observance by Joshua (Josh. 5:2). That it should be the symbol of the new birth, *i.e.*, of the sanctification of human nature, from its source and origin, is shown both by the passages which speak of the circumcision of the heart (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16, 30:6; Jer. 4:4, 9:25; Ezek. 44:7), and from the manner of speech in use among the Israelites, in which Jewish proselytes were described as new-born."

Details of the Ordinance of Circumcision. (1) V. 10—"every male among you shall be circumcised." (Cf. Exo. 12:48-49, Josh. 5:3, 7). This allowed for no exceptions; at the same time it exempted all females. (It should be noted that circumcision of girls (by the removal of the clitoris and the labia minora) was a common custom among many primitive peoples and continues to be practised by some groups in our own time. Closely related to circumcision of girls was the practice of introcision (enlargement of the vaginal orifice by tearing it downward) and infibulation (the closing of the labia just after circumcision). The first two of the practices mentioned were

for the purpose of facilitating coition; the last-named was for the purpose of preventing coition until the proper age was reached. These practices were all characteristic of initiation ceremonies associated with arrival at the age of puberty. Obviously this could not have been the design of circumcision in the Abrahamic covenant: hence, we must conclude that in it females were considered as represented by the males, as stated above. (2) V. 8—"he that is eight days old" (cf. Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59; 2:21; Phil. 3:5). This specific age requirement shows that *in the Abrahamic covenant circumcision could not have been a puberty rite in any sense of the term*: we know of no puberty rites performed on infants only eight days old. (Note the interesting case of Zipporah and Moses and their two sons, Exo. 2:22, 18:2-4, 4:24-26. The narrative in vv. 24-26 is somewhat obscure. It seems, however, that Eliezer had been born a few days before Zipporah and Moses set out on the journey back to Egypt. In the course of the journey, the eighth day from the birth of the child arrived and his circumcision should have taken place. Evidently the rite was repugnant to Zipporah and she deferred it, with Moses weakly consenting to this act of disobedience. At the end of the eighth day, when Moses went to rest for the night, he was seized by what was probably a dangerous illness of some kind. This he rightly regarded as a divinely inflicted punishment, visited on him for his act of disobedience. "To dishonor that sign and seal of the covenant was criminal in any Hebrew, particularly so in one destined to be the leader and deliverer of the Hebrews; and he seems to have felt his sickness as a merited chastisement for the sinful omission. Concerned for her husband's safety, Zipporah overcomes her maternal feelings of aversion to the painful rite, performs it herself, by means of one of the sharp flints with which that part of the desert abounded, an operation which her husband, on whom the

duty devolved, was unable to do; and having brought the bloody evidence, exclaimed, in the painful excitement of her feelings, that from love to him she had risked the life of her child" (Jamieson, CEC, Exo., *in loco*). Note her reproachful words, "Surely a bridegroom of blood art thou to me." That is, "surely I have redeemed thy life, and, as it were, wedded thee anew to me in the bloody circumcision of thy son" (SIB, Exo., *in loco*). Note the following explanation (JB, 83): "Zipporah circumcises her son and simulates circumcision for her husband by touching his male organ with her son's foreskin." "Not to circumcise was tantamount to abrogating the covenant (Gen. 17:14) and meant that the uncircumcised was cut off from inclusion in the covenant people. Since the advent of Christ, real circumcision has been of the heart and not of the flesh, Rom 2:29" (HSB, 89). The rite once performed, albeit reluctantly, God abated His anger and permitted Moses to recover his strength and continue his journey to Egypt. *This incident surely proves that fleshly circumcision was not to be treated lightly under the Old Covenant. It points up the fact also that no divine ordination is to be treated lightly. Think of the many ways in which churchmen have ignored, rejected, distorted, even ridiculed, Christian baptism! (3) Why on the eighth day?* Perhaps because it was held that the child was not separated and purified from its embryonic state until seven days had gone by following birth, seven having been regarded as the number (symbol) of perfection and the week of birth was a terminus for the birth throes and labor (the time element may have been definitely connected with the ceremonial purification of the mother, Lev. 12). Moreover, as the law regarded animals used for sacrifice as entering upon their independent existence with the eighth day (Exo. 22:30, Lev. 22:17), so the human infant was probably viewed from the same angle.

The following summation (K¹D, 227) is worthy of careful study here: "Eternal duration was promised only to the covenant established by God with the seed of Abraham, which was to grow into a multitude of nations, but not to the covenant institution which God established in connection with the lineal posterity of Abraham, the twelve tribes of Israel. Everything in this institution which was of a local and limited character, and only befitted the physical Israel and the earthly Canaan, existed only so long as was necessary for the seed of Abraham to expand into a multitude of nations. So again it was only in its essence that circumcision could be a sign of the eternal covenant. Circumcision, whether it passed from Abraham to other nations, or sprang up among other nations independently of Abraham and his descendants, was based upon the religious view that the sin and moral impurity which the fall of Adam had introduced into the nature of man had concentrated itself in the sexual organs, because it is in sexual life that it generally manifests itself with peculiar force; and, consequently, that for the sanctification of life, a purification or sanctification of the organ of generation, by which life is propagated, is especially required. In this way circumcision in the flesh became a symbol of the circumcision, *i.e.*, the purification of the heart (Deut. 10:16, 30:6; Lev. 26:41; Jer. 4:4, 9:25, Ezek. 44:7), and a covenant sign to those who received it, inasmuch as they were received into the fellowship of the holy nation (Exo. 19:6), and required to sanctify their lives, in other words, to fulfill all that the covenant demanded. It was to be performed on every boy on the eighth day after birth, not because the child, like its mother, remains so long in a state of impurity, but because, as the analogous rule with regard to the fitness of young animals for sacrifice would lead us to conclude, this was regarded as the first day of independent existence (Lev. 22:27, Exo. 22:29)."

(4) Vv. 12, 13—Every male child “*that is born in thy house, or bought with money of any foreigner that is not of thy seed*” (cf. Lev. 24:22, Num. 15:15-16). Murphy (MG, 310): This “points out the applicability of the covenant to others, as well as the children of Abraham, and therefore its capability of universal extension when the fullness of the time should come. It also intimates the very plain but very often forgotten truth, that our obligation to obey God is not cancelled by our unwillingness. The serf is bound to have his child circumcised as long as God requires it, though he may be unwilling to comply with the divine commandments.” It will be noted that the two classes specified here were those male children born within the limits of Abraham’s own household, and foreign male children born of parents who had been bought with his money. Obviously these two classes had to be taught to “know Jehovah” after their induction into the covenant. Cf. Jer. 31:31-34—here we learn that this fleshly covenant was to give way in due time to a new spiritual covenant, a covenant of faith; that is, all who enter into this new covenant relationship should “know Jehovah” as a condition of admission. Under this New Covenant God’s law would be written in their hearts (put into their inward parts) as a prerequisite of their induction into the covenant (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1-11, Heb. 8:6-13). Fleshly circumcision should give way to spiritual circumcision, circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:28-29, Phil. 3:3, Col. 2:9-13). But now the further question: Were such uncircumcised slaves and slave children incorporated into the chosen people by this rite? Leupold (EG, 524): “We believe that the answer must be, Yes. Israel certainly never had a separate slave class, who were deemed inferior beings and mere chattels. What then became of the slaves that originally were part of the household establishment and went down into Egypt at Jacob’s time? The answer seems to be: They were naturally absorbed by the Israelites and blended with the

