

Chapter 4

The God of Abraham and the Covenant of Grace

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

-Genesis 17:7

The Seal of Covenantal Righteousness

The significance of the "household" emphasis in the New Testament is even more apparent upon a consideration of the covenant of grace, and a closer examination of the covenantal sign associated with it. Louis Berkov regarded Genesis 17 as the *formalization* of the covenant of grace, though the covenant itself had been revealed as early as Genesis 3:15 (1932, 1:258).

... I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.

Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 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. Whether born in your house

or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant (Gen. 17:7-14).

This "everlasting covenant" which God formally established with Abraham and his descendants consisted, first of all, of a promise that the LORD would be Abraham's God and his descendants' God. Such a promise meant that the LORD would take Abraham and his progeny under his protective care, bestow his goodness upon them, and defend them against all their adversaries (Gen. 24:60; Ps. 105:14-15). Prior to the institution of circumcision as the covenant sign, God had promised to "bless" Abraham and those who blessed Abraham, and to "curse" those who cursed Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3). God had spoken to Abraham in a vision, promising him offspring as numerous as the particles of the earth's dust and the stars of heaven, and when Abraham believed God's promise, God credited Abraham's faith to him as righteousness.

The decisive moment came when the LORD himself, the Sovereign party in the covenant transaction, effectually ratified the covenant through a symbolic representation of his presence which theologians designate a *theophany*. A smoking firepot with a blazing torch passed between the severed sections of the animals that Abraham had sacrificed in obedience to God's instructions. God swore to give to Abraham, and to his offspring, a magnificent piece of real estate stretching from the Nile River to the great Euphrates (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:1-21). The ethical and sacramental aspect to this solemn promise on God's part was set forth in chapter 17 where Abraham was called to holiness: "Walk before me and be blameless" (vs. 1) and the covenant was *signed* and *sealed* through the rite of circumcision.

For Berkov, the promise of Genesis 17:7 constituted the "all-comprehensive summary" of the covenant of grace (1932,

1:264). The covenant promise--"I will be your God," with its copulative phrase "and the God of your descendants (seed) after you," is reiterated throughout the Old Testament. The meaning of this promise is expounded and amplified in the succession of covenants, and revelatory events, each building upon the former, embracing it, and taking the former to a new level of splendor in God's redemptive plan. It is especially relevant to the subject of infant baptism that every major biblical covenant, including those that preceded Abraham and the new covenant itself, embraces the "descendants" or "seed" of the human party who is the focus of God's gracious promise, as well as the human party himself. This is illustrated in the following list:

Edenic Covenant: Gen. 3:15

Noahic Covenant: Gen. 6:18; 9:8-9; Heb. 11:7

Abrahamic Covenant: Gen. 17:7

Sinaitic Covenant: Exod. 20:5-6, 12

Deuteronomistic Covenant: Deut. 29:10-13, 29; 30:6

Davidic Covenant: 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 132:11-12

New Covenant: Isa. 44:3; 49:25; 54:13; 59:20-21;

Jer. 31:33-34; 32:38-40; Heb. 8:6, 10-11; Luke 1:15; 2:11; 18:15-16; 1 Cor. 7:14; Acts 2:39; 16:31.

Implicit in the promise of Genesis 17:7, John Calvin noted, was the gift of eternal life.

God's promise to be, not only Abraham's God, but the God of his descendants as well, represented the promise of eternal life for Abraham's descendants, as well as for Abraham, because Jesus Christ affirmed "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" [Luke 20:38; Matt. 22:32] (Calvin 1960,2:1326).

Calvin's observation is clearly substantiated by the biblical unfolding of Genesis 17:7 as the covenant blessing is further described in terms of privileged possession of the divine revelation (Deut. 29:29), the circumcision of the heart (Deut

30:6), the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 44:3), salvation (Isa. 49:25), personal instruction by the LORD himself (Isa. 54:13), permanent indwelling by the Spirit and by the words of the LORD (Isa. 59:20-21), knowing the LORD, eternal forgiveness by him, and inscription of his laws upon the heart and mind (Jer. 31:33-34). Such is the biblical meaning of the LORD's promise to be "your God and the God of your descendants after you."

