

## **Genesis 17 – The life of Abraham – The covenant of circumcision**

### **1. God's covenant with Abraham (v1-9)**

After Ishmael was born, many years passed. Abram is now 99 years old (v1); 13 years later (16:16). One of the hardest trials for us is simply to wait for God, and his time. God waits until we can see that we are too weak; the power must be from him. God appeared to Abram, and gave his name as “the Almighty God”. Before in these chapters he had been called “God most high” (ch. 14), “Lord God” (ch. 15) and “the God who sees” (ch. 16). Our hope is in God himself; our desire must be to know more about him. God told him to walk before him; with such a great God, we must be very careful how we live. God announced to Abram his covenant. He did not negotiate, but told him how it would be. Abram (“father”) was to have a new name, Abraham (“father of many”). The land was promised to him again, and God promised to be his God. The goal of these promises was Christ (Gal. 3:16). There is an eternal inheritance for all nations in him.

### **2. Circumcision (v10-14)**

God gave a sign for the covenant – circumcision. Today people do this for traditional reasons, or tribal identity, or for medical reasons. But for Abraham, it was God's sign of the promises. It told them they needed to become new people. It told them that they were a chosen people and that the Messiah would come from this family. It told them they must be separate from other peoples. It told them they were born unclean. It told them they must pass on the promises from generation to generation. In the New Covenant today, God circumcises our hearts and places his seal on us in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:14, Romans 2:29), and we are part of the same people, because all our salvation is through Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ.

### **3. Sarah and Ishmael (v15-22)**

Sarai's name (“my princess”) was also changed to Sarah (“princess”) - she would now be a blessing to many, not only to Abraham. She was to be the mother of the promised child. Abraham appears to ask that Ishmael should receive the covenant's blessings. This was not God's plan. God told Abraham that this would not be so, yet he would bless Ishmael. Ishmael's blessings were only for his lifetime, not part of the covenant and promises. Sadly too many people are happy with that! God's blessings are all good; but it is better to be in his covenant than to be the father of twelve princes. God now told Abraham the time for the child to be born was near. We must have faith; but the day will come when we will see.

### **4. Abraham's obedience (v23-27)**

Abraham immediately obeyed God. After God has come near to us, we must be careful to fully obey him. Abraham obeyed God completely (v23). This also is essential. God takes special notice of obedience; it is worth more than anything else we can give him (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Jesus does not demand that we perform great miracles, but that we obey him – these are the ones he loves (John 15:23-24). If God has saved you through Jesus Christ and given you promises of heaven and glory, then what are you doing? Are you giving him *obedience*?