Israelite stock, adopting the Israelite religion. So with all its necessary exclusiveness Israel was at the same time broader in its attitude than many assume. But there certainly could be little hesitation about letting circumcised slaves be merged with the chosen race." The rite of circumcision, instead of being the badge of any favored class within the nation destined to spring from Abraham's loins, was, on pain of excommunication, to be open to the lowliest member of the commonwealth of Israel, even to the bond-servant and the stranger. (5) *The penalty for disobedience*, either by omission or commission: "that soul shall be cut off from his people." Not infants, who could not circumcise themselves, but such as wilfully neglected the ordinance when they grew up, would nationally be *cut off from their people*. Anyone who renounced this distinguishing mark of Abraham's seed, renounced his covenant alliance with God and fellowship with His people. Nothing could be more reasonable, therefore, than that they should be excluded from the privileges of the nation and accounted as heathens. This is the import of *cutting off from his people* in most of the passages where we find the phrase (cf. Exo. 12:15, 19; 30:33, 38.—Lev. 7:20, 21, 25, 27; 17:4, 9, 10, 14; 22:3.—Num. 9:3, 19:13, 20). In some passages, however, death is certainly connected with the phrase, that is, death by the immediate hand of God thru the magistrate (cf. Exo. 31:14; Lev. 18:29, 19:8; 20:3, 5, 6, 17; Num. 15:30, 31, 32-36). It is difficult to determine whether this phrase indicated anything beyond *excommunication* in the present instance. Certainly, however, to despise and reject the sign, was to despise and reject the covenant itself; hence, he who neglects or refuses the sign, "*he hath broken my covenant*" (v. 14). It can not be doubted that in some cases capital punishment (by stoning to death) was the sanction inflicted for flagrant violations of God's law under the Mosaic institution. However, "to suppose that such was its meaning here necessi-

tates the restriction of the punishment to adults, whereas with the alternative signification no such restriction requires to be imposed on the statute. The uncircumcised Hebrew, whether child or adult, forfeited his standing in the congregation, i.e., ceased to be a member of the Hebrew commonwealth: *he hath broken my covenant*" (Whitelaw, PCG, 234).

Design of the Covenant Sign. "Not a divinely ordained instrumentality for initiation into the people of God, at least not for a native Israelite. He was a member of the people of God by virtue of birth. By circumcision he was made aware of his covenant obligations and received a perpetual badge or reminder of these obligations" (Leupold, EG, 521). Was it, as some would have it, "a self-imposed obligation on the part of God, irrespective of any condition on the part of man," or was it, as others would say, "a bilateral engagement involving reciprocal obligations between God and men"? We think Skinner's explanation is more to the point (ICCG, 298): "The truth seems to lie somewhere between two extremes. The *Berith* is neither a simple divine promise to which no obligation on man's part is attached (as in 15:18), nor is it a mutual contract in the sense that the failure of one party dissolves the relation. It is an immutable determination of God's purpose, which no unfaithfulness of man can invalidate; but it carries conditions, the neglect of which will exclude the individual from its benefits." (The same is equally true of the New Covenant). Circumcision here "becomes a sign which, like the rainbow of 9:16-17, is to remind God of his Covenant and man of the obligations deriving from his belonging to chosen people" (JB, 33, n.). "Circumcision was covenantal in nature, being the outward sign or seal of the Abrahamic agreement which God made (17:11). The failure to be circumcised separated one from the people of Israel. The command was perpetuated in

the Law of Moses (Lev. 12:3, John 7:22, 23). In the gospel dispensation, circumcision was abolished (Eph. 2:11-15, Col. 3:11), and to require it now is to revert to legalism. Circumcision in this age is of the heart and not of the flesh, but even when it was binding it had no value unless accompanied by faith and obedience (Rom. 3:30, Gal. 5:6, Rom. 2:25, 1 Cor. 7:19)" (HSB, 28). The most important fact of all is that *circumcision is tied up closely with the Messianic hope*. "For if it indicates the purification of life at its source, it in the last analysis points forward to Him through whom all such purification is to be achieved, who is Himself also to be born by a woman, but is to be He in whom for the first time that which circumcision prefigures will be actually realized" (EG, 521).

4. *The Covenant-Heir* (vv. 15-21)

15 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. 16 And I will bless her, and moreover I will give thee a son of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be of her. 17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? 18 And Abraham said unto God, Oh that Ishmael might live before thee! 19 And God said, Nay, but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

The Child of Promise. Sarah, not having mentioned hitherto in any of the divine promises, is now explicitly taken into the covenant, and accordingly receives a new name. (Cf. Gen. 32:27-28, Isa. 62:2, Rev. 3:12). In view of the fact that she is to be the mother of the covenant-heir, her name will no longer be Sarai, but Sarah (princess); that is, whereas formerly she was Abraham's princess only, she is now to be recognized as princess generally, especially as princess to the Lord. Moreover, it is now expressly announced for the first time that the Child of Promise—the promised seed—was to be Sarah's child; that he should be born "at this set time in the next year"; that his name should be Isaac ("laughter"). (Cf. 16:11 on naming prior to birth). V. 16—"A mother of nations she shall be; kings of peoples shall be of her." This promise did not include the Ishmaelites or the sons of Keturah (25:1-4): they were not born of Sarah. The Israelites descended from her, but were only one nation. Hence this promise must mean that the posterity of Abraham embraced his spiritual posterity also, *i.e.*, all peoples who are "grafted" into the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:26-29; Rom. 4:11, 12, 16, 17; 11:15-24). Aptly she was named *Sarah*: she was to bear the child of promise, to become a mother of peoples, and a mother of kings. History testifies, of course, that all the parts of this divine promise were literally fulfilled.

Abraham's Laughter, v. 7. Interpretations of the patriarch's response to this announcement of the identity of the Child of Promise are varied. For example, Skinner (ICCG, 295) "Abraham's demeanor is a strange mixture of reverence and incredulity." Cornfeld (AtD, 67): "God was not conceived as impersonal in patriarchal times, and if we are to understand properly the biblical texts, we must develop a feeling for a social phenomenon of the times, the closeness of men to gods, and of the Hebrews to God. In our society a man who claims to have divine visitors is

regarded as queer. That is why it is not easy for every modern reader, who is not familiar with the ancient background and literatures, to understand that aspect of Hebrew society. For the ancient Hebrews, the human and divine intermingled freely. The early direct relationship between men and gods is common to all the epics: Ugarit, Mesopotamian, Greek and proto-patriarchal. This simple personal contact between men and God was gradually eliminated." Again: "A charming tradition illustrates how Abraham, on intimate terms with the Lord, dared to intercede with him, in the famous dialogue over the problem of the wicked people of Sodom and its few, hypothetical righteous men." (Cf. Moses and God, Exo. 19:7-15; Num. 11:10-23, 14:11-35). But, note Lange's comment (CDHCG, 424): "That the interpreter . . . knows nothing of a laugh of astonishment, in connection with full faith, indeed, in the immediate experience of the events (Psa. 126:1-2) is evident. . . . We may confidently infer from the different judgments of Abraham's laughter here, and that of Sarah, which is recorded afterward, that there was an important distinction in the states of mind from which they sprang. The characteristic feature in the narration here is, that Abraham fell upon his face, as at first, after the promise, v. 2." "The laughter of Abraham was the exultation of joy, not the smile of unbelief" (Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 16, 26). Certainly the laughter of Sarah later (18:12-15) was one of incredulity, but the concept of Abraham in a derisive attitude toward God is not in keeping with the patriarch's character. Murphy (MG, 311): "From the reverential attitude assumed by Abraham we infer that his laughter sprang from joyful and grateful surprise. *Said in his heart*. The following questions of wonder are not addressed to God; they merely agitate the breast of the astonished patriarch. Hence his irrepressible smile arises not from any doubt of the fulfillment of the promise, but from surprise at the unexpected

