

ABRAM HAD THE COVENANT RECONFIRMED BY GOD: AROUSSED FAITH — THE STEPS TO A FRESH, STIRRING EXPERIENCE WITH GOD GENESIS 17:01–14

Introduction

Abram was desperate. He had been wanting a son ever since his marriage to Sara, and they most likely had been married for over fifty years. Thus, Abram's longing — his hopes and dreams — to have a son had been gnawing at him for over fifty years. But Sara had been unable to bear children. In desperation, when Abram was an old man, Sara had suggested that Abram take her maid, Hagar, and try to bear a son through her before it was too late. This Abram did, and Ishmael was born. Abram's dreams for a son were finally realized in Ishmael. Did Abram ever expect to have another son, a son other than Ishmael? Not likely, for he was now ninety-nine years old, and Sara was eighty-nine, both well beyond childbearing years. Abram was well aware of this fact; verse 17 tells us this. Apparently, Abram had felt that Ishmael was the son promised by God, that God was going to fulfil His promises through Ishmael. Abram loved Ishmael dearly. Note verse 18, where Abram cried out for God to remember and bless Ishmael. Ishmael was thirteen years old, and because of Abram's life-long desire for a son, he no doubt loved Ishmael more deeply than the average father. The bond between them was probably closer than the bond between most fathers and sons. Apparently, Abram had become comfortable and settled in life, somewhat complacent and lethargic, slumbering and slacking off. Abram just accepted reality: he was too old to bear any more children, and Ishmael was the only child he had. Thus, he felt Ishmael was bound to be the son promised by God.

But as this passage so clearly reveals, this was not God's plan. Ishmael was not the promised seed, not the son promised to Abram. Thus Abram's faith needed to be aroused once again. Abram needed God to arouse — stir, quicken, awaken — his faith to look beyond Ishmael...

- beyond the present
- beyond the physical
- beyond the possible

Abram needed to be renewed, to look at the impossible and to believe in the miraculous power and works of God. Note how this is exactly what we need. When a believer becomes comfortable — at ease, complacent, and lethargic in life, he needs to be aroused by God. He needs a fresh, stirring experience with God similar to Abram's experience. This is the subject of this important passage: *Abram Had the Covenant (Promises) Reconfirmed by God: Aroused Faith — the Steps to a Fresh, Stirring Experience with God, Genesis 17:1-27.*

- I. Step 1: receiving a fresh revelation from God: God is the Almighty God (v. 1).
- II. Step 2: making a new commitment to walk before God and to live a blameless, perfect life (vv. 1-2).
- III. Step 3: humbling oneself before God and listening to God (vv. 3-5).
- IV. Step 4: hearing and believing God's covenant or promises (vv. 6-8).
- V. Step 5: keeping the covenant and sharing in the ritual of the covenant: keeping its meaning always in one's mind (vv. 9-14).
- VI. Step 6: changing the relationship to one's family (vv. 15-18).
- VII. Step 7: accepting the will and purpose of God (vv. 19-21).
- VIII. Step 8: making a public decision and obeying God's instructions, His Word (vv. 22-27).

I. *Genesis 17:01 Receiving Fresh Revelation*

How can we arouse our faith, have a fresh, stirring experience with God? Step one is to receive a fresh revelation from God, that God is *the Almighty God* (El Shaddai). This was exactly what Abram needed, to see God as *the Almighty God, as El Shaddai*. God was about to tell Abram that he and Sara were to have a son despite their advanced age. They were well beyond childbearing years: Abram was ninety-nine years old and Sara eighty-nine. It was Physically impossible for them to conceive a child. Thus what Abram needed was to see God as *El Shaddai*, the Almighty God, the God who possessed all might and power, the God who could do anything. Almighty God could quicken the bodies of Abram and Sara and make them fertile and cause a son to be born to them. Abram needed to believe this promise; P needed to believe the impossible. Therefore, God revealed Himself as the Almighty God, the God of all power, the God who could fulfil His promise and who could meet the needs of Abram and his dear wife. (See *Almighty God*, Gen 17:1.)

Thought 1. God is the Almighty God; He possesses all might and all power. He can do all things; in fact, there is nothing that God cannot do.

