

**Reading:** Genesis chapter 17

**Key Thought:** The promise of belonging to God's family.  
(Read [John 1v12](#); [Romans 12v5](#); [1 John 3v1](#))

**Context:** Thirteen years had passed since the birth of Ishmael, and here we see an advancement of the covenant between God Almighty (v.1 – El Shaddai) and Abraham. To ratify and show acceptance of the Covenant there is to be a sign – that of circumcision. It was at this point that God changed Abram's name to Abraham. (In the original Hebrew language of the Torah, the name Abram literally means "exalted father." The name Abraham, however, contains another unused root word, which roughly means "multitude." Abraham translated literally, then, means "father of a multitude". Cited from [walterborolive.com](http://walterborolive.com).)

**Content:**

In this passage God elaborates on the Covenant, ratifies it, and predicts the birth of Isaac one year later.

**Verses 4-7:** Abraham will be the father of many nations

**Verse 8:** The Land of Canaan will belong to Abraham's descendants (through Isaac, yet to be born)

**Verses 9-13:** Abraham, and every male descended from him shall be circumcised – as a sign

**Verses 19-22:** It will be an everlasting covenant maintained by circumcision, the seal or guarantee

Circumcision, by its very nature of being so personal, fulfils the ancient practice of cutting to seal an agreement. But, more than that it symbolises an ongoing covenant with Abraham's offspring.

**Verses 23-27:** Abraham was obedient to God – he and Ishmael were circumcised that day. In verse 20 we see how God also promised blessing to Ishmael's descendants (generally, the Arabic nations are descended from Ishmael); they also practice circumcision. They have their promised reward which is temporal (i.e. riches) rather than spiritual. Under the New Covenant they can enter into God's family through faith in Jesus.

**Challenges:**

**This covenant was about family.**

God introduced this Abrahamic covenant because he had promised that all who were circumcised would become a part of His family. It was all about them forming that relationship with God and with each other – bound together by the Covenant. But The Lord had us in mind too. When we accept Christ as Saviour, we also become children of Abraham ([Read Galatians 3v7-9](#)). At the Last Supper with his disciples, **Jesus re-new-ed the Covenant** in his own body ([Read Luke 22v20](#)) – so that everyone can have the opportunity to belong to the family of God. And, when we share Communion we are acknowledging this. **The Holy Spirit is**

**The Seal of the New Covenant** (Eph. 1v13,14)

**How do we act on the Covenant with respect to each other?**

- Do we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ as loved family members? Are we always kind, considerate, giving and helpful towards them?
- Are we willing to accept help, prayer and counsel from others when we need it?

**How do we act on the Covenant with respect to The Lord?**

- Circumcision was the seal of the Old Covenant. The New Covenant demands circumcision of our hearts, and a change of our ways. ([Read Galatians 5v6](#)). The challenge is this: Do we prove our hearts are 'circumcised' by our love to God?
- Are we fully acting on His promises of salvation, healing, provision, protection, guidance and belonging – all a part of the New Covenant? They are all promised as a free gift, when we trust in The Lord.

**Communicate:**

Feel free to let us know if you have questions or comments about this study. Perhaps you have a word of encouragement or a need for prayer if you are struggling with any of the issues. We will gladly get back to you.