

# New Covenant, New Name

## *More Reflections of Genesis 17*

- 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty [El Shaddai]; walk before me, and be blameless,
- 2 that [And] I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."
- 3 Then Abram fell on his face. And God [elohim] said to him,
- 4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.
- 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.
- 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.
- 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.
- 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."
- 9 And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.
- 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.
- 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.
- 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or

bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,  
13 both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.  
14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."  
15 And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.  
16 I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."  
17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"  
18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!"  
19 God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.  
20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes [25:13–16], and I will make him into a great nation.  
21 But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."  
22 When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.  
23 Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him.  
24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old 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.

<sup>26</sup> That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised.

<sup>27</sup> And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

## Genesis 17:1-27

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### Naming and Covenant

Last week I said that I did not know if I would stay in Genesis 17 for another week. After the service, some of you said that you would like me to, and that if I would, please focus on the ideas of **covenant** and **naming** that we find in this chapter. I agreed it would be worth our time. So I began my study this week with a search for “covenant” and “name”<sup>1</sup> in the same verse of the ESV. There are 9 verses in which both ideas appear together. When I expanded it to two verses, the number went up to 54. Within three verses it went to 72. To put that another way, the idea of covenant and names are closely associated with one another.

Why might this be? The most basic idea, of course, is that **covenants are made with persons**, and persons have names.<sup>2</sup> In some of these covenants, the person calls on the Name of the LORD (cf. **Gen 21:32-33**). In others, the LORD reveals his

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<sup>1</sup> Or any form such as “covenants,” “covenanting,” “names,” “naming,” etc.

<sup>2</sup> I say “persons” rather than “people” because some covenants are made with more than human beings. For example, the covenant of the day and the night below seems to have been made with the angelic beings as well as Adam. All were bound to its laws.

name to the person he is covenanting with (cf. **Ex 6:4-6**). In still others, it is God's name that is at stake (cf. **Jer 14:21**), because he has sworn the covenant in his own Name.

On the other end of it, we find that naming is something that God does when he enters into covenant. That is, when he covenants, he also names. We can think about the **covenant of creation** in this regard. The LORD says, "I have ... established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth" (**Jer 33:25**). And "God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night" (**Gen 1:5**). To call a thing like this is to name the thing, as we see with Adam in the very next chapter, "Whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (**Gen 2:19**).

What is **the purpose of naming** in the ancient world? There are two basic ideas. The first is that giving a name to something was **the assignment of roles**. As one scholar writes, "It was believed that the name of a living being or an object was not just a simple or practical designation to facilitate the exchange of ideas between persons but that it was the very essence of what was defined, and that the actual pronouncing of a name was to create what was spoken."<sup>3</sup> This is one of the

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<sup>3</sup> J. M. Plumley, "The Cosmology of Ancient Egypt," in *Ancient Cosmologies*, ed. Blacker and Loewe, 38; cited in John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 188.

reasons why I do not understand why the number one boy's name in America for 14 years in a row (1999-2012) has been Jacob (Deceiver).

The other idea is that to name a thing was **to have authority** over it. We saw this in Genesis 1-3 with God naming things and Adam naming both the animals and his wife. This was a worldwide idea. Perhaps you remember when Daniel was sent to Babylon. When he came under the king's jurisdiction, he was renamed: “**And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego**” (**Dan 1:7**).

Throughout the Bible, many persons receive new names, but only a handful receive new names at the hand of God. **Jacob** becomes Israel (**Gen 32:28**). The children of Hosea go from “**No Mercy**” (Lo-Ruhamah (**Hos 1:8**) and “**Not My People**” (Lo-Ammi; **1:9**) to “**Mercy**” and “**My People**” (**2:1, 23**). In the NT, **Simon** becomes Peter (**Matt 16:18; John 1:42**).<sup>4</sup> There are three more name changes that are significant, and all of them are related to Genesis 17.

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<sup>4</sup> Solomon is called Jedidiah indirectly because of the LORD (2 Sam 12:24-25). Saul is not actually renamed Paul (Act 13:9). Rather, Paul was his Roman name as a Roman citizen.