Thus, when we face difficult, impossible circumstances, we should seek God, seek the power and promises of God. We should seek a fresh revelation from God, to see God as the Almighty God, as the God who can do all things.

Mat 19:26 *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Mat 28:18 *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*

Luke 1:37 *"For nothing is impossible with God."*

Eph 3:20 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

Jude 1:24 *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.*

Rev 19:6 *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder; shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns."*

Job 42:2 *"I know that you can do all things."*

Psa 115:3 *Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.*

GENESIS 17:01 ALMIGHTY GOD (*EL SHADDAI*)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless."

Genesis 17:01

The Hebrew means God Almighty or Almighty God. This name for God is used forty-eight times in the Old Testament, thirty-one times in the book of Job alone, and seventeen times in the rest of the Old Testament. The name *Almighty* (Shaddai) stresses both the power of God and the sufficiency of God. The Almighty God has the *power* to meet the needs of His people, no matter how great the needs may be, and the Almighty God is *sufficient* to meet the needs of His people. He is sufficient both in power and in possessions. He *has enough sufficiency, enough power and enough blessings* to take care of His people and His creation.

It should be noted that the Hebrew word "shaddai" is sometimes traced back to a Hebrew root that means breast but later came to mean *mountain*.

Other meanings have even been suggested for shaddai, but the strongest evidence by far is that El Shaddai means God Almighty or Almighty God. In the words of the great Lutheran scholar H.C. Leupold:

It would appear that this name Shadday, comes from the root shadad, which may mean, "deal violently, " but would in reference to God signify "to display power. " This derivation is so natural and the sense so satisfactory that efforts to lay inferior and unworthy meanings into this divine name should not have been made (H.C. Leupold. Genesis, Vol. 1, p. 512).

=> El Shaddai, Almighty God, has the power to fulfil His promises and covenants (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3).

=> El Shaddai, Almighty God, has the power to give mercy (Gen 43:14).

- => El Shaddai, Almighty God, has the power to bless, to give all the blessings needed in life, including the assurance of the blessings of heaven (Gen 49:25).
- => El Shaddai, Almighty God, has the power to reveal Himself to men (Num 24:4, 16).
- => El Shaddai, Almighty God, has the power to discipline (Ruth 1:20; Job 5:17; 6:4; see Jn. 15:2; Heb 12:10).
- => El Shaddai, Almighty God, cannot be understood, not perfectly (Job 11:7).
- => Man should return to the Almighty (Job 22:23).
- => Believers are to abide and live under the shadow of the Almighty (Psa 91:1).
- => El Shaddai, Almighty God, demands that we live a life of separation from the world (2 Cor 6:17-18).
- => El Shaddai, Almighty God, is the living and true God, the Sovereign Lord of the universe (Rev 1:8).
- => El Shaddai, Almighty God, is holy (Rev 4:8).
- => El Shaddai, Almighty God, shall rule and reign over the earth in the end time (Rev 11:17).
- => The wicked shall suffer the judgment and drink of the wrath of the Almighty (Job 21:20; Isa 13:6; Joel 1:15; Rev 16:14; 19:15). □

II. *Genesis 17:01–02 Making a New Commitment*

How can we arouse our faith, have a fresh, stirring experience with God? Step two is to make a new commitment to walk before God and to live a perfect or blameless life. The believer's life is not a static, complacent life. When God gives us a fresh revelation — some new insight or knowledge — He expects us to act, to put the new knowledge to use, and to grow thereby. This was true of Abram. God gave Abram a fresh revelation of Himself as the Almighty God, but God also told Abram to recommit his life and to do so more diligently than ever before. God charged Abram to make two commitments:

1. He was *to walk before God*: this means to live step by step in the presence of God; to live moment by moment in fellowship with God; to live in an unbroken consciousness of God; to be always aware of God's presence, power, and security. Three pictures are painted by this descriptive phrase.
 - => To walk before God means that we live before Him in a spirit of devotion, worship, fellowship and service.
 - => To walk before God means that we do not walk behind Him nor ahead of Him. But we walk before Him, conscious that He can see us and that He has the power to look after and care for us.
 - => To walk before God means that we are aware of His power to see and know all, aware that He will judge us for all we do.

