

Topic: Aspects of Abraham's Covenant
Text: Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-13, 15 (NIV)
Theme: "The aspects of Abraham's covenant have relevance to Christians today"

Introduction

- Abraham's birthplace was Ur, people in this place were idolaters, including Terah, his father.
- At 75, God called Abram to leave Ur and to settle to a place where He would show him (Canaan).
- God declared His covenant with Abram in Genesis 12:1-3.
- His first son through Hagar was Ishmael (when he was 86), second son was Isaac through Sarah (when he was 100); he died at age 175.
- The Abrahamic Covenant was given before the Law was introduced. It has been observed since then and still being observed today.

I. IDENTITY ASPECT: THE CHANGE OF NAME

Genesis 17:5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

V15 God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah."

A. Significance of name changing

1. Name changing nowadays is common for migrants whose names are "unusual" to the adoptive country. (e.g. Li Wei to Louie or Maria to Mary Ann)
2. On name changing in Australia, according to the Law Handbook by Fitzroy Legal Services: *According to the law, you can take on a new name simply by consistently using it. Provided you do not assume your new name for a criminal purpose, you are free to call yourself what you like, and to assume your name whenever you like. Some religions place restrictions on the way their members are allowed to change their names, but these restrictions have no legal effect.*

3. One common reason to change name is by marriage for women.
4. When one's name is changed, whether for glamour or through marriage, the IDENTITY IS CHANGED. You need to update your legal documents (license, bank accounts, bills, employment record, passport, etc.)
5. Name changing in the Bible had nothing to do with glamour, prestige, or status; rather it involved commitment (as in a covenant) with the Lord.

B. Bible heroes whose names were changed.

1. Abram (exalted father) – Abraham (father of many)
2. Sarai (princely) to Sarah (queen of princes or mother of princes).
3. Jacob means "he grasps the heel" (or figuratively "he deceives") --- Israel (Prince with God/Soldier of God/God-wrestling/God's Prince) (*Genesis 32:28*)
4. Simon son of John (Jona) to Cephas (Aramaic) or Peter (Greek for stone).

C. Christians, who are overcomers, are given new names.

1. To an overcomer, Jesus will give him a white stone with a new name written on it. (*Revelation 2:17*) In the context, the Church in Pergamum was being addressed and was commended for standing in faith in Jesus.)
2. The old tradition: The giving of white stones was known as **victory stones**. Or, judges had white and black stones. If a black one was given to the criminal, he was condemned; if a white stone, he would be pardoned.
3. Conquerors in the public games were also given white stones with their names in them, which means they will have life pension.

II. RELATIONSHIP ASPECT: THE MARK OF OWNERSHIP

Genesis 17:9 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.

V10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

V11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

V12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.

V13 Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.

- God wants to establish a personal relationship with His people. When you are agreement with him, He put a stamp on you as a seal/mark of ownership. .
- (A mark is a sign of ownership, like a BRANDING IRON used to mark an animal with a heated metal.)

A. OT mark of ownership is by circumcision (v17:10, 11, 13)

V10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

V11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

V13 ... My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.

V13 All must be circumcised. Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. (NLT)

V13 That way my covenant will be cut into your body, a permanent mark of my permanent covenant. (The Message)

1. To seal the deal, circumcision was required for every male baby who was 8 days old

Why the eighth day?

V12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised...

2. An infant has "peculiar susceptibility to bleeding between the second and fifth days of life.
3. It is only on the fifth through the seventh days of the baby boy's life that vitamin K is present in adequate quantities. Vitamin K is responsible for producing prothrombin, which causes blood coagulation (changing from a fluid to a thickened mass).
4. On the eighth day, the amount of prothrombin present actually is elevated above 100% of normal—and is the only day in the male's life. It is only on Day 8 of a male's life where vitamin K and prothrombin levels are at their peak.

B. Is circumcision still relevant in NT?

1. YES, for health and hygienic reason.
2. But NO, for spiritual reason. (I WILL TELL YOU WHY)
3. IN MY OPINION, it has something to do with the **spilling of the blood**. Just like when God covered Adam and Eve's nakedness with a skin of an animal. To make a dress from an animal skin, it must be killed. And to kill an animal, blood must be shed. It foreshadowed the spilling of the blood at the Cross.
4. (And the final BLOOD was shed/ has been spilt 2,000 years ago.) (*Galatians 5:6; Colossians 2:11-12; Romans 2:29*)

C. NT seal of ownership is by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22 The Message)

III. PROMINENCE ASPECT: THE MARK OF HERITAGE

Genesis 17:4b ...You will be the father of many nations.

