

## **From Promise to Covenant** **(Parallel: Abraham's Future is Ours Series – Part VI)**

10/11/2009

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. Read Genesis 17:1-2. How does this personal visit from God differ from the ones described in Gen. 12, 13, and 15?

Abraham had heard promises before about how he was going to have lots of offspring, but now God was not just making a promise, but He was talking about a covenant relationship with Abraham.

2. Read Genesis 17:3-8. What are some of the terms and conditions of this covenant?

It is very personal (v. 3) between God and Abram.

Abram emerges from this with a new name, Abraham (Father of Many).

Some of Abraham’s descendants will be kings

Abraham’s descendents will own and live in Canaan

3. Read Gen. 17:9-14. What is expected of Abraham in return for all these blessings?

Abraham and all his descendents are expected to maintain this close relationship with God.

All males (including servants) are to be circumcised as a sign of this covenant

Anyone within the community who refuses circumcision is to be cut off from the community.

4. What other references to a covenant do you recall from reading the Bible?

There are a couple dozen examples. A few are:

Numbers 10:33 – The arc of the covenant

Luke 22:14-20 (or Matt. 26:26-29) – The cup at the Last Supper represents the New Covenant (the new relationship with God).

Hebrews 8:3-7 – contrasts the old covenant (with Abraham) and the new (through Christ).

Hebrews 10:28-31 – emphasizes the need to believe in the new covenant established by the crucifixion and resurrection.

5. How is a covenant different from a promise, a contract, or a friendship?

I can make a promise or sign a contract with someone I don't even know, but who needs something from me or I need something from them. A covenant is a long-term commitment (like a marriage) on which a basis for living from this day forward is established. It changes everything that is yet to come. It is an agreement that describes that relationship for the mutual benefit of all parties.

I can have a friendship with lots of people, but I can only have one spouse. Similarly, one can not have a covenant relationship with lots of different people. Thus, we are instructed to hear His voice, obey His voice, and forsake all other gods (including self).

6. So, how many times does God have to say something before you believe it? And once you believe Him, what difference does that make in your life?

It is easy to question whether or not it is God speaking to us or Satan trying to lead us astray. This would especially be true if nothing happened for ten years after hearing from God, as occurred with Abraham. We would suspect that, if it had really been God, something would have happened by now.

Further, we are not necessarily prepared for the message we receive. We believe we are doing God's will, yet the message seems to tell us to stop doing what we are doing and go someplace else. It just doesn't make sense!

7. Why is it that God does not condemn Abraham for having a child with Hagar (Gen. 16;1-2), but rather chooses to intensify the relationship?

The idea for the liaison with Hagar came from Sarah and was fully in compliance with local customs at the time. Abraham's wife could not provide him with offspring, so it was considered to be up to her to arrange for offspring through someone else. In Abraham's defense, God had not said yet that his descendents were going to come via Sarah, but rather just said they would come from Abraham. After 10 years of waiting, it is reasonable that Abraham might have felt that God was waiting for him to take the next move.

8. Pastor Steve generalized the Abraham/Sarah/Hagar situation by saying "Christians can obey God and end up in places they shouldn't be". How do we deal with this seeming dichotomy?

The deeper our relationship with God, the less likely it is that we will take the wrong fork in the road. If we are totally honest with God and open in our communication, He will provide us with sufficient patience and insight to wait until He knows the time is right to reveal the next piece to the puzzle.

9. What is the equivalent of circumcision that all Christians could participate in today?

Pastor Steve described it as circumcising our heart. We are to consecrate that part of our body to God that He can use most or that is currently outside of God's will. We then voluntarily restrain, constrain, and discipline ourselves. God in turn will use that part of our body to bless our descendants. Thus, we share our minds, money, and talents as an offering to God.