Rom 6:4 *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

Gal 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

Eph 5:15 *Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise.*

Col 2:6 *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.*

Heb 4:13 *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

1 John 2:6 *Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.*

2. He was to *be perfect or blameless (tamim)*. This means just what the Hebrew word says: to be sound, complete, without any lack or failure whatsoever; it means to be blameless, without blemish. Scripture is *not teaching sinless perfection*, for no person has or ever will live a *sinless* and perfect life, no person other than Jesus Christ our Lord. But Scripture is teaching *holiness*, that Abram and all other believers are to walk before God diligently seeking to live perfect, blameless lives. We are...
 - to live holy lives before Him
 - to develop a heart that is single-minded, set upon God first and foremost throughout all of life
 - to live lives that are wholly devoted to the Lord
 - to be conformed to the image of Christ
 - to please God with all our hearts

Thought 1. We live in days of immorality, lawlessness, and violence; and tragically we make excuse after excuse for our loose living. We do our own thing, live like we want, and try to excuse our sinful behaviour by blaming society, environment, circumstances, or the weakness of human nature. But note the words of Arthur W. Pink as he explains the kind of life we are to live before God:

It [the word "perfect"] is the same word which is translated forty-four times "without blemish." Then, did God really say to Abram, "Be thou perfect?" He certainly did. And how could He say anything less? What lower standard than that of perfection can the Perfect One set before His creatures? Only too often men whittle down the Word to make it square with their own conceptions. All through the Scriptures, the standard of perfection is set before us. The law required that Israel should love the Lord their God with all their hearts. The Lord Jesus bade His disciples, 'Be ye therefore perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Mt. 5:48). And the

teaching of the Epistles is all summed up in that Word, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps” (1 Pet 2:21). Is not that [the steps of Jesus] the standard of perfection? Brethren, such is the standard set before us. This is that which we are constantly to strive after. With nothing short may we be satisfied. It is because such is the standard that none in the flesh have ever realized it, that each and all must say with the apostle,

Phil 3:12-14 *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

*Yet, nevertheless, the Word to us today is the same as that to Abram of old: “Be thou perfect.” Does someone murmur, “An impossible standard!” Then remember that it was El Shaddai who gave it. Who dares to talk of “impossibilities” when the Almighty is our God? Has He not said “My grace is sufficient for thee”? Then, do not charge Him with setting before us an unattainable standard: rather let us charge ourselves with failure to rest upon His Almighty arm, and confess with shame that the blame is ours through not appropriating His all-sufficient grace. (Arthur W. Pink. *Gleanings in Genesis*, p. 188)*

Why do we walk before God and diligently seek to live perfect or blameless lives? Because God has saved us and given us eternal life. He has forgiven our sins and accepted us, and He continues to forgive our sins when we stumble and fall — all to the praise of His eternal mercy and grace.

Mat 5:48 *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

2 Cor 13:11 *Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*

Phil 3:15 *All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.*

Col 1:28 *We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.*

2 Tim 3:16-17 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Heb 6:1 *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.*

James 1:4 *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

3. Note the result of walking before God and seeking to be perfect or blameless: God says that He will fulfil His covenant, His promises in the life of the believer (v. 2). God made a covenant with Abram: if Abram would walk before God diligently seeking to be perfect or blameless, then God would fulfil His promises; He would send *the promised seed* through Abram's descendants. God gives the same assurance to us all: God will fulfil His promises in the life of any person who walks before Him and diligently seeks to be perfect or blameless.

Mat 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*

Rom 4:20-21 *Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

2 Cor 1:20 *For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.*

2 Pet 1:4 *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

1 John 2:25 *And this is what he promised us — even eternal life.*

III. **Genesis 17:03–05 Humbling Oneself before God**

How can we arouse our faith, have a fresh, stirring experience with God? Step three is to humble ourselves before God and to listen to God, to His Word, to what He has to say to us. No doubt, Abram immediately fell on his face at the first appearance of God. The brightness of God's glory would strike any person to the ground. The point is this: Abram humbled himself before God; he got as low as he could to show reverence for God, that he was ready to listen and to receive whatever message God had for him. God said two things to Abram:

1. God reminded Abram that it was he who had been chosen to receive the covenant of the promised seed. He and he alone, not someone else, had been chosen to be the father of many nations.

Thought 1. The stress is upon God's call, the appointment of Abram to be God's servant. When God calls us — any of us — to serve Him, we must humble ourselves before Him and listen to His call.