mode in which it is to be fulfilled. Laughing in Scripture expresses joy in the countenance, as dancing does in the whole body." Jamieson (CSCG, 153): "It was not the sneer of unbelief, but a smile of delight at the prospect of so improbable an event (Rom. 4:20); he fully believed the word of God; there was humility blended with wonder and joy. This is what our Lord alluded to, John 8:56. As Abraham saw heaven in the promise of Canaan, so he saw Christ in the promise of Isaac (laughter.)" "Abraham's laughter is to be echoed by Sarah's, 18:12, and Ishmael's, 21:9 (see also 21:6): each is an allusion to the name Isaac . . . which means, 'May God smile, be kind' or 'has smiled, has been kind.' Abraham's laughter is a sign not so much of unbelief as of surprise at the extraordinary announcement; his mention of Ishmael, present heir-apparent to the Promise, is an implicit request for reassurance." Speiser would render it, *he smiled*, anticipating the personal name *Isaac*. He adds (ABG, 125): "A Hurro-Hittite tale describes the father (Appu) as placing his newborn son on his knees and rejoicing over him. Such acts were often the basis for naming the child accordingly. The shortened form *Isaac* (with the subject left out) undoubtedly reflects some such symbolic gesture: (X) rejoiced over, smiled on (the child), etc." Leupold (EG, 527): "From what follows it becomes very clear that Abraham's attitude in no way lays him open to blame. Nothing is indicative of doubt or misgivings in his reply. Consequently, when he falls upon his face, this is an act of worshipful adoration. Also his laughter is the laughter of joy and surprise. A host of glad feelings is called forth in him at this precious promise. So, too, the questions express no doubt but happy wonder. For saying 'to himself' the Hebrew uses the more expressive *belibbo*, 'in his heart.'" "Abraham laughed, in virtue of his firm belief of the promise, and his satisfaction therein (Rom. 4:16-25, John 8:56); but

Sarah laughed in unbelieving derision, ch. 18:12 (SIB, 240). "After twenty-four years of impatient waiting, the words of God seem an idle fancy to Abraham. All of the outward circumstances were against him. The biological facts of life stood over against the promise of God. Sight and sense told him the promise was impossible of fulfillment. Yet Abraham was a man of faith who had moments of doubt. How much we can learn from his laugh of disbelief here!" (HSB, 29).

Abraham's Intercession for Ishmael v. 18. Would that Ishmael might live in your favor! was Abraham's plea. We may assume—or so it seems to this writer—that Abraham had fallen into the erroneous expectation that the divine promise would be fulfilled in Ishmael, and since there is no record of any divine correction of his error in the meantime, it is difficult to see how the patriarch could have avoided this conclusion. Undoubtedly Hagar had communicated to him the substance of the revelation granted her as to her own son's destiny (16:10-11) and this surely would have strengthened his conviction. Now he receives the final communication from God which expressly identifies the covenant-heir as Sarah's child who is to be born "at this set time in the next year," his paternal solicitude manifests itself for the firstborn, the child of the handmaiden. "It puts an end to the old, sad doubt, in regard to Ishmael, since it starts a new and transient doubt in reference to the promise of Isaac; therefore there is mingling with his faith, not yet perfect on account of the joy (Luke 24:41), a beautiful paternal feeling for the still beloved Ishmael, and his future of faith. Hence the intercession for Ishmael; the characteristic feature of which is, a question of love, whether the son of the long-delayed hope, should also hold his share of the blessing" (Lange, CDHCG; 42^s). Let Ishmael live and prosper under thy favor, was Abraham's plea. God answers, "I have heard

thee," and agrees to bestow His blessing in a fourfold manner; Ishmael is to be fruitful, that is, prolific; he is to be multiplied exceedingly; he is to beget twelve princes (cf Gen. 25:12-16): he is to become "a great nation" (people). Some nations might have called these rulers "kings," but the Ishmaelites called them "princes." Nevertheless, the divine promise is expressly reaffirmed: *the true covenant-beir shall be Sarah's child* (v. 21). ("As for Ishmael, I have heard thee," an allusion to the significance of the name Ishmael, which means "God hears.") "Abraham still hoped that Ishmael would be recognized, but this plea and God's answer in v. 19 shows that man's answers and ways can never be substituted for God's" (HSB, 29). The blessings of the covenant were reserved for Isaac, but common blessings were to be showered abundantly on Ishmael; and though the covenant relationship did not descend from his family, yet personally he might, and it is to be hoped *did*, enjoy its benefits. "And God left off talking with him, and God *went up* from Abraham," went up to heaven. (cf. 35:13): a most interesting concluding statement.

5. Abraham's Obedience, vv. 22-27

22 *And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.*

23 *And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin, in the self-same day, as God had said unto him.* 24 *And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.* 25 *And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.* 26 *In the self-same day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son;* 27 *And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.*

The prompt obedience of Abraham is shown by his circumcising himself and all male members of his household without delay ("in the selfsame day"). The text indicates that Abraham performed the rite upon himself and upon Ishmael first, and then upon the men of his house, "those born in the house and those bought with money of a foreigner." Abraham was 99 and Ishmael 13 years old when the circumcision was performed. (According to the testimony of Josephus, *Ant.* I. 12. 2, the Arabs delay circumcision until the 13th year. By Moslems Ishmael is hailed as an ancestor, buried with his mother in the Kaaba at Mecca.) "Abraham's faith triumphed over his doubts. He responded to the covenant by circumcising himself and all his males. Thus he passed another crucial stage in his walk and experience with the covenant-keeping God! (HSB, 29). Note well, v. 27—"all the men of his house, those born in the house, and those bought with money of a foreigner, were circumcised with him." Jamieson (CECG, 154): "Whatever had become the heathen version of this symbol, no one will deny that when the Hebrew patriarch circumcised the members of his household, he both acted with a definite purpose and was animated by a spirit thoroughly religious. The symbol was profoundly ethical, and was distinguished not only for its equal operation, but the grandeur of the end for which it was appointed. Translated into words, the meaning of it was, 'be ye holy, for I am holy.' Outward in the flesh, and so, accordant with the sterner genius of the old economy, it imprinted on the mind of every Hebrew the peculiar closeness of his own relations to the pure and perfect God, and the necessity therein implied of fearing and loving Him, and circumcising (Deut. 10:12-16) more and more 'the foreskin of the heart.' The narrative describes the rite as performed upon 'every male' in 'Abraham's house.' Females had no equivalent for it. The

absence of circumcision, however, did not convey the idea that the privileges of the covenant were not applicable to woman also, but that she was dependent, and that her position in the natural and covenant-life was not *without* the husband, but *in* and *with* him—not in her capacity as *woman*, but as *wife* (and *mother*). Woman was sanctified and set apart in and with man; in and with him she had part in the covenant, and so far as her nature and position demanded and admitted of it, she had to co-operate in the development of the covenant!”

The Covenant, God repeated (v. 21) for emphasis no doubt, should be established with Isaac whom Sarah was to bear to Abraham at that very time in the following year. “Since Ishmael therefore was excluded from participating in the covenant grace, which was ensured to Isaac alone; and yet Abraham was to become a multitude of nations, and that through Sarah, who was to become ‘nations’ through the son she was to bear (v. 16); this ‘multitude of nations’ could not include either the Ishmaelites or the tribes descended from the sons of Keturah (ch. 25:2 ff.), but the descendants of Isaac alone; and as one of Isaac’s two sons received no part of the covenant promise, but only the descendants of Jacob alone. But the whole of the twelve sons of Jacob founded only the *one* nation of Israel, with which Jehovah established the covenant made with Abraham (Exo. chs. 6, 20-24), so that Abraham became through Israel the lineal father of *one* nation only. From this it necessarily follows, that the posterity of Abraham, which was to expand into a multitude of nations, extends beyond this one lineal posterity, and embraces the spiritual posterity also, *i.e.*, all nations who are grafted *ex piteos Abraam* into the seed of Abraham, Rom. 4:11, 12, 16, 17).” (KD, 226). By this enlargement it follows that in reality Abraham received the promise “that he should be heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13).