The term "everlasting covenant" is used throughout the Scriptures in reference to God's redemptive grace. The "everlasting covenant" which God designated "my faithful love promised to David" (Isa. 55:3) and extended to others was clearly a covenant of grace:

Come, all you who are thirsty,
 come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
 come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
.....
Listen, listen to me, and eat
 what is good,
and your soul will delight
 in the richest of fare.
Give ear and come to me;
 hear me, that your soul
 may live (Isa. 55:1, 2b-3a).

The Letter to the Hebrews described Christ's redemptive blood as "the blood of the eternal covenant" (Heb. 13:20).

Some have disputed that redemptive grace was the essence of the LORD's everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendants insisting instead that the "everlasting possession" of the Canaan's real estate by Abraham's physical descendants (Gen. 17:8) was the essential covenantal feature (Showers 1984). That interpretation disregards the perspective of the Galatian epistle in which the apostle identifies the covenant blessing with the promised Holy Spirit, and includes the Gentiles among Abraham's seed (3:14, 26-29). It also overlooks the perspective

of the Letter to the Hebrews on Abraham, the patriarchs, and the "land":

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were looking for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Heb. 11:9-10, 11-16).

It is clear from this passage that the historical possession of the land was not the fulfillment, but rather the prefigurement of the promise to Abraham. F. F. Bruce, commenting on Hebrews 11:16, stated,

The earthly Canaan and the earthly Jerusalem were but temporary object-lessons pointing to the saints everlasting rest, the well-founded city of God. Those who put their trust in God receive a full reward, and that reward must belong not to this transient world-order but to the enduring order which participates in the life of God (1964, 305-6).

From a New Testament perspective, to confine the Abrahamic covenant to a piece of real estate in this present world-order is to miss the everlasting nature of the covenant and the promised possession of the land. It is to confuse shadow with substance.

God's promise that he would establish his everlasting covenant with Abraham and his seed, and that he would be the God of Abraham "and his descendants after him," was sacramentally linked to his command to Abraham to receive the sign of the covenant and to administer it to his infant sons--natural and adoptive.

This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised . . . (Gen. 17:10-12).

Those who argue that an infant is not old enough, or that he does not have faith sufficient to qualify him for the new covenant sign of baptism ought to take careful note here, for the same principle that offends them in the matter of infant baptism was equally involved in the matter of circumcision. Circumcision, the sign of the covenant, was to be applied to the infants sons "eight days old."

But what did circumcision signify? The apostle Paul stated, "He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:11 ESV). Abraham had saving righteousness imputed to him before he received the outward sign and seal of that righteousness; nevertheless, the outward sign was to be applied to his male sons when they were only eight days old--with the promise that Abraham's God would also be the God of his descendants. To overlook this truth is to fail to understand the organic nature of the covenant whereby the covenant blessing extended beyond the subject to his offspring as well.

Election and the Covenant

God's covenant placed Abraham under a holy obligation (Gen. 17:1), and in that sense it was conditional; but it was not a contract between two equals. Since God was the sovereign party, the foundation of the covenant was a unilateral *promise*, rather than a mere bilateral set of conditions depending upon Abraham's (or his offspring's) will power.

The Septuagint translators used the Greek word *diatheke* almost invariably to translate the Hebrew *berith* ("covenant"). In so doing, they

passed over *suntheke*, the usual word for covenant in the sense of 'compact,' or 'agreement.' Instead, the word they chose is one which indicates a unilateral arrangement, and thus is well adapted to indicating an arrangement where one party is dominant and dictates the terms, as in all the cases where God is one of the parties (Morris 1955, 81).

The covenant did not negate the necessity for Abraham and his offspring to exercise their wills, but it plainly regarded the conditions of faith and obedience as dependent upon the divine sovereign act of grace. "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

Biblical faith is faith in the "operation" or "power" of God (Col. 2:12); in fact, it is a divine gift as illustrated in these statements from the apostle Paul's:

...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Phil. 2:12b-13).

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10).