2. God changed Abram's name to Abraham (v. 5). The meaning of Abram is *high father*, the meaning of Abraham is the *father of a multitude*. This experience with God was to be a turning point in Abram's life: *the promised seed* was soon to be born through Sarai. Thus, God gave Abram a new name to remind him of this experience with God: God's great call and covenant, of God's great assurance to fulfil His promise.

Thought 1. God has given the believer the very name of His own dear Son, *Christian* (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16). The great need of the hour is for believers to humble themselves before God and remember the great name He has given them, the name of *Christian*. The name should remind us...

- of our conversion experience
- of other deep experiences with God
- of God's great call to us, the great task He has given each of us to do
- of God's promises (covenant) of His assurance to fulfil the promises made to us

IV. Genesis 17:06–08 Hearing and Believing God's Covenant or Promises

How can we arouse our faith, have a fresh, stirring experience with God? Step four is to hear and believe the great promises of God. God made two great promises to Abraham. (Remember, these two promises are the two great promises of the Abrahamic covenant. See notes, Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21.)

1. There was the promise of *the promised seed* (vv. 6-7). Abraham was to be very fruitful. His descendants were to include nations of people, and some were to be very prominent, holding the highest office possible, that of king. Remember, Abraham was the father of...
 - the Arabs through Ishmael
 - the Jews through Isaac
 - the nations born of a third wife, Keturah (see Gen 25:1-4)
 - the believers of the world: Scripture says that we are the spiritual children of Abraham (Gal 3:7-9; see Rom 4:11-12)

Now, note what else God says: the promised seed is an everlasting covenant established by Him (v. 7). What does this mean? It means that Abraham will have descendants upon earth as long as the earth stands.

But note another fact as well: God established the promised seed as an everlasting covenant for a reason: that He might be the God of the promised seed, be their God forever. God wants a personal relationship with Abraham's descendants;

He wants a people with whom He can fellowship and pour out His mercy and grace, a people who will worship, serve and live for Him eternally.

This is very significant, for it tells us exactly with whom God established the everlasting covenant. The everlasting covenant applies to Abraham and all those who follow in the steps of Abraham. Who are they? Believers. All persons who walk upon earth believing God just as Abraham believed God; all persons who follow after God just like Abraham did. The point is this:

=> God gave Abraham the promise of the promised seed, of many nations and descendants.

=> But God also gave Abraham a very special promise: that He would establish the covenant of the promised seed *forever*. There would always be those who would do just what Abraham did: believe God and follow diligently after God. And God would be the God of these descendants forever. Note that this is the promise of eternal life — an everlasting covenant — to those who truly follow after God as Abraham did.

Gal 3:6-9 *Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

Rom 4:3, 11 *What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”....So then, he is the father of all who believe....in order that righteousness might be credited to them.*

2. There was the promise of *the promised land* (Canaan) (v. 8). Note that God also established *the promised land* as an everlasting covenant. Abraham and his descendants are to possess the land forever. But again, the everlasting, eternal reference must apply to the eternal land of Canaan, to heaven itself. Heaven is the only world that is eternal, that will last forever. The promised land is given to all Jews and Gentiles who believe and follow after God just as Abraham did. God is the God of those who believe in Him and follow Him. True, He wants to be the God of unbelievers, but unbelievers do not believe in Him. They will not let Him be their God. Consequently, God is not the God of unbelievers: the promised land is not theirs eternally. Unbelievers may possess it now, during this world, but they will not possess it eternally, in the perfect world that is coming. (See notes, Gen 12:1.)

Rom 4:13 *It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*

2 Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives. As you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Isa 65:17 *“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”*

Isa 66:22 *“As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure.”*

V. *Genesis 17:09–14 Keeping the Covenant and Sharing in the Ritual of the Covenant: Circumcision*

How can we arouse our faith, have a fresh, stirring experience with — God? Step five is to keep the covenant and share in the ritual of the covenant, keeping its meaning always in one's mind.

1. God demands that Abraham and his descendants keep the covenant (v. 9). This means that they were to believe God and His promises and never stop believing.

Thought 1. God demands that we all...