For a list of names changed in the Bible see: <http://godwords.org/450/name-changes-in-the-bible/>

The **first** is God himself. In Genesis 17, the new name is told to Abraham. It isn't really a name "change." More like a new revelation. Up to this point, God has been called Adonai (Lord) or Elohim (God) or Yahweh (I AM). But now he is **El Shaddai**, "The Omnipotent God" or possibly "[High] God of the [Divine] Mountain."<sup>5</sup> This new name comes to Abram just as God is about to change Abram's name and give him a covenant. This makes Abram the **second** person to receive a new name in this chapter. Abram (A High Father) becomes Abraham (Father of Many Nations), and the covenant here is what Stephen calls "the covenant of circumcision" (**Acts 7:8**). The **third name** change has Sarai (Contentious) become Sarah (Princess).

Why would God change their names at this point? This name change comes just as God promises that she will give birth to a son at the age of 90 in a little over a year from this moment. So the name change has to do with the promise finally coming to pass. This promise, of course, is part of God's covenant.

Both name changes focus in on the promised seed that God had been telling them about for many years (and

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<sup>5</sup> A good discussion of the divine name as either of these two options is Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 269. He also explains that the "new" name Yahweh is new only in the sense of the person understanding God's power, not in terms of having never heard the name before (p. 31; cf. Isa 52:6 and Jer 16:21).

chapters) now. This seed, as we will see, is both **physical and spiritual**, and so the new names designate the new functions that they will be given. They will be parents of kings, and so they had better act like it. They will be parents of the faithful, and so they had better remain in the faith. These promises will be insured by the covenant.

That leads us to consider the covenant that is before us in Genesis 17. How are we to think about it? There is a difficulty here. It arises, because circumcision is attached for the first time to any covenant with Abraham. Up until now, the covenants have been basically unconditional covenants of grace. Yet, **circumcision** in the NT is often related to the law. So to put this in the form of a question, is this a covenant of works or a gracious covenant?

You are probably used to hearing “a covenant of works” or “the covenant of grace.” I said “a gracious covenant” rather than “the covenant of grace” because in my understanding, I believe that the Reformed Baptists were correct to say that the **covenant of grace is really the new covenant** that was enacted in the New Testament by Jesus Christ. For this is fount from which all grace actually springs forth. In a video on covenant theology, Richard Barcellos says, “**Those [OT] covenants in and of themselves were not**

salvific in nature, they did not deliver the benefits of redemption.”<sup>6</sup> He does **not mean** that people in the OT were not saved, or even that they were not saved by the covenant of grace. What **he means** is that only the blood of Christ can or ever has saved a person. And so God looked forward in the OT to the time when Christ would die, and on the basis of his own omnipotent ability to bring to pass the covenant of grace in Christ, he would save people in the OT.

Now, God would **save them graciously** in the OT. No one was ever saved by their works in the OT, only by grace. They were **saved by faith** in the OT. As we see in **Gen 15:6**, it was faith in the Son of God, the very God who covenanted with them. It was trust in his ability to bring about the promises of the future. All of the OT covenants had elements of these promises in them (even Moses), even if they also had elements of works in them (even Abraham and Noah). But they were not the covenant of grace properly speaking. In this way of speaking, older Reformed Baptists differed quite a bit in the way they spoke about things than their Paedobaptist brothers.

Nevertheless, OT covenants were still basically shaped by either an idea of works or grace, even if there were mixtures

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Barcellos, An Introduction to 1689 Federalism video) <http://www.1689federalism.com/> (around 9:30 into the video).

of both in them. Some are more of one than the other. Why would there be mixtures of both? It wasn't to confuse law and grace. Rather, **the works guaranteed** temporary physical promises (such as land, biological offspring, future kings, etc.) while at the same time pointing to eternal spiritual promises such as eternal life.