To summarize: "The covenant plays an important role in Abraham's experience. Note the successive revelations of God after the initial promise to which Abraham responded in obedience. As God enlarged this promise, Abraham exercised faith which was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15). In this covenant the land of Canaan was specifically pledged to the descendants of Abraham. With the promise of the son, circumcision was made the sign of the covenant (Gen. 17). This covenant promise was finally sealed in Abraham's act of obedience when he demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice his only son Isaac (Gen. 22)." (Schultz, OTS, 34).

FOR MEDITATION AND SERMONIZING

The Two Covenants, or From Sinai to Calvary

John 1:17, Gal. 3:23-29, Heb. 8, 2 Cor. 3.

Every student of the Bible knows that it consists of two general divisions or parts: what is known as the Old Testament or Covenant, and what is known as the New Testament or Covenant (the Testaments being the stereotyped records of the respective Covenants); what is known as the Law before the Cross, and what is known as the Gospel since the Cross; what is known as the "letter" on the other side of the Cross, and what is known as the "spirit" on this side; what is called the ministration of death" on the other side, and what is called "the ministration of life" on this side; what is known as "the ministration of condemnation" on the other side, and what is known as "the ministration of righteousness" on this side. Calvary is the dividing line. When Jesus died on the Cross, the Partition Veil, *i.e.*, the curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, of the Temple, was rent in twain (Matt. 27:51), thus symbolizing the point of demarcation between the Covenants and signifying that for the first time since man's fall, the way into heaven itself,

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the Holy of Holies, was opened up; that humanity had unhindered access to the Throne of Grace, through Christ, and without the services of an officiating earthly priesthood. In brief the rent veil symbolized the abrogation of the Old Covenant and the ratification of the New.

The books of the Old Testament point forward in type, symbol, metaphor and prophecy, to Christ and His church as revealed in the New Testament. The subject-matter of the Old Testament is valuable to us historically, and in its delineation of human character and its treatment of the problems of everyday living, its ethical value is inestimable. Its evidential worth, in laying a proper foundation for the Christian system, is immeasurable. *But the books of the Old Testament do not reveal the Christian religion.* Though inspired by the Holy Spirit, they were for the fleshly seed of Abraham. Christianity is not revealed in the Old Testament, except in shadow, as a thing of the future, as a system yet to be instituted. In the words of the well-known couplet:

"In the Old Testament we have the New Testament
concealed,
In the New Testament we have the Old Testament
revealed."

It should be understood also that the two Covenants are not identical; that is, that the New is not a continuation or enlargement of the Old, but a distinct and separate Covenant, enacted upon better promises and offering infinitely greater blessings and rewards (Heb. 8:6, Eph. 2:15-16). (Note the significance of the expression, "one new man," as used in this connection).

It becomes exceedingly important that we know what belongs to the respective Covenants. (Cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). Much confusion has resulted from the failure of theologians and preachers generally to make the proper distinc-

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tions. We hear it said even in our day of enlightenment that "the whole Bible is binding upon Christians." Certainly those who make such assertions do not believe what they say, or, if they do, they do not practice what they preach. This writer does not know of a church group in all Christendom that even makes a pretense of perpetuating the laws and observances of the Old Covenant. For example, under the Old Covenant, God commanded the following: (1) that every male child should be circumcised on the eighth day, Gen. 7:9-14; (2) that many different kinds of animal sacrifices should be offered; Lev. 23; (3) that the Passover should be kept annually Exo. 12; (4) that the seventh day should be set aside as the Sabbath, as a memorial of the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, Exo. 16:21-30, Deut. 5:12-15; (5) that the people should allow their lands to rest every seventh year, Exo. 23:10-11; (6) that a distinction should be made between "clean" and "unclean" animals, Lev. 11; (7) the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle and its ritualism, the Day of Atonement, the many and varied solemn feasts and convocations, new moons and sabbaths, etc. Under the Old Covenant no one was permitted to kindle a fire on the Sabbath day, (Exo. 35:2-3). In Numbers 15:23-26 there is an account of a violation of this command, and we read that the guilty man was taken outside the camp and stoned to death. Capital punishment was usually inflicted for an infraction of the Law of Moses; hence, the Apostle speaks of the Old Covenant as "the ministration of death," 2 Cor. 3:7. The various Christian bodies make no pretense of maintaining these Mosaic laws and observances, and would indeed be foolish to do so, because they are not in any sense a part of the Christian Gospel or system. They were for the *fleshy* seed of Abraham only, and were abrogated along with the Mosaic Law at the death of Christ.

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The distinctions between the Two Covenants may be listed briefly as follows:

1. The Old was made with the fleshly seed of Abraham only. It was first announced to Abraham himself, and was later enlarged into a national covenant at the time of the establishment of the Jewish theocracy under Moses, at Mount Sinai, Gen. 12:1-3, 17:1-8, 22:15-18; Deut. 5:2-5, Gal. 3:19. It is generally known as the Abrahamic Covenant. The New Covenant, on the other hand, is an overture to all mankind, although its blessings are confined to those who comply with its conditions of membership, Matt. 28:19-20, Acts 10:34-43, 17:30-31; Rom. 10:9-10, Acts 2:38, Gal. 3:26-29.

2. Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant, Jesus of the New (Deut. 5:5; Heb. 3:1-6, 8:6, 9:18-28, 12:24; 1 Tim. 2:5).

3. The basis of membership in the Old Covenant was *fleshly*. The Covenant included those born in Abraham's house and those bought with Abraham's money, that is, those born of Hebrew parents and those retained as slaves in the Hebrew households, Gen. 17:12. Obviously, *all such infants and heathen servants had to be taught to "know Jehovah" after they had been inducted into the Covenant by circumcision*. But the basis of membership in the New Covenant is *spiritual*, Jer. 31:31-33-34, John 3:1-6; it depends not on earthly parentage, nor upon inclusion in any particular racial or ethnic group, but upon spiritual birth. (See Jer. 31:31-34, John 3:1-6). Under the New, God must write His laws in our hearts, and we must all know Him, from the least unto the greatest of us, in order to be admitted into the Covenant. In a word, one of the things absolutely necessary to participation in the blessings of the New Covenant is that we know God by faith in Jesus Christ who came to reveal God to us (John 14:1, Acts 16:31, Rom. 10:9-10, etc.). We know Him by faith,

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and we appropriate the blessings of the Covenant by obedience (Rom. 10:17, Heb. 11:6, Matt. 7:24-27, John 15:14, Heb. 5:9, 2 Thess. 1:8, 1 Pet. 1:22). This, of course, does not include the innocent and the irresponsible, such as infants, for whom Jesus atoned *unconditionally* when He died on the Cross. Those who die in infancy pass directly from the kingdom of innocence into the kingdom of glory (Rom. 5:19, 1 John 3:4, Matt. 19:14, 18:1-6, etc.)

4. The seal of the Old Covenant was *fleshly circumcision* (Gen. 17:9-14). The seal of the New Covenant is the indwelling Spirit of God (2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13, 4:30, etc.). This cutting off of the old sinful relationship and life by the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the obedient believer's heart is spiritual circumcision (Acts 2:38-39, Rom. 2:28-29, Phil. 3:3, Col. 2:9-12, Eph. 1:13-14).

5. The Old Covenant was *national*, confined to one people, the fleshly seed of Abraham, The Mosaic Code was a civil code for the government of the Theocracy of Israel. In this sense the Law of Moses might be said to correspond to the civil statutes of the United States of America, and the Decalogue, which was the core of the Mosaic Law, to our federal Constitution (Deut. 5:2-21). The tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were engraved were known as the tables of testimony or tables of the Covenant (Exo. 24:12, 31:18, 32:15-16; Deut. 6:20-23, 4:13, 10:1-5). The New Covenant is for all mankind. It has no *geographical* or racial *limitations*. The Decalogue is God's mandate to humanity, binding on ruled and ruler alike.