On the one hand, "good works" could never be the foundation of the covenant, for "no one will be declared righteous in his sight by the observance of the law" (Rom. 3:20). On the other hand, a faith that did not issue in good works was not a living faith and could never be considered valid (James 2:17). Good works would be required of Abraham even to the point of expressing his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, his only son by Sarah. But such an expression was not in order to accomplish his justification, but rather to manifest the reality of it, i.e., to justify his faith as essentially valid (Rom. 4:1-3; James 2:18-24; Edwards 1879, 1:649-52). The only work that could constitute the *foundation* of the covenant was the work of Christ, Abraham's true Seed and the Mediator of a new covenant transacted in time and space on a Roman cross (Gal. 3:16; Heb. 8:6; Heb. 10:5-14).

The inequality of the two parties in the covenant of grace, or the dependence of the one party upon the other in such an arrangement, is well illustrated by their respective self-proclaimed identities. The God of the covenant proclaims, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:14; Cf. John 8:58); whereas, the man who is redeemed under the covenant testifies,

"By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Clearly the human will is not totally negated here, but simply overshadowed, upstaged, and supported by grace (Rom. 3:27-28)--so much so that Paul, though converted as an adult, could trace the operation of that grace to his infancy. He pointed to his conversion as the time

when God, who set me apart from birth [lit. *from my mother's womb*] and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15).

Circumcision did not focus so much upon Abraham's faith as it did upon the *righteousness* which was imputed to him by faith (Rom. 4:11). That righteousness did not originate through man's effort or initiative; rather it was a "righteousness from God" (Rom. 1:17) revealed in God's gracious act of offering his Son, in the sinner's behalf. Christ's blood satisfied the requirements of God's justice thereby averting the divine wrath due the sinner (Rom. 3:24-26). Christ's sacrifice did not cause God the Father to love the sinner; rather the reverse was true. God's love sent Christ to the cross (Isaiah 53:10; John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Righteousness, in Abraham's case, was divinely imputed as a free gift *in anticipation of* the fulfillment of the covenant in time and space, and *on the basis of it* (Rom. 4:16, 22-23; 5:17; Phil. 3:9). Abraham was justified on the basis of Christ's mediatorial work on the cross even before that work was accomplished in Jerusalem because the undertaking of the work was established by a heavenly transaction, an eternal covenant among the members of the Godhead with respect to our redemption before the world was made (Rev. 13:8).

This emphasis on God's sovereign grace and righteousness, rather than faith *per se*, is illustrated by the man who climbed out of a six-foot ditch after his car skidded off the road. As the man stepped up onto the slippery pavement, a little boy approaching shouted to him, "Don't worry, Mister, my daddy can get your car out of that ditch." The man murmured, "Boy, I wish I had your faith!" "No, Mister," the boy replied, "you don't need my faith--you just need my daddy's bull-dozer!"

Circumcision, like baptism which succeeded it, symbolized repentance and mortification of sin on man's part, and imposed a holy obligation of obedience upon its recipients: "Circumcise the foreskins of your hearts" (Deut. 10:16). It was an obligation, however, dependent upon God's gracious promise:

The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live (Deut. 30:6).

Only by relying upon God's grace and trusting in God's promise could the conditions be realized in one's life. Old Testament commentator H. C. Leupold stated,

...The rite as such represents a putting away of evil, a kind of purification, in fact, more specifically it points to the necessity of the purification of life at its very source. It is not a sacrament efficacious in supplying the needed grace and the desired effect. But it suggests in a type or symbol what obligations are laid upon those who stand in covenant relation with God, namely primarily to put away the foreskin of their hearts (Jer. 4:4), to circumcise the heart and "be no longer stiffnecked" (Deut. 10:16), an effect which, strictly speaking, only the Lord's grace can achieve in a man (Deut. 30:6), which, therefore man in seeking to accomplish must seek from the Lord. Secondly, this rite is tied up closely with the Messianic hope. For if it indicates the purification of life at its source, it in the last analysis points forward to Him through whom all such purification is to be achieved, who is Himself also to be born by a woman, but is to be He in whom for the first time that which circumcision prefigures will be actually revealed....

