

Genesis 17:1-14

Background to Consider...

Last week, we looked at how God responded to the event at the Tower of Babel. The nations of people were divided, having been cursed with having their language changed so that they could not understand one another. Confusion and disunity became the essence of mankind's relationship with each other.

But God is gracious. Though God split and severed the nations, He would one day bring them all back together again. A man called "Abram" was going to be the one through whom God would rescue the nations—indeed, through him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3).

This week, we want to look at Gen 17:1-14, because it is here where we see the details of the covenant God made to Abraham in more detail. In Genesis 12 and 15, God "calls" Abraham, and in Genesis 17, God issues forth the terms of the covenant. It is important to remember that the Law (which will be fully laid out in Exodus & Deuteronomy) was given to a people who had already been "called" into the covenant. First came the "call," then came "the covenant/law."

Questions about Genesis 17

1. In Genesis 12:1, God calls a man named Abram to be the head of a new type of people, Israel. Then in Genesis 17, the initial terms of the covenant is given (i.e., circumcision) and the rest of the Law comes hundreds of years later in Exodus through Moses. *So first God "calls" a people to Himself, then He gives them the Law.*
 - a. How significant is it to understand that God's calling comes first, and then afterward the giving of the Law? That is, is it important to note that the Law came *after* the people were already in the covenant?
 - b. *Hint:* It has traditionally been thought that God gave Israel the law in order for them to work "really, really" hard to earn righteousness, only to show them they can't do this very well. To be sure, the Law shows us our sinful nature (Rom 3:20), but is it accurate to say that God gave Israel the Law in order for them to earn their way into the covenant, when in fact God gave them the Law after they were *already* in the covenant to begin with?
 - c. In short, in Genesis 17 with the institution of circumcision, and in Exodus (and Deuteronomy) with the giving of the Law, was God setting up Judaism as a legalistic religion?
 - d. What was the purpose of circumcision in Genesis 17? (See verse 11.)

Your Thoughts/Questions?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____