In one way, works could actually gain you eternal life, and so eternal life is part of any works covenant. If someone were to keep all of the works of the covenant perfectly, they would obtain the spiritual promises, because God is fair. **“To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life” (Rom 2:7)**. But for any **“who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil” (Rom 2:8-9)**. This is said by the Apostle in the context of **“Jews first”** under the covenants (and then Gentiles too, who have the law written on their hearts).

Of course, no one did keep the law perfectly in the OT. So no one earned eternal life then, nor were they even able to hold on to temporary physical promises that were brought about by basic obedience. This is exactly why we needed Jesus to keep the law for us and thereby extend pure grace to us in

the new covenant. In Genesis 17 though, we want to try and figure out if this covenant is more basically works oriented or grace oriented. This is a difficult question and good Christians disagree. For example, **Paedobaptists** will say that Abraham (along with Adam after the fall and Noah) was given the covenant of grace. I have already said why I do not like this language. If I were to take their basic position, I would say that Abraham was given a gracious covenant. But some **Reformed Baptists** have actually taken a very different track. They actually see God giving more than one covenant to Abraham. That is, they see God giving one covenant to Abraham and **to his spiritual seed** (say, Gen 12 or 15) and one covenant to Abraham and **to his physical seed** (Gen 17 and circumcision).<sup>7</sup>

The problem they see surrounds circumcision.<sup>8</sup> Circumcision is viewed throughout the NT through the lens

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<sup>7</sup> See Nehemiah Coxe: *Covenant Theology From Adam to Christ*, ed. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, Francisco Orozco (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> They actually have another problem which is that when filtered through the newer Calvinism of absolute strict limited atonement (as opposed to the older view of dualism where Christ's death is sufficient for all rather than hypothetically sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect), there is an absolute distinction between what they would call the spiritual vs. the carnal seed. These two groups are absolutely separate like we find in Kipling's famous poem *Barrack-room ballads*: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." Therefore, they cannot share in the promises of one another in any sense. Since this is too difficult to explain in a sermon like this, I'll leave it at a footnote.

Nehemiah Coxe writes, "At present it will suffice to remind you that there is no way of avoiding confusion and entanglements in our conception of these things except by keeping before our eyes the distinction between Abraham's seed as either spiritual or carnal, and of the respective promises belonging to each. For this whole covenant of circumcision given to the carnal seed, can no more convey spiritual and eternal

of “works.” For example, “For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision” (Rom 2:25). You can hear how circumcision and obeying the law are connected here. Or again, “Every man who accepts circumcision ... is obligated to keep the whole law” (Gal 5:3). So the idea is that if circumcision is all about law-keeping, then how can the covenant in Genesis 17 be about grace?

But what is the Apostle addressing? Is he saying that circumcision is itself “a work” and that if any NT Christian gets circumcision, that they are now on the fast track to hell? No. Paul himself had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3) “because of the Jews.” Why? The same Apostle says, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing”

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blessings to them as such, than it can now enright [invest with a right or title] a believer (though a child of Abraham) in their temporal and typical blessings in the land of Canaan. Neither can I see any reason for assigning a covenant interest in all typified spiritual blessings (as well as in the temporal blessings that were the types of them) to the carnal seed, and yet not admit the same covenant to convey temporal blessings to the spiritual seed. I say this since some conceive both are directly included in the same covenant and the promise of both was sealed with the same seal” (Coxe, 93). In this paragraph, we can see how “respective promises belong to each” but not to the other. But this is not true in every sense for *either* group. First, while it is true that the “carnal” seed will not “convey ... eternal blessings,” it is not true that it does not convey some kinds of spiritual blessings (is not even common grace a spiritual blessing?) or that it “cannot” convey eternal blessings in the sufficient sense. What I mean here is that God freely offers the gospel to all men, because Christ’s death really is sufficient for all men. The problem does not reside in an atonement that didn’t do enough, but in the hearts of men. If they were to look to Christ by faith, then they would receive eternal life. Second, the spiritual seed do in fact receive physical promises. In the OT, they received the land, they were (by and large) descended physically from Abraham, etc. In the future, we will inherit “the world” and “the earth.” So this kind of distinction which is at the heart of making Genesis 17 a purely physical works-oriented covenant is not necessary from this point of view.