V6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

- Prominence denotes distinction, being outstanding, prestige (respect), glory, honour, notability, popularity. (*Deuteronomy 28:13*)

A. Abraham's prominence

1. Abraham was recognized by the Jews, Muslims, and Christians as their patriarch.
2. He was considered a millionaire during his time. (*Genesis 13:2; 6*)

B. Jew's prominence

1. Famous movie celebrities: Elizabeth Taylor, Sammy Davis Jr, Roseanne Barr, Rob Schneider, Jason Alexander, Tony Curtis, Kirk Douglas, Jane Seymour, Goldie Hawn, Billy Crystal, Kevin Kline, Ben Kingsley, Bette Midler, Michael Douglas, Daniel Day-Lewis, Dustin Hoffman, Matthew Broderick, Debra Messing, Ben Stiller, Woody Allen, Paul Newman, Robert Downey Jr, Sarah Jessica Parker, Natalie Portman, William Shatner, Gwyneth Paltrow, Harrison Ford, Alicia Silverstone, Wynona Rider; Rachel Bilson; Adam Brody, Zac Efron; Jake Gyllenhaal; Scarlett Johansson; Joaquin Phoenix; Adam Sandler; Famous Directors & Producers: Sam Raimi (Spiderman), Alan Arkin (Little Miss Sunshine), Ivan Reitman (Ghosbusters), Milos Forman (One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest), Sam Mendes (American Beauty), Andrew Vajna (Rambo, Terminator), Aaron Spelling (Melrose Place), Roman Polanski (Rosemary Baby, Chinatown), Bryan Singer (p. of X-Men), Steven Spielberg
2. Famous singers: Amy Winehouse, KD Lang, Elvis Presley, Barry Manilow, Art Garfunkel, Lenny Kravitz, Carole King, Bob Dylan, Billy Joel, Paula Abdul

3. Famous scientists: William Herschel (planet Uranus), Edward Teller (hydrogen bomb), Jonas Salk (polio vaccine), Gregory Pincus (practical oral contraceptive pill).
4. Other Famous/Rich Jews: David Beckham, owner of Universal Studios, Vidal Sassoon, owner of Estee Lauder, owner of Goodyear, Larry Ellison (Oracle) Michael Dell (Dell computers), Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, owners of Wal-Mart Stores, Rupert Murdoch, Jeffrey Skoll (e-bay), Jerry Yang (Yahoo), owner of Lego, McDonalds, Zobel de Ayala, owner of Ralph Lauren, Amway, owner of Apple Computer, Ford Motor, Levis Jeans

Why are Jews rich and successful:

5. Jews helped each other, trusted each other, and were forced into becoming merchants and traders, had a common language, formed communities with mutual aid societies, encouraged their children to pursue education.
6. Jews are the most economically successful group in American society Jewish family income is 72 percent more than the national average. Jews make up only three percent of the population, they account for approximately a fifth of the very rich, i.e. millionaires and above.
7. Israel has more engineers and scientists per capita than any other country. Israel has the highest ratio of university degrees per head in the world. 24% of Israel's workforce holds university degrees. 12% hold advanced degrees.

C. *Christian's prominence*

1. Christians are the spiritual Jews. (Galatians 3:6-9; 29)
2. IT IS TIME FOR US TO CHANGE OUR HERITAGE. Let us live up with how the Lord has called us to be. There is a change of heritage, from NOBODY to SOMEBODY, from NOTHING TO EVERYTHING, from LEAST AND LAST to FOREMOST and FIRST.

3. Famous scientists: Nicholas Copernicus (planets going around the sun), Francis Bacon (philosopher), Galileo (telescope), Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle (Boyle's Law), Michael Faraday (electricity), Albert Einstein.
4. Other Famous Christians: Backstreet Boys, Boyz II Men, Mickey Rooney, Jimmy Carter, Elvis Presley, Pat Boone, George Forman,

CONCLUSION

- The Jews are successful not ONLY because of God's covenant with Abraham and with them. But they work REALLY hard.
- So Christians must work doubly hard. To whatever we do, whether we preach or song lead or at work, we should always give our best shot.