6. The Old Covenant was *local i.e.*, adapted to a people living in a fairly warm climate. Its provisions pertained largely to matters of the flesh, "meats and drinks and divers washings, carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation" (Heb. 9:10). How could any human being living in a cold climate obey the Old Covenant

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regulations governing the observance of the Sabbath, one of which was that no fire was to be kindled on that day? The commands of the New Covenant are, on the other hand, moral and spiritual in nature, and can be obeyed by all people in all parts of the world. This is not only true with respect to Christ's ethical teaching, but equally so with respect to His positive ordinances—baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Day (Acts 2:38, Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Cor. 11:23-30, 16:1-2). These ordinances can be observed anywhere regardless of circumstances, climate, or environment.

7. The penalty for violating the Old Covenant was in most cases *physical death*. The penalty for refusing the overtures of the New Covenant is *spiritual death*, eternal separation from "the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thess. 1:8-9, Rev. 20:11-15). For example, under the Old Covenant adultery was a crime for which the death penalty was inflicted, usually by stoning; under the New, it is a sin which will damn the soul.

8. The New Covenant is a better Covenant because it has been "enacted upon better promises" (Heb. 8:6). Under the Old, for instance, there was no actual remission of sins, for the simple reason that animal sacrifices were not a sufficient atonement for the guilt of sin (Heb. 10:1-18). On each annual Day of Atonement the High Priest of Israel went into the Holy of Holies with the prescribed offerings for his own sins and for the sins of the people, in response to which God merely laid the guilt of their sins over to the next annual Day of Atonement, and so on throughout the entire Jewish Dispensation. There was never any actual remission of sins until the Son of God Himself made the sufficient Atonement "once at the end of the ages . . . by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:6-10, 23-28; Exo. 30:10, Lev. 23). Under the New Covenant, however, remission of sins is one of the promises of the Gospel (Acts 2:38, 10:43; Luke 24:45-49). We have

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God's promise that on condition of our own faith and continued obedience He will be merciful with respect to our iniquities and will remember our sins against us no more (Jer. 31:31-34, Heb. 8:10-12). And let us remember that *when God forgives, He forgets* (Psa. 103:12, Heb. 8:12).

9. Under the Old Covenant there was no distinct assurance of blessedness beyond the grave. Old Testament intimations of the future life are indefinite (cf. Job 14:13-15, 19:25-27; Psa. 23). But the Christian Scriptures speak with positiveness about Judgment, blessedness, Life Everlasting, immortality, etc. Jesus Himself spoke of the future life in such unmistakable terms as to leave no room for doubt, and the Apostles testify with no less finality about these matters in their own writings. (John 11:25-26, 10:18; Acts 2:36, 17:31; Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 6:28, 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:1-4, Phil. 3:20-21, 1 Cor. 15, etc.).

10. The Old Covenant was *negative* throughout. The Ten Commandments have been called the "thou-shalt-nots" of God. The contrast between the thunderings of Jehovah above Sinai announcing the prohibitions of the Decalogue, and the gentle accents of the Son of Man proclaiming the Beatitudes, in His "Sermon on the Mount," is an analogy of the distinction between the Covenants. No wonder, then, that the New Covenant is called "the royal law" and "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (Jas. 2:8, 1:25).

11. The Decalogue was the foundation and the very heart, so to speak, of the Law of Moses. Yet the Ten Commandments were nailed to the Cross, along with the rest of the Law. They were not abolished, but were *abrogated*, i.e., set aside, then re-enacted, with but one exception, in the New Testament. We as Christians are subject to the provisions of the Decalogue only to the extent that is fundamental ethical principles, which are necessarily permanent, have been re-enacted as a part of

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the Christian System. When a man makes two wills, he may take certain provisions of the old will and re-incorporate them in the new; and they are binding, not because they were in the old, but because they are in the new. A careful survey of the apostolic writings reveals the fact that all the Ten Commandments, with but one exception, have been re-stated in the Christian Scriptures, with this fundamental difference: in the Old they are stated *negatively*, but in the New, *positively*. The Fourth Commandment is not re-enacted in the New Testament. There is no command in the apostolic writings that we as Christians should keep the Sabbath. There would be no reason for our keeping it, as it was a memorial to the fleshly seed of Abraham of their fathers' deliverance from Egyptian bondage. It would be meaningless to a Gentile. Therefore, we as Christians are to keep the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, instead of the seventh day. The Lord's Day is a memorial of the resurrection of our Lord (Mark 16:9, Acts 20:7, Rev. 1:10, Psa. 118:22-24, Acts 4:11-12). (Note the parallels: Exo. 20:3—Acts 4:15, 17:24-31; Exo. 20:4-6—1 John 5:21; Exo. 20:7—Jas. 5:12; Exo. 20:12—Eph. 6:1-4; Exo. 20:13—Rom. 13:9-10; Exo. 20:14—Matt. 5:28, 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Exo. 20:15—Eph. 4:28; Exo. 20:16—Col. 3:9; Exo. 20:17—Eph. 5:3.)

A great many persons seem to have the notion—and it is one that should be corrected—that all they need to do to be saved is to keep the Ten Commandments. This is a false and misleading idea. Obeying the Ten Commandments will make a man a respectable citizen and keep him out of jail, but he might obey the Commandments consistently, even perfectly if that were possible, and still not be a Christian. (Cf. Mark 10:17-22). There is nothing in the Decalogue about Christ and His church. We might keep the Commandments perfectly and never believe in Christ, never be baptized, never pray, never observe the Lord's Supper, never attend a Christian worshiping assem-

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bly. *The Decalogue is not the Gospel, nor is it any part of the Gospel.* Though essential to good morals, it is a minor part of the Christian system of faith and worship. Moreover, Jesus made it quite clear that, spiritually, the Decalogue is inadequate, when, in answer to a question propounded by His critics, He pointed out the two greatest commandments in the Law, and neither of the two is found among the Ten Commandments (Matt. 22:35-40, Deut. 6:5, Lev. 19:18). In brief, we must keep the Ten Commandments to stay out of jail, but one might keep all of them and still fall far short of being a Christian.

Frequently we have been asked the question, *Why can we not be saved as the penitent thief (on the Cross) was saved?* The answer is obvious. As long as a will-maker (testator) lives, he dispenses his property as he sees fit personally; but when he dies, his property must be dispensed as directed in his last will and testament (cf. Heb. 9:16-17); and so, as long as our Lord was on earth in the flesh, it was His prerogative to dispense His gifts and graces as He saw fit (Luke 23:39-43, 5:17-26). But when He returned to the Father, He left us His Last Will and Testament, the executors of which were the Apostles, by whom it was probated on the great Day of Pentecost; and so, throughout the present Dispensation His blessings are bestowed on the conditions specified in the New Covenant; these are the "keys of the kingdom," and the terms of admission into the Church (Body) of Christ. These conditions are faith in Christ as the Son of the living God, repentance toward Christ, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ (Matt. 16:18-20, 28:18-20; Acts 2:38, 16:31-34; Rom. 10:9-10, Luke 13:3, 2 Cor. 7:10, Matt. 10:32-33; Acts 8:34-39, 22:16; Rom. 6:4-6, Gal. 3:26-29, John 3:1-5, etc.). (The function of a key is to unlock a door; hence the "keys of the kingdom" are the requirements which open the door of the church to the obedient believer.)

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12. The Law was a civil code for the government of the old Jewish theocracy. It was never intended to be a permanent and universal rule of religious faith and practice. It was added, the Apostle tells us, that is, added to the Abrahamic promise, "because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made" (Gal. 3:19). The tendency of the Children of Israel to drift into the customs and practices of their idolatrous heathen neighbors occasioned the giving of the Law. Under conscience alone the people became such habitual sinners that it became necessary to put them under a code of law, in order that they might know the eternal distinctions between good and bad, right and wrong. Such is the purpose of law, generally speaking: it is to define right and distinguish it from wrong. *Law was never enacted to make people better, but for the purpose of restraining the lawless and protecting the weak from the strong.* (Cf. Rom. 7:7-11, 3:19-20). Therefore, what the Law could not do for man, God did for him by a manifestation of His infinite grace in the person of His Only Begotten (Rom. 8:3-4).