(1Co 7:19 NAS). “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything” (Gal 5:6 NAS). If you don’t make circumcision about law-keeping, then it isn’t about law-keeping.

No, the problem is not that circumcision was a work, but that the Jews turned it into something to boast about, to show the world how God loved them because they were circumcised physically. This was part of their overall bragging about keeping the whole law: “Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God” (Rom 2:17 NIV 1984), and circumcision is in the law (Lev 12:3).<sup>9</sup> Of course we know that they fell terribly short of their own boasts.

But in a way it was beside the point, because circumcision came before the law, that is before the law of Moses. It came after faith. Listen carefully to Romans 4:10-12, “How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness

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<sup>9</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Ro 2:17.

would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.” So you see, God gave circumcision to Abraham as a sign to him that confirmed and sealed in his heart that he had faith. He gave it to the rest of Abraham’s offspring as a sign that they needed the faith of Abraham.

It is amazing that after Mt. Sinai and the Ten Commandments, there are only two commandments that deal with circumcision in all of the Law of Moses. The first says, “If a woman conceives and bears a male child ... on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (Lev 12:2-3). The only other commandment is this, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (Deut 10:16). The outward rite points to the inward *in the Law*. What does it mean to have a circumcised heart? It means you have faith in Christ. “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). “A Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter” (Rom 2:29).

## Works or Grace?

### *Works*

Let's return now to this question of how we are to think of this covenant in Genesis 17. Is it basically works or basically gracious? My answer is that **it depends on what a person does with it**. If a person wants to take circumcision the way the Jews did, then they will see only the **outward, physical blessings** and promises. Is there anything outward and physical in Genesis 17? Of course there is. The land of **Canaan (17:8)** is a real place, across the pond (the Atlantic) and that little sea (the Mediterranean), and people live in it to this day. **Circumcision** of in **"the flesh"** (**Gen 17:11**) and is **"outward and physical"** (**Rom 2:28**) as the Apostle says. God gave a promise of a child to Sarah (**Gen 17:16, 19**). **Isaac** was a real person born from her womb and through him came all sorts of biological Jews who were never saved by faith. **Ishmael**, his older brother, was circumcised (**Gen 17:25**), but the promises did not go through him. You have the option of taking circumcision or any of the rest of God's law in this way too. Is that something you want to do?

There are problems with taking it only this way. One is that some of these promises are **conditional**. Take the land as an example. The law says, **"You shall keep my statutes and**

my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you ... lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you” (Lev 18:26, 28). If you do not keep the law, “You shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it” (Deut 28:63). Why? “The land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners” (“aliens and tenants” NRS)” (Lev 25:23). Whatever God’s designs may or may not be with a future nation of Israel in the land of Canaan, we can say for sure that their return to the land has hardly been because of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, nor because of obedience to the law of God. The land is still God’s to do with as he sees fit. And we have to take these kinds of things into consideration when we think of the physical promises given to Abraham.

Perhaps the most important problem is what I’ve just discussed regarding present day Israel. It is that taking the covenant as purely physical does not result in salvation. “If you break the law, you become as though you had not been circumcised” (Rom 2:25). One wrong act means you break the whole law (James 2:10). If you break the law, then you cannot earn the reward. You still need your heart circumcised. The generation in the wilderness learned this

lesson the hard way as Hebrews and the Psalms say, they were unable to enter because of unbelief (**Heb 3:19**; **Ps 78:22**; **106:24**).

### *Gracious*

But, a person can also take the covenant in Genesis 17 in a **spiritual way**, seeing beyond the physical (without denying its temporary/temporal blessings). This is the way God meant all people to take it, as it points to faith. In this way, the covenant is essentially gracious. We do not need a second covenant being given to Abraham here. Rather, there is one covenant that can be taken one of two directions, because the same covenant points in both the physical and spiritual direction, but the physical was always given to lead people to the spiritual, the temporary to the eternal.

