

October 15, 2006 AM

**CUTTING OFF THE OLD CREATION  
GENESIS 17.1-27**

*Chiasm* - parallel sections with a distinct center; the beginning and end of the section have parallel qualities, the middle sections have parallel qualities, and the middle forms a particular emphasis. (Note the outline: 1 & 5, 2 & 4, 3 as center)

**1. GOD ALMIGHTY CALLS FOR COVENANT FAITHFULNESS (1-3A)**

***God appears to Abram (1a):*** Time factor; moved from 86 years of age to 99. Ishmael is 13 years of age.

Could Abram be thinking about grandchildren or, to say it another way, his *seed*? Could he be thinking, as may be indicated in the text a little later, that Ishmael might just be the seed?

***“I am ‘El Shaddai” (1b):*** “God Almighty;” *‘el shaddai* emphasizes God’s ability, his power over all things. It emphasizes that he is able to do whatever he wishes to do.

Cf. Exod 6.2-3 - God gives a “new” name to himself. This does not mean that Abram did not know the appellation “YHWH” (cf. Gen 14.22). These names indicate various stages in history and what God is doing in it.

*‘el shaddai* is the God who makes promises. His power gives us the assurance that he will keep those promises. YHWH emphasizes that God is the covenant-keeper.

***“Walk before me and be blameless” (1c):*** Abram is called from the first to conform his life to God’s word (cf. Gen 12.1f.).

The call to faith is a call to walk before God as did his faithful ancestors; cp. Enoch walked with God (5.22, 24), Noah was “blameless” in his generations (6.9).

“Blameless” = idea of completeness or maturity. Abram is to continue pressing on in faith, remaining faithful to God’s word.

***The giving of the covenant (2):*** If Abram will trust God, God’s covenant promises will be realized.

“Give” the covenant. Not the normal “cut” or “establish.” The covenant is about to take particular focus and have a particular sign.

***Abram’s humble response (3a):*** initial act of submission/obedience to the King.

**2. THE PROMISE OF A SEED AND A CHANGE OF NAME: ABRAM TO ABRAHAM (3B-8)**

***“Exalted Father” to “Father of a Multitude” (3b-5):*** expansion and clarification of the promise in 12.1-3. Ch. 15 God promised him a seed in and through whom the re-creation of the created order would take place. Now he is making the beginnings of the change of epochs by changing Abram’s name (imaging God).

Name changes common when God is changing history: God’s people = “Hebrews” from the time of Eber/Abraham (cf. 14.13); Exodus = children of Israel; after Babylonian exile = Jews; after Christ = Christians. God gives his people “a new name” when he moves them forward into another epoch of history. God is indicating that he is bringing in a new era.

***Restoring creation (6):*** “fruitful” and “kings” - reflecting Gen 1 command to be fruitful and take dominion.

Important to note: God’s redemption of the world is just that, the redemption of the creation. Redemption is not something fundamentally different than God’s original intentions in creation. God is restoring and bringing to completion what he intended from the beginning.

This is why NT authors are not “stretching” the interpretation of the Abrahamic promises. The promises always included the restoration and maturation of creation. Canaan and even the physical seed of Abraham were provisional and temporary (yet indispensable).

***The seed and the land (7-8):*** “I will *establish* my covenant” contains idea of continuity with the old (cf. 6.18; 9.11). That is, God is not starting something brand new. Rather he is continuing that which he has started. Even though he is transforming it, there is a continuity with the old. In other words, God is completing his original intentions.

This explains why the covenant is made with Abraham and his seed (i.e., children). God's is restoring his original creation order in which the children born would have been born in the Garden, as it were; i.e., not in exile from God.

An "everlasting covenant" - these are particular stages in God's larger plan culminating in Christ. All of these things are provisional until the fullness of God's promise comes in.

The heart of the covenant is given at the end of v. 8: I will be their God. God takes Abraham and his seed as his people. This is a unique relationship of love and fidelity. They will enjoy a standing before God unlike anyone else in the world.

### **3. GOD'S COMMAND: "GUARD MY COVENANT" (9-14)**

*Entrusted with the priesthood (9):* The sign follows the word.

"Keep my covenant" - obey, yes; but much broader. The word carries more the idea of "guard" or "protect." Cf. of Adam in 2.15, of angels in 3.24, of priests in Lev 8.35, of Levites in Num 1.53, all of Israel in Lev 18.4.

Abraham's seed becomes the priestly seed. This covenant has a specific focus: Abraham's seed will be priest to the nations. That is, God's house will be here. This will be his throne and the place that sin is dealt with.

*The cutting off of the flesh of the old creation (10-13):* circumcision instituted as a sign. Is it a "mere external" but doesn't deal with the "essence" of the covenant? Circumcision is synonymous with the covenant in v. 13. Not to be circumcised is breaking the covenant in v. 14. Not an incidental external (cp. 1 Cor 11.25, "This cup *is* the new covenant..."). It is virtually inseparable.

Cf. Gen 9 - God's war-bow is a "sign" of the covenant he remembers when he sees. So this sign will be a "memorial" for God.

8<sup>th</sup> day - Beginning of a new week; the first creation week—i.e., the first seven days—have been corrupted by Adam's sin. That week, that old creation corrupted by sin, must now be cut off (it must die) in order for the new creation to come in.

The covenant of circumcision, therefore, specifies the people who must die in order for this new creation to be born; i.e., Abraham's seed. But they will also embody what it means to go through death and resurrection because the eighth day is the day of new life, new creation.

"everlasting covenant" - Christ comes, takes this up in himself, and now all of those in Christ have been circumcised with him; i.e., through baptism. Cf. Col 2.11-12.

*The cutting off of the disobedient (14):* to be fruitful you must be cut off from the old creation by God. If you refuse, you will become impotent and unfruitful. You will be cut off from history.

### **4. THE PROMISE OF A SEED AND A CHANGE OF NAME: SARAI TO SARAH (15-21)**

*"My Princess" to "Princess" (15):* new epoch includes the woman; she is not just Abraham's princess.

*The fruitful queen (16):* the woman

*The laughter of Abraham (17):* must remember that God is 'el shaddai

*The appeal for Ishmael (18):* Abraham is appealing to God that Ishmael might be the seed of promise.

*The laughter of God (19):* God has turned the tables and surprised everyone; Isaac will be God's "joke."

*The distinction between the seeds (20-21):* Ishmael will be blessed; but Isaac will be the promised seed.

### **5. ABRAHAM RESPONDS WITH COVENANT FAITHFULNESS (22-27)**

"That very day" Abraham obeys.

(1) God's covenant is non-negotiable. (2) God's covenant always demands loyalty/faithfulness/obedience from those within the covenant. (3) God's signs and seals are not to be regarded lightly. (4) The everlasting covenant is fulfilled in Christ and in his church.