13. To summarize: as stated above, God has made two wills. The first was made with respect to the fleshly seed of Abraham, through the mediation of Moses (Deut. 5). The last is an overture to all mankind through the mediation of Jesus Christ. The Old was ratified by the blood of animals at Sinai: the New was ratified by the precious blood of Christ on Calvary. (Cf. Heb. 8:11-22). the death of our Lord abrogated the Old and ratified the New at the same time (Col. 2:13-15, Heb. 8:23-28). He nailed the Law to His Cross and ushered in the universal reign of grace. God graciously permitted the Law to remain as a civil code for the Jewish people down to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but its binding force was removed when Jesus was crucified. One of the elementary principles of law is that a new will

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automatically abrogates all prior testaments. We today are under "the Last Will and Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." We are not under Law, but under grace; not under the bond written in ordinances, but under the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. (John 1:17, Jer. 31:31-34, Rom. 4:21-31, Gal. 3:15-29, 2 Cor. 3:1-11, Heb. 8; Col. 2:8-17, etc.).

Circumcision of the Heart

Deut. 10:16, 30:6; Jer. 4:4, 9:25-26. Cf. Rom. 2:28-29, Phil. 3:3, Acts 7:51, Gal. 3:27-28, 2 Cor. 3:2-6, Col. 2:9-13. The Scriptures teach expressly that there is such a thing as "circumcision of the heart." But what does "heart" (Heb. *leb*, Gr. *kardia*) mean in Scripture? This we can determine by what the "heart" is said to do, to experience, to suffer, etc., namely, it *thinks* (Gen. 6:5, Deut. 15:9, Prov. 23:7, Matt. 9:4, Heb. 4:12); it *reasons* (Mark 2:8, Luke 5:22); it *understands* (Matt. 13:15); it *believes* (Rom. 10:8-10); it *loves* (Matt. 22:37); it *knows* (Deut. 29:4); it "*breaks*" with sorrow (Jer. 8:18, 23:9); it can *be grieved* (Deut. 15:10); it can *be troubled* (John 14:1); it can *be fearful* (John 14:27); it *rejoices* (Psa. 16:9, 28:7; Acts 2:26); it can *be comforted* (Eph. 6:22); it *wills*, "purposes," "determines" (Dan. 1:8, 2 Cor. 9:7, 1 Cor. 7:37); it can *lust* (Matt. 5:28, Rom. 8:6-7); it *obeys* (Rom. 6:17, Eph. 6:6); it *approves* and *condemns* (Rom. 2:14-16, Acts 2:37, 1 John 3:19-22). From all these texts we must conclude that the Scriptural "heart" includes intellect, feeling, conscience, and will. It is the entire "inner man," everything that is not included in the phrase, "flesh and blood" (John 3:6, 1 Cor. 15:50, 2 Cor. 4:16, Rom. 7:22, cf. 1 Pet. 3:4—"the hidden man of the heart").

1. There is such a thing as spiritual circumcision, "a circumcision not made with hands." The Bible leaves no room for doubt on this matter.

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2. Fleshly (physical) circumcision of the Old Covenant was designed to be a type of spiritual circumcision under the New. Hence, as the circumcision ordained in the Old Testament was a seal stamped upon the flesh, it follows that the circumcision ordained in the New Testament must be a seal stamped on the *mind* or *spirit* of man, the true "inner man" (Cf. John 3:1-8, Acts 2:38, Jer. 31:33, Ezek. 11:19).

Whitelaw writes (PCG, 232) that fleshly circumcision was designed (1) to be a sign of the faith that Christ should be descended from Abraham, and (2) to be a symbolic representation of the putting away of the filth of the flesh and of sin in general; therefore, it served the following uses: "(1) to distinguish the seed of Abraham from the Gentiles, (2) to perpetuate the memory of Jehovah's covenant, (3) to foster in the nation the hope of the Messiah, (4) to remind them of the duty of cultivating moral purity (Deut. 10:16), (5) to preach to them the gospel of a righteousness by faith (Rom. 4:11), (6) to suggest the idea of a holy or spiritual seed of Abram (Rom. 2:29) and (7) to foreshadow the Christian rite of baptism (Col. 2:11, 12)."

There can hardly be any disagreement about the first six of the "uses" of fleshly circumcision listed above. The one exception is the last-named. One of the errors that has caused untold confusion in Christian teaching and practice is this oft-recurring claim that fleshly circumcision of the Old Covenant was the type of which baptism is the antitype under the New Covenant. There is no Scripture warrant for this view.

There are many "clergymen" who still cling to the threadbare argument that baptism as "spiritual circumcision" under the New Covenant has taken the place of fleshly circumcision, the seal of the Old Covenant; hence, they contend, that as infants were inducted into the Old

Covenant by fleshly circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14, cf. Jer. 31:31-34, Heb. 8), so infants are to be inducted into the New Covenant by "baptism" (as a matter of fact, by sprinkling), which, according to the theory has "taken the place of" the old fleshly circumcision. *Their errors are those of making baptism the seal of the New Covenant, and identifying baptism with spiritual circumcision.* We reply to this argument as follows:

1. *Baptism is not a seal.* In New Testament teaching there is not the slightest intimation that baptism is the seal of anything. On the contrary, it is expressly stated that the seal of the New Covenant is the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13-14, 4:30; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 3:16-17, 6:19-20; Rom. 8:14-17, etc.). True, the reception of the Holy Spirit by the repentant believer is connected in Scripture with baptism; however, it is not baptism. It is the Holy Spirit who seals us as members of the Covenant (Acts 2:38, Gal. 3:27, Tit. 3:5). If someone should ask, How can we know that the baptized believer is sealed by the Spirit? or, What is the certain proof? The answer is obvious, namely, the principle enunciated by Jesus Himself, "each tree is known by its own fruit" (Luke 6:43-45), or "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:16-23). The baptized believer who is truly sealed by the Spirit will bring forth in his life the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23; Jas. 1:22-27, 2:14-26; Matt. 7:11-27, 25:31-46).

2. *Baptism is not spiritual circumcision.* If baptism under the New Covenant has "taken the place of" fleshly circumcision of the Old Covenant, it follows that, since only male infants received fleshly circumcision under the Old (and that "when eight days old," Gen. 17:12), so only male infants can be proper subjects for what the "pedobaptists" call "baptism" under the New Covenant. As stated above, there is such a thing as "spiritual circum-

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cision" (Rom. 2:28-29, Phil. 3:3, 2 Cor. 3:2-6, Col. 2:9-13), a "circumcision not made with hands." Moreover, as the fleshly circumcision of the Old Covenant was designed to be a type of spiritual circumcision under the New, and hence, that as the circumcision ordained under the Old Covenant was a seal stamped on the flesh, so the circumcision ordained in the New Covenant must be a seal stamped upon the *mind* or *spirit*, the inner man.

3. *Spiritual circumcision consists in the cutting off—from the interior man—of the body of the guilt of sin.* Rom. 6:6—"our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away" (1) This is done by the Spirit of God at the time of His entrance into the human heart to indwell and to sanctify it: although this occurs in connection with the penitent believer's baptism into Christ, still it is not baptism itself. (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:2, 5:16-26; John 3:3-8, Tit. 3:4-7, etc.). The remedy for sin is the blood of Christ, and the place divinely appointed for the repentant believer to meet the efficacy of this blood is the grave of water (1 John 1:7, Rom. 6:1-10, John 3:1-8, Col. 2:9-12): here divine grace and human faith meet, and the pardon, remission, justification, etc., takes place in the Mind of God; the entrance of the Holy Spirit at the same time cuts off the body of the guilt of past sin: this guilt will be put away as far as the east is from the west (Psa. 103:11-12, Rom. 6:6, Col. 2:9-12). (2) The Spirit of God, as He continues to indwell and to possess the heart of the true Christian as the Agent of the latter's sanctification, is the *seal* of his participation in the privileges and responsibilities of the New Covenant, and is at the same time the *earnest* or pledge of his eternal inheritance, the rest that remaineth for the people of God (1 Pet. 1:3-5, Eph. 1:13-14; Acts 20:32, 26:18; Rom. 8:18-23; Col. 1:12; 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5; Heb. 4:9, 9:15, 11:13-16, 10:28-31; Rom. 5:5, 14:17; 1 Thess. 5:19).