So the physical (and corporate) promises were based on keeping the law, and this would be made clearer in the Mosaic covenant. The spiritual (and individual) promises were based on faith, and are made clear in the faith of all the saints in the OT. Their law keeping was supposed to be done by faith. In Abraham's life, we see it two chapters earlier in **Genesis 15:6**, long before God gave him the sign of circumcision. But we see it in the faith of Moses, the faith of Noah, the faith of David, and so on.

For the remainder of this sermon, I would like to show you how the covenant in Genesis 17 points us towards **spiritual realities** and faith in Christ. I want to use the changes of the names of Abraham and Sarah as a segue. At its most basic level, being given **a new name means having something new**. Again, it means having a new function, a new start. For our couple, it was a new start confirmed through a covenant, a covenant that needed confirmation, because of how they had so badly fallen into sin the chapter before this.

### *New Creation*

Also at the most basic level is the book we are in. This is the book of **Genesis**. Genesis is the book of “**beginnings**” (Genesis means “beginning”). The book starts off, “**In the beginning ...**” or “**When God began ...**” The first chapter introduces us to the theme of creation, and we spent many weeks talking about this creation and what God was doing. We also saw how there was a covenant with creation, or as Jeremiah called it, a covenant with the day and night.

We then came to the Flood and saw how the whole scene is developed as being a reversal of creation, a kind of de-creation where everything returned to the original condition of **Genesis 1:2**. Then God started over with a new man. He gave him a new covenant. Everything immediately after the

Flood is depicted as a kind of **new creation**. But this man fell into the same kind of sin as Adam. The new creation would not be a return to Eden.

We have now seen Abram and Sarai fall into sin that parallels that of Noah and Adam and Eve. Yet, God now comes to them in grace. In this context, the first way I want to suggest he does this is through the idea of the new creation. This is pictured in the number “**eight**.” The text says that the sign of the covenant will be circumcision on the eighth day (**Gen 17:12**).

Eight is a fascinating number. It is tied most often, including in circumcision, to the idea of seven or a week. Creation in Genesis 1 was performed in a week. In this new creation, eight points you past this week, to a new creation week. The Church Father’s were all over this. A note in Schaff’s *Church Fathers* says, “**The Fathers take the eighth to mean the new creation.**”<sup>10</sup>

The Epistle of Barnabas is one of the oldest surviving non-biblical Christian books (post 70 A.D.). In it, the author preaches, “[God] made a second creation in the last days. And the Lord says: ‘Behold, I make the last things as the first’ ...

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., *Saint Augustin: Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 8, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), p. 44, n. 10.

we have been created anew, just as he says once more in another prophet: ‘Behold,’ says the Lord, ‘I will take away from these their stony hearts, and put in hearts of flesh’” (Barn 6:13-14).<sup>11</sup> He is actually quoting the new covenant promise given by Ezekiel and Jeremiah of the *circumcision* of the heart. But he goes on to say, “I will create the beginning of an eighth day, which is the beginning of another world. This is why we spend the eighth day in celebration, the day on which Jesus both arose from the dead (Barn 15:8-9).

The LXX, which was the Bible of the earliest Fathers, has two Psalms which are translated in their introduction, “Hymns for the eighth” (Ps 6:1) or “... upon the eighth” (Ps 12:1).<sup>12</sup> What is this “eighth?” For them, it was the idea of an *octave*. In music, there are seven notes: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. The note after G is not H, but returns to A. This is identical to a week, with its seven days, beginning on Sunday (for us) and returning again to Sunday. Perhaps this is why, as God was creating, it says the morning stars sang (Job 38:7). The week of creation parallels their singing in octaves.