....By circumcision he [the Israelite] was made aware of his covenant obligations and received a perpetual badge or reminder of these obligations. That circumcision foreshadows baptism is, of course, undeniable (1942, 520-21).

The bestowal of the promise, as well as its fulfillment, was conducted in accordance with God's elective decrees hidden from men's eyes. Two thousand years after the promise was made to Abraham, the apostle Paul reflected upon Israel's national unbelief and rejection, and what appeared to many to be the failure of God's promise in their behalf. In the Letter to the Romans, Paul reminded his Christian readers of God's sovereign election.

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this is how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son" (Rom. 9:6-9).

Peter Martyr, Reformation leader and professor at Oxford, commented on Romans 9:8:

This passage declares, that what has been before promised generally was restrained by the secret election of God to certain men in particular....In the same way it happens at this day respecting the children of the faithful. We have a promise, that God is willing not only to be our God but also the God of our seed; which promise being indefinite is applied to infants by the secret election of God, not indeed always to all, but to *some certain ones in particular, according as it shall seem fit to God's purpose. And since this is unknown to us, and we ought to follow the outward word which is committed to the Church, under that promise we baptize our little ones as the ancients circumcised theirs.* The Anabaptists blame us for doing so; because we know nothing concerning the spirit, nor the faith, nor the election of those little ones. But we do not think those things of any weight in the matter; we only regard the word of God which is offered to us in the form of a general and indefinite promise. But we commit its fulfillment to God, since we cannot judge respecting his election (Goode 1857, 187).

Peter Martyr's point that God's election is secret, and, therefore, that it cannot be justifiably regarded as an impediment

to faith, is well-taken. The suggestion that the promise is "general and indefinite," however, has given rise to a bit of ambiguity. Hoeksema has pointed out that to regard the promise as "general" is to make the promise a mere "possibility"--an Arminian notion (1977, 13-33). To the faithful chosen there is nothing "indefinite" or "general" concerning the promise. It is very definite and specific.

Peter Martyr's statement illustrates the difficulty humans encounter in attempting to speak of the mysteries of God. His point is that, in the final analysis, the promise can only be efficacious for those who are the special objects of God's electing grace--though their particular names are not mentioned as part of the promise as it stands written in its outward form. Because God's elective decrees are hidden from men's eyes, the promise is set forth as a general promise for the professing church.

Just as the promise could in some sense be considered general, so the grace associated with the covenant would in some cases only be *common*, and thus not effectual in producing saving faith. Pierre Marcel stated,

The grace of the covenant, in fact, is not always saving grace, absolutely conducive to salvation; it is resistible grace which may suffer revolt and which involves the full responsibility of him who rejects it and consciously, voluntarily, and freely chooses the road which leads to perdition (1953, 111-12).

Hoeksema put it in the following terms:

. . . we cannot arrive at a correct view of the seed of the covenant as long as we hesitate to accept the clear teaching of the Word of God that it is not all Israel that is called Israel, that not all the children born in the historical manifestation of God's covenant on earth are also actually children of the promise, but that the line of election and reprobation also cuts right through the visible manifestation of the covenant and makes separation, always and again

separating between Israel according to the flesh and Israel according to the promise. Or to put it negatively, we shall never be able to hit upon a pure, Scriptural conception of this truth as long as we try to hold fast to the view which wants to presuppose that all children born in the covenant in its external form are regenerated (1977, 52-53).

Hoeksema added, “. . . wherever one may view that historical line of God's covenant as it runs in generations, never is all that is called God's people truly the people of God” (1977, 54).

Hoeksema faced squarely the biblical teaching concerning reprobation in reference to infant baptism.

Not all the children who are born of believing parents are therefore also elect and saved. There are reprobate; there are even--to judge from the history of Israel--*very many reprobate* in God's covenant in this outward sense of the word. For their being in God's covenant by reason of birth from believing parents the salvation of infants does not simply follow as a necessary conclusion (1977, 153).

To acknowledge the reality of reprobates, however, is not to renounce circumcision as originally instituted by God, the command to administer it to infants, or the spiritual blessings and promises which it signified (Rom. 3:1-4).