(3) In a word, spiritual circumcision is, in its essential nature, identical with regeneration, the process which begins with the reception of Christ into the human heart by faith (Gal. 4:19, Col. 1:27; Rom. 10:17, 8:1-11; 1 Pet. 1:22-25, Jas. 1:18), and is consummated in the penitent believer's birth from the water of his final act of "primary obedience" (conversion): John 3:37, 3:1-9; Tit. 3:5, Eph. 5:25-27; Acts 2:38, 22:16; Heb. 10:22). (4) Thus it will be seen that baptism as the consummating act of the process variously designated in Scripture as conversion, adoption, justification, regeneration, etc. (*i.e.*, the consummating act on the human side) has associated with it the entrance of the Spirit into the obedient believer's heart, to possess and to mould his inner spiritual life. (It must be emphasized here that *only those who believe and repent are proper subjects for Christian baptism*. What is commonly designated *change of heart* must precede baptism (Luke 13:3, 1 Cor. 7:10, Acts 2:38, Acts 16:29-34; Rom. 10:9-10, Luke 24:46-47). One who does not have this change of heart will go down into the baptistry a dry sinner and come up a wet sinner (Rom. 6:17). *However, it is the indwelling Spirit, and not baptism, that is the seal of the Christian, stamping him as set apart for participation in the blessings and responsibilities of the New Covenant. And it is the operation by the Spirit of excising the body of the guilt of sin, at His entrance into the newly-made saint's interior life—and not baptism—which is designated in Scripture spiritual circumcision. Baptism and spiritual circumcision are associated in God's plan, but they are not identical* (Col. 2:9-14). As a matter of fact, to identify baptism *per se* with spiritual circumcision is to vest the ordinance, that is to say, the water itself, with magical properties. Certainly, to present infants—or anyone incapable of faith—for such a rite as what is generally called "infant baptism" (sprinkling, pouring) is not only

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unscriptural—it is antiscritptural. If there is any efficacy in such an act, obviously it cannot be in the state of the child's heart, but would have to be in the water: this would be sheer magic. There is no warrant in the New Testament for such an esoteric concept. Moreover, the attitude of the parents in such a practice cannot in any way affect the child's salvation. There is no such thing in Scripture as *salvation by proxy*.

But, someone may be asking, *what about the salvation of infants?* We answer as follows: (1) According to Scripture teaching, sin is a personal act, and responsibility for the guilt of sin is *personal* (Ezek. 18:19-20: here we have the doctrine of the *guilt* of sin, as distinguished from that of the *consequences* of sin as stated in Exo. 20:1-17; Prov. 24:12, Matt. 16:27, Rom. 2:6, 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10, 11:15; Eph. 6:8, Col. 3:25; Rev. 2:23, 20:12, 22:12). As there is no such thing as salvation by proxy, so there is no such thing as sinning by proxy. "Original sin," in the sense of original *guilt*, is just another fabrication of the theological mentality. True it is that the human race is suffering the consequences of Adam's sin (of which the most frustrating is physical death, Gen. 3:17-19, Heb. 9:27) and of the sins of the fathers, but there is no evidence from Scripture, experience or common sense that any person will be held *guilty* before God for what Adam did or what his own forebears have done. Such a notion impugns the justice and goodness of the Heavenly Father. All this "theological groundwork" for the practice of what is called "infant baptism" (true infant baptism would be infant immersion) thus turns out to be nothing more than a house of cards. The infant does not sin for the simple reason that it *can not* sin; hence, said Jesus, "to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14). (2) Whatever the human race lost through the disobedience

of the First Adam, it has regained through the obedience of the Second Adam (Rom. 5:19, 1 Cor. 15:45-49), regained *unconditionally* for the innocent and the irresponsible, but regained *conditionally* for all accountable human beings, that is, on the terms and conditions of the Last Will and Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ ("the keys of the kingdom of heaven," Matt. 16:19; Acts 2:37-38). Our Lord atoned for the innocent unconditionally by His sacrifice of Himself on the Cross, the Lamb of God who "taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 1 Cor. 5:7). The infant is in need of salvation from the *consequences* of sin only; it is in need only of the redemption of the body, that is, salvation from mortality itself (Rom. 8:22-23, 2 Cor. 5:4). The spiritual progression for accountable persons is from the Kingdom of Nature, through the Kingdom of Grace (John 3:1-8), into the Kingdom of Glory (Rev. 20:11-14, 22:1-5). The spiritual progression for those who die in infancy, we may surely believe, is *directly* from the Kingdom of Nature, by means of the Covering of Grace, our Lord's Vicarious Sacrifice, into the Kingdom of Glory (Rom. 8:29, 1 Cor. 15:20, 23; Col. 1:18-23, Heb. 12:23).

(3) Infant sprinkling, pouring, christening, etc., reverses the order specified in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). The order demanded by the Commission is (a) *go*, (b) *make disciples*, that is, learners, believers; (c) *baptize* those who have been made disciples, believers, by the preaching of the facts, commands, and promises of the Gospel; (d) *nurture* those who have been baptized into Christ and have the right to wear the name Christian, that is, nurture them in the most holy faith, the Spiritual Life. The pedobaptist order is (a) *go*, (b) "baptize," and then (c) *teach*, or *make disciples*; in a word, "christen" them in infancy and require "confirmation" at about the age of

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twelve. Those who practice this sequence are simply bringing over into the New Testament the sequence prescribed in the Old Testament. The Old Abrahamic Covenant took in those born in Abraham's house and those heathen servants bought with his money, all of whom had to be taught to *know Jehovah after* their induction into the Covenant by fleshly circumcision. But God states explicitly, with respect to the promised New Covenant, that "they shall teach no more, every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah: *for they shall all know me*, from the least of them unto the greatest of them," etc. The New Covenant is not a covenant of *flesh*, but a covenant of *faith*. Those who would enter the New Covenant must, as Jesus states expressly, be "born anew," literally "born from above," "born of water and the Spirit," "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13, 3:3-5). God's law is put in their inward parts, written in their hearts, in order for them to be born again, and so to enter the Covenant. (Cf. 2 Cor. 3:1-7). Suffice it to say that there can be no spiritual birth without a prior spiritual begetting, and there can be no spiritual begetting without faith. Infant christening, "baptism," sprinkling, pouring, etc., ignores this teaching *in toto*; not only ignores it, but contradicts it in every particular. Infant christening, infant "baptism," infant affusion, infant aspersion, infant dedication, infant church membership, etc., not one of these things, nor all of them together, can be substituted, in the Gospel Plan of Salvation, for spiritual birth (regeneration). These are all forms of so-called "baptismal regeneration," a dogma which the present writer rejects flatly. *Baptism is an act of faith, or it is nothing*. My personal conviction is that the term *kingdom* (literally, *reign*) in Scripture is more comprehensive than the term *church*, in that it takes in all who, in the very nature of

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the case, cannot belong to the church; that is, infants and irresponsibles generally, and in all probability the elect of prior Dispensations. (Cf. Luke 17:21, Mark 10:24, Matt. 18:3, Mark 10:15, Luke 18:15-17, Matt. 21:43; Heb. 11:4, 5, 7, 8-16, etc.)