At any rate, Fathers like Athanasius [*Treatise on the Psalms*] and Eusebius [*Commentary on the Psalms*] said, “What is the

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<sup>11</sup> The translation of this and the next Barnabas quote comes from Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew reads, “... with stringed instruments, upon an eight-string lyre.”

octave? It is the day of the Lord's resurrection on which we receive the fruit of our labors;" and "The octave is the day of Christ the Lord's salvific resurrection ... also symbolic of an infant's circumcision ... This day is better than the seventh because on it the Law is dissolved." The Catholic Church still teaches this to her people, and Protestants should certainly be doing at least as good a job teaching as they do, "The *eighth day*. But for us a new day has dawned: the day of Christ's Resurrection. The seventh day completes the first creation. The eighth day begins the new creation. Thus, the work of creation culminates in the greater work of redemption. The first creation finds its meaning and its summit in the new creation in Christ, the splendor of which surpasses that of the first creation." (CCC Part 1, Sec. 2, Ch. 1, Art. 1, Para 5.2.349). In this way, through the eighth, the covenant with Abraham points beyond the mere physical, to a future spiritual eternal reality in Christ.

### *The Sabbath*

Closely related to this, as we looked at last week, is the idea of Sabbath. Last week we saw that "[sabbath](#)" can mean "to sever," and this is what is also happening in circumcision. But *sabbath* as an idea originates *in creation* as the climax of the original creation week. God did not make *sabbath* up in the

days of Moses. On the seventh day God rested (**Gen 2:2**). It says that he had completed his work, finished it, or severed it. His temple building was accomplished, and now he was going to take his royal enthroned rest as King of his creation.

It is because of creation and the fourth commandment that links back to creation that we usually think of Sabbath as meaning “seven.” In fact, most Lexicons (dictionaries) will tell you that *sabbath* in Greek means “seventh day,” at least as the first definition. But, *sabbath* does not mean “seven.” It is also associated with other days, particularly (again as we saw last time) the **first, eighth, fifteenth**. What those all have in common is that they fall on the first day—**Sunday**.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, in both the picture of circumcision as a cutting off or ceasing/resting, and the idea of the eighth day of circumcision, this covenant of circumcision with Abraham pointed past the brute physical rite, to the **eternal spiritual reality**, which is why it was called a **sign** in this very text. Signs point to something, they are not an end to themselves.

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<sup>13</sup> I made a mistake last week thinking that John 7:22-23 referred to the first day of the week. It does not do this (except incidentally if a baby boy were to be born eight days before a feast day), as the law from Lev 12:2-3 and the Rabbis taught (cf. Mishnah, *Shab.* 18:3; 19:1, 2; *Ned.* 3:11). Jesus is, in fact, talking about seventh day circumcision eight days after the child was born. See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 362. However, the spiritual point about the “eighth” still remains, as was noted in the sermon.

Again, the Father's understood this, even tying it to their discussion of these Psalms.

Augustine calls the eighth day “the eternal age” (Augustine, *on Psalm 12*). Pseudo-Ignatius writes, “After the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week]. Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, ‘To the end, for the eighth day’”<sup>14</sup> (Ignatius, *Magnesians 9*).<sup>15</sup> Another says, “This psalm is sung ‘for the end’ because these are the most perfect contemplations concerning the eighth ... Just as he who is circumcised in the flesh has removed a certain part of his body, so also he who casts off every care of life is circumcised in his heart and is like the true pure ones who dwell earnestly on thoughts of the Lord. On the eighth day the circumcision is completed” (Didymus the Blind [c. 313–398], *Fragments on the Psalms 6.1*).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This quote refers to the LXX of Psalm 6:1.

<sup>15</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church reflects this old theology, “The *eighth day*. But for us a new day has dawned: the day of Christ's Resurrection. The seventh day completes the first creation. The eighth day begins the new creation. Thus, the work of creation culminates in the greater work of redemption. The first creation finds its meaning and its summit in the new creation in Christ, the splendor of which surpasses that of the first creation.” CCC Part 1, Sec. 2, Ch. 1, Art. 1, Para 5.2.349.

<sup>16</sup> Craig A. Blasing and Carmen S. Hardin, eds., *Psalms 1–50*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 48.