While John Bunyan was not a Paedobaptist, he understood the meaning of election and promise. In his sermon, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, he expounded John 6:37: "All that the Father gives me will come to me." He spoke of the Father's election decree, or the *giving* of the church to Christ, as an *absolute* promise, and the *coming* of that church to Christ as a *conditional* promise, i.e. a promise conditioned by faith and repentance on man's part.

If they *shall-come*, they *shall-come*; and he that hath said they *shall-come*, if faith and repentance be the

way to come, as indeed they are, then faith and repentance *shall* be given to them for *shall-come* must be fulfilled on them (Bunyan 1979, 282).

An absolute promise hath all the *conditional* ones in the belly of it, and also provision to answer all those qualifications, that *they* propound to him that seeketh for their benefits (1979, 283).

Not only was Bunyan emphasizing that the conditions of the covenant were contingent on the Absolute Promise of God's electing grace, but that, as far as the elect were concerned, God's saving grace was ultimately *irresistible* (Steele & Thomas 1963, 48-56)

The timing of the divine fulfillment of such a promise in the children of a believer was itself a matter of God's counsel and choosing, and not necessarily simultaneous with the application of the covenant sign. A delay in the timing did not, however--any more than the reality of reprobates--represent a weakening of the promise; nor did it negate the divine command to apply the sign universally, that is, to *all* the infant sons (Gen. 17:12b; Rom. 3:1-4). Furthermore, such timing might hinge on the fulfillment of certain conditions in the life of the believing parent, but neither would that weaken the promise nor lessen the command, though the fulfillment be delayed.

Abraham was not only the father of the faithful in general, but the father of his immediate family in particular. The LORD's promise to be the God of Abraham's offspring was conditioned by Abraham's covenant parenting assignment with respect to his immediate family.

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised (Gen. 18:19).

J. Rodman Williams woefully overlooked this in his *Renewal Theology* insisting that circumcision *per se* was the "sole obligation" for Abraham (1988-, 1:285, 290). Such an oversight provided much of the basis for his rejection of infant baptism (1988-3:232).

Regarding Genesis 17:10-11, Samuel Hopkins noted that the external rite of circumcision was spoken of as the "token" or "sign" of the covenant between God and Abraham. Hopkins explained that the application of the external rite was not intended to be the sole condition of the covenant.

. . . though he circumcised his children, if he did not in heart dedicate them to God, and faithfully perform the duties signified and promised in the transaction, he did not keep the covenant of circumcision, but would break it, in the most essential part of it" (1811, 2:292-293).

Hopkins went on to lay out the biblical parental responsibilities incumbent upon Abraham:

When Abraham circumcised his children, he devoted them to God, and promised to treat them as God's children, and educate them for God, which implied praying for them, and with them; instructing them in the things of the covenant, and directing and watching over them, and exercising parental care and government over them, and using all proper means, to lead them to know and do their duty to God and man, as soon as they should be capable of acting for themselves; at the same time, setting a good example before them in all his conduct, both of true piety towards God, and righteousness and benevolence towards men. This was the covenant between God and Abraham, on Abraham's part, with respect to his children of which circumcision was the sign, token, and seal (1811, 2:293).

This was the implication of God's charge to Abraham in Genesis 17:1: "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless."

The covenant condition of godly parenting, on the other hand, was itself based upon God's election and the divine provision of grace. For the statement of Genesis 18:19 begins with grace--"For I have chosen him," and ends with grace--"the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised." God, not Abraham, ultimately would be the one to guarantee that the conditions of the covenant would be met, i.e., that the outward sign of circumcision would be attended with the corresponding spiritual reality.

Promise of Blessed Offspring

Paul King Jewett argued that in the Old Testament only physical attachment to Abraham's house by birth or purchase qualified one to receive the sign (1978, 98-99). This he described as a *de facto* participation in the covenant that presupposed no more than that the participant was a member of the nation "after the flesh." Jewett insisted that the term "seed" in the Old Testament primarily referred to the fleshly seed, "the notion of a spiritual seed coming into the foreground only in the new dispensation under Christ (1978, 103).