(4) Other objections to the pedobaptist practice of following the Old Covenant pattern are the following: It contradicts New Testament teaching regarding the design of baptism (1 Pet. 3:21, Rom. 6:17). It belies the plain teaching of the New Testament that Christian baptism is more than a physical act. It tends to fill the church with unconverted, unregenerated persons; that is, with those who would make of their Christianity nothing but vain ritual observances. It ignores altogether man's God-given power of choice. Finally, it tends to obliterate the distinction between the church and the world, and the distinction between church and state as well. How many professing "Christian" parents use the practice of christening pretty largely for the credentials by which birth certification can be established? Moreover, so-called "infant dedication" is misleading: the popular tendency, so great is the general ignorance of the Bible, is to identify it with infant sprinkling. If the act is simply a dedication, why use water in the observance of it?

To summarize: the equating of Christian baptism with spiritual circumcision is one of the most egregious fallacies that has ever been perpetrated on the Christian world. We repeat that baptism is an act of faith, "the appeal of a good conscience toward God" (1 Pet. 3:21)—or it is nothing. Spiritual circumcision is the excision of the body of the guilt of sin by the entrance of the Spirit into the human heart to take possession of it and thus to make it, little by little, a partaker of the divine nature and meet for the inheritance of the saints in light (2 Pet. 1:4, Col. 1:12, Heb. 9:11).

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REVIEW QUESTIONS ON
PART THIRTY

1. Explain how the content of ch. 17 is an enlargement of the Abrahamic Covenant. Explain how it is more inclusive.
2. How old was Abraham at the time when all the details of the Covenant were finally made known to him?
3. By what name did God reveal Himself to Abraham here? What does this name mean?
4. What is the significance of a new name in Scripture?
5. What changes were made at this time in the names of Abram and Sarai? What did the changes signify?
6. Show how these changes served to elevate the moral and spiritual status of Abram and Sarai.
7. What did the terms "everlasting" and "forever" signify with reference to the Covenant?
8. What happened to the Abrahamic Covenant at Sinai? At Calvary?
9. What two progenies (seeds) of Abraham are included in these promises?
10. Explain how each of these promises had a twofold fulfillment (double reference).
11. What was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant?
12. Give the two Greek words for "covenant" and explain the meaning of each. Which word is used in the New Testament?
13. How is a covenant to be distinguished from a contract?
14. Why was it necessary for God to specify the details of the Covenant?
15. List these details.
16. How are females dealt with in the details of the Covenant?

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17. What was the connection between the terms of the Old Covenant and the preservation of the family, and later that of the nation?
18. Why were the details of the Covenant not revealed to Abraham at first?
19. Discuss briefly the history of circumcision.
20. Why cannot circumcision have been originally a test of edurance?
21. Why cannot circumcision have originated on hygienic grounds?
22. Why do we object to the view that circumcision originated to increase procreative powers?
23. Why do we reject the notion that it originated for the purpose of getting rid of emanation from physical secretion connected with the physiology of the fore-skin?
24. Why can we not accept the view that circumcision originated as a phase of phallic worship?
25. Why is it unlikely that it was originally of the nature of a sacrifice to deity?
26. Why is it unlikely that it persisted as an attenuated survival of human sacrifice?
27. Why do we reject the view that circumcision was in some manner related to the cult of reincarnation?
28. Can it be proved that the spread of circumcision among ancient peoples was in any way connected with human sacrifice?
29. On what ground does Lange affirm that circumcision did not come to Abraham as a custom of his ancestors?
30. What was its special significance under patriarchal law?
31. How does Lange explain its symbolic significance?
32. How is the status of females to be explained under the covenant of circumcision?
33. What specific requirement proves that circumcision was not a puberty rite?

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34. Explain the customs of sub-incision, introcision, and infibulation, as practiced by primitives? Do we find any of these practices in the history of the Israelites? What does all this prove with regard to the purity of Hebrew monotheism?
35. What Old Testament incident shows that circumcision was not to be treated lightly by the Children of Israel? Explain.
36. What reasons are suggested for the provision that circumcision of males should take place on the eighth day after birth?
37. What provision shows us that the blessings of the Covenant were to be extended to others as well as those born in Abraham's household? To what others were these blessings extended?
38. What was the penalty for disobedience to the law of circumcision? Did this penalty include anything beyond excommunication from the commonwealth?
39. What was the design of the Covenant-Sign? How was it related to the Messianic hope?
40. Who was now specified to become the Covenant-Heir? What significance in the change of Sarai's name to *Sarah*?
41. What are the various explanations of Abraham's "laughter" on receiving the promise of Isaac's birth?
42. What does Cornfeld say about this? How does Murphy explain it? Speiser? Leupold? How do you explain it?
43. Did Abraham's laughter differ from that of Sarah later? Explain.
44. Can we say that Abraham "was a man of faith who had moments of doubt"? Can we say the same of ourselves?
45. How does God reply to Abraham's intercession for Ishmael?

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46. What was Abraham's response to the law of circumcision? How old was he at the time? How old was Ishmael?
47. State the successive steps in the progressive revelation of the Covenant.
48. When and where was the Abrahamic Covenant enlarged into a national Covenant?
49. Where in the Old Testament do we find references to "circumcision of the heart"?
50. What is the fundamental difference between the Old Covenant and the New?
51. When and where was the Old Covenant abrogated and the New Covenant ratified?
52. Who was the mediator of the Old Covenant? The mediator of the New?
53. Is the New Covenant an extension of the Old, or is it strictly a *New Covenant*? Explain.
54. What was made the basis of membership in the Old Covenant and what is it in the New?
55. Why do we say that the Old Covenant was local? How does the New Covenant differ on this point?
56. What did fleshly circumcision of the Old Covenant point forward to in the New?
57. What is meant by *spiritual* circumcision? What is it, according to New Testament teaching?
58. Explain the fallacy of identifying Christian baptism and spiritual circumcision.
59. What did the Old Covenant include as to membership? What does the New Covenant include?
60. How is the New Covenant a better covenant "enacted upon better promises"?
61. Are the Ten Commandments a part of the Gospel? Explain.
62. Which of the Commandments are morally binding upon Christians, and why?
63. Which one is not binding upon Christians? Explain.

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64. Why can we not be saved today as the penitent thief on the Cross was saved?
65. What is the primary function of law in general? Does the Law have the power to regenerate and sanctify men?
66. Can one keep the Ten Commandments and still not be a Christian? Is it possible for any person to keep them perfectly?
67. Explain the distinction between the Old Covenant as a Covenant of Law and the New Covenant as a Covenant of Grace.
68. Does the New Testament teach that baptism is a seal of anything? Explain.
69. What are the necessary conditions to baptism? What is meant by a "change of heart"?
70. Is it possible Scripturally to baptize one who is not old enough to believe?
71. In what way did our Lord provide for the salvation of the innocent and the irresponsible.
72. Distinguish the import of Exo. 20:1-17 and Ezek. 18:19-20.
73. Do the Scriptures teach that we inherit the *guilt* of the sins committed by our ancestors or of that committed by Adam? Explain.
74. Is the dogma of "original sin" warranted by Scripture teaching?
75. Explain the statement that the innocent (infants) need to be redeemed only from the *consequences* of sin.
76. Explain how and why so-called "infant baptism" is unscriptural?
77. Why do we affirm that so called "infant baptism" is essentially a form of magic?
78. What according to the New Testament is the necessary motivation for baptism?

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79. Show how "infant baptism" reverses the order laid down in the Great Commission.
80. In what sense is "infant baptism" the "appeal of a good conscience" toward God?
81. Explain how "infant christening," "infant baptism," etc. obliterates the distinction between the church and the world and between church and state.
82. In what sense is the Kingdom probably more inclusive than the Church?
83. What is the spiritual progression for accountable persons? What is it for the innocent (infants)?
84. What fundamental error is involved in the pedobaptist procedure with respect to membership in the new Covenant?
85. Where is the promise of the New Covenant found in the Old Testament? Explain how the language of this divine promise indicates the distinctions between the Covenants.