The eighth day was the day of required festival assemblies in the OT, to sing, eat, and hear God's word (Lev 9:1; 23:36; Neh 29:35; 1 Kg 8:65-66; 2 Ch 7:9; Ps 6:1; 12:1; Neh 8:2; 18). Sound familiar to anything we are doing now? This was simply not true of the seventh day Sabbath, at least not originally. Why then do we find the Christians "assembling" together to feast upon the bread and wine, to sing, and to hear God's word on the first day of the week? The answer should be obvious.

Perhaps it is worth mentioning that Abraham and Sarah received their new names on the very day that Abraham received the sign of circumcision. That would make it the first day when the sign was given. Perhaps even more interesting, it was on the day that John the Baptist was circumcised that he was given his name (Luke 1:59-60). The same is true of the Lord Jesus (Luke 2:21). Both were named on the eighth day. The naming signifies the newness of the covenant order on the first/eighth day.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Seed*

All of this is made possible, of course, by the new covenant to which the Abrahamic covenant points. The new

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<sup>17</sup> This appears in a unique way in the Noah story, wherein after Noah's "fall" (Gen 9:20-23), the covenant is reaffirmed, and will now come through "Shem" which means "Name" (Gen 9:26-27).

covenant is better than the old (any of the old covenants) precisely because it has better promises, a better sacrifice, a better high priest, and better mediator. Jesus Christ is the end to which all of the OT covenants point, and this is certainly true in Genesis 17.

Is not Christ spoken of explicitly here in this covenant? He says that Sarah will have a child in her old age. This, of course, refers to Isaac who will be born in ch. 21. But the promise is actually more general than this. It says that Kings will come from her (**Gen 17:6, 16**). It even says that God will establish the covenant with his “seed” after Isaac (**19**). This seed to which it ultimately refers is Jesus Christ.

And so how are you supposed to understand Genesis 17 in terms of the covenant? The Apostle tells you exactly how: “But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-- for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’--so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.

“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

“Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” ([Gal 3:12-22](#)). We are not to think of the Abrahamic covenant as the Pharisees did, as being only outward and physical. We are to look to Christ, for it points to and is actually made with him.

*Our New Name*

When a person does this by faith, what they will find is that in the new covenant, each receives new name. Isaiah predicted it, “The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give” (Isa 62:2). Revelation confirms it, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev 2:17).

What is that new name? It is a name that no longer means much in this sad world of ours, but it meant everything to the them. “In Antioch the disciples were first called Christians” (Act 11:26). Today, it seems, that many of us are more proud to be called “Evangelical” or “Baptist” or “Reformed” or “Confessional” or “Dispensational” or “Lutheran” or “\_\_\_\_\_,” than we are to be called “Christian.” Though I understand why we do that, and I do it myself and will continue to do so, if these things eclipse our unity in Christ, if we would rather be known for a doctrine or a behavior or a fallen man or a denomination or a movement than for our Savior, then this is a sad state of affairs indeed. For only “Christian” has the Name in it. The rest talk about what we

believe, but only “Christian” identifies who we believe in. John Bunyan knew this, which is why his main character in Pilgrim’s Progress was not called “Baptist” or “Puritan” but “Christian.”

Why is this new name important? It is because it shows that **he has authority over us**. He is our King. He is our God. He has **circumcised our hearts** by his Spirit, and therefore given us new roles. In this name we are his **disciples**, his followers. We are those that **conquer** and persevere it to the end. We are those that **fear the Name** and obey his Word because of the grace of the Lord Jesus that has been poured out upon us. “**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation**” (2 Cor 5:17). “**Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation**” (Gal 6:15).

It is a **unifying name**. They were *all* Christians, even though some were male and others female, some were Jewish and others Gentile, some were slaves and others free, some were poor and others rich, some were old and others young, some were preachers and others tinkers. But they were all Christians. They were all made new in Christ. Their identity was found in him. Their life was in his new covenant.

Is this true of you? Are you a Christian—a follower of Christ? Has he renamed you? Or, do you simply call yourself

by this name because of your parents or the country you live in? Do you know him? Has he given you his Name? Look to the Name above every name. Look to the eighth day, to the new creation, to the circumcision of the heart. Then you will understand what it must have been like to have been Abraham and Sarah on that great day so long ago.