In response to Jewett's perspective on the Old Testament, note that (1) circumcision signified the all-pervasive divine moral imperative of the covenant even in the Old Testament (Deut. 10:16); (2) the fathers in Israel shared Abraham's spiritual call and obligation (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 4:9, 25-26; 6:6-9, 20-25; Psalm 78:5-8); (3) the promise of spiritual regeneration was designated a circumcision of heart and applied to the offspring as well as to the parents (Deut. 30:6); (4) the LORD punished his people because of their uncircumcised hearts (Jer. 9:25-26); and (5) the patience of the LORD in establishing a pattern from which the New Testament church would be instructed did not mitigate Israel's call to holiness anymore than it did Abraham's call or the call of the New Testament church (1 Cor. 10:11; Gen.

17:1; Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16). Strictly speaking, therefore, there was no such thing as *de facto* participation in the covenant without spiritual obligation.

John Murray acknowledged that the spiritual blessing associated with circumcision indeed marked Israel as "a distinct national and racial identity"; yet he insisted that the covenant embraced external blessings only insofar as the internal blessing resulted in external manifestation. Noting that Stephen had referred to the Abrahamic covenant as "the covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8), Murray insisted that circumcision had deep spiritual significance. It signified union and communion with the God of Israel, "removal of defilement," and represented the seal of the righteousness of faith. As divinely instituted, neither the covenant *per se* nor circumcision was to be identified with mere external status. Accordingly, circumcision was "not essentially or primarily the sign of family, racial, or national identity" (1980, 45-47).

J. Rodman Williams's insistence that the Jew, as of the New Testament era, was "no longer a racial figure," and that fleshly circumcision was "no longer the means whereby the covenant obligation [was] exercised," misrepresented what actually had been the case from God's perspective (1988-, 1:287). There was a radical difference between the actual Abrahamic covenant and the way in which it was perceived by Abraham's natural descendants (Deut. 10:16; John 8:39).

As Jewett saw it, the paedobaptists' application of Genesis 17:7 to the New Testament church represented a failure to distinguish between type and spiritual fulfillment. Jewett should have observed more closely the Old Testament development of Genesis 17:7 pointing, not only to its spiritual fulfillment in the New Testament, but also to the expressed application of that spiritual blessing to the believer's offspring (e.g. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 32:38-39; Isa. 44:3; 59:20-21). It simply will not do to say that the "spiritual seed" came into the foreground only in the new dispensation under Christ, as if such a concept were not first introduced by Moses and the Old Testament prophets. Nor is it accurate to say that the spiritual

blessings associated with Abraham's natural seed have no bearing on the infant offspring of New Testament believers.

God's charge to Abraham respecting the moral and spiritual directing of his household exposes the flaw in Jewett's reasoning. If, as Jewett insisted, the Abrahamic covenant, as it pertained to the infant offspring, had no bearing on the Christian church, was the Christian church also exempt from the parental commission given to Abraham? The answer is obvious.

The promise of spiritual blessing upon Abraham and his offspring was repeated time and again throughout Israel's history, along with the condition of human obedience.

But, from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children--
with those who keep his covenant and remember
to obey his precepts (Ps. 103:17-18).

I will contend with those who
contend with you,
and your children I will save (Isa. 49:25).

The righteousness which Abraham received by faith before he was circumcised was promised to his descendants (seed) as well. Indeed, it extends to the children of the righteous in every generation. "The generation of the upright shall be blessed" (Ps. 112:2). "For God will save Zion...the children also of his servants will inherit it" (Ps. 69:35-36).

Who, then, is the man who fears the LORD?
. . .his descendants will inherit the land.
The LORD confides in those who fear him;
he makes his covenant known to them (Ps. 25:12-14).

The children of your servants
will live in your presence;
their descendants will be established
before you (Ps. 102:28).

May the LORD make you increase,
both you and your children (Ps. 115:14).

Jeremiah certainly was expounding upon the truth of Genesis 17:7 when he spoke of the new covenant blessing in the following terms:

They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them. . . (Jer. 32:38-40a).

Particularly striking was Isaiah's prophetic enlargement on the promise of Genesis 17:7.

"The Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,
declares the LORD.

"As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the LORD (Isa. 59:20-21).

The Ancient Landmark

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