- continue to believe in the promised seed, both in the promised Saviour and in the promised nation of believers who follow after the faith of Abraham
 - continue to believe in the promised land, in the eternal land of Canaan, the new heavens and earth that is to come
2. God gave Abraham the sign or ritual of the covenant: circumcision. The outline of the Scripture is self-explanatory:
 - a. Circumcision was to include all male children (v. 10).
 - b. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant and only a sign (v. 11). It was a sign that a person was dedicating and committing his life to believe the promises (covenant) of God and to follow after God with his whole heart.
 - c. Circumcision was to be performed at a set time: when the child was eight days old (v. 12).
 - d. Circumcision was to include every household: every male, free or enslaved (vv. 12b-13).
 - e. Circumcision was to be an everlasting sign (v. 13b). What does this mean? How could a physical, earthly, temporal sign be an everlasting sign? It can't. Even common sense tells us this. Nothing on this earth lasts forever. God is referring to the meaning lying behind the sign or ritual, referring to the covenant itself. The sign was to remind believers of God's great covenant established with Abraham...
 - that the promised seed was assured; the Saviour would come to the earth, and there would always be a nation of believers who followed after God just as Abraham did, a nation of genuine believers who would live forever.
 - that the promised land was assured; the true children of Abraham would inherit the land, an eternal land forever and ever.
 - f. Circumcision was to be strictly observed: refusal to share in the ritual was to be severely punished. A man who refused to be circumcised was to be cut off from the people. This meant that the person was to be removed from those who believed the covenant and followed after God, cut off from those who walked after the faith of Abraham.

Thought 1. What does the ritual of circumcision say to believers today?

- (1) Jesus Christ has performed a *spiritual circumcision* upon believers. He has circumcised the believer, cut away the whole sinful nature of the believer. He cuts away more than just a piece of flesh; He performs radical surgery: He cuts away the whole body of sin, all the sin which the believer has committed and for which he stands guilty.

Col 2:11-12 *In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ. Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*

- (2) Circumcision — God’s true circumcision — is of the heart, not of the flesh. God never intended circumcision to be only a ritual, a physical sign that one belonged to the people of God. Yes, circumcision was to be a sign, but a sign of spiritual truth: a sign that a person’s heart belonged to God, totally and wholly, a sign that one was following and living for God, fully and completely.

Rom 2:28-29 *A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.*

Deut 10:16 *Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.*

Deut 30:6 *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.*

Warren Wiersbe says this about the believer’s spiritual circumcision:

*What does all of this [circumcision] mean to Christian believers today?... We have experienced a “spiritual circumcision” (Col 2:9-12) that makes us part of the “true circumcision” (Phil 3:1-3). When we trusted Christ to save us, the Spirit of God performed “spiritual surgery” that enables us to have victory over the desires of the old nature and the old life. Circumcision removes only a part of the body, but the true “spiritual circumcision” puts off “the body of the sins of the flesh” (Col 2:11) and deals radically with the sin nature. This “spiritual circumcision” is accomplished at conversion when the sinner believes in Christ and is baptised in the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). This baptism identifies the believer with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, and also in His circumcision (Col 2:11-12; Luke 2:21). It is not “the circumcision of Moses” but “the circumcision of Christ” that is important to the Christian believer. (Warren W. Wiersbe. *Be Obedient*, pp. 69-70).*

- (3) Believers are the true circumcision who worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, in His power to remove sin.

Phil 3:3 *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.*

Thought 2. Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism can be compared as follows:

Circumcision: *the cutting away of the flesh meant that one was...*

1. Renouncing the flesh, all human effort in approaching God.
2. Willing to believe God and to obey God, to be identified as a follower of God no matter the pain or cost.
3. Becoming identified with the people of God.

Baptism: *being immersed in water meant that one was...*

1. Dying to self and the past (Rom 6:3; Luke 9:23).
2. Being raised to newness of life, willing to live a new life for Christ no matter the cost (Rom 6:4).
3. Becoming identified with the followers of Christ, the church (1 Cor 12:13).

Thought 3. Romans 4:11 says that God gave circumcision to Abraham for two reasons: to be a sign of Abraham's faith and to be the seal of Abraham's righteousness. Note the verse:

Rom 4:11 *And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.*

Abraham received circumcision as a sign or symbol only. Circumcision was not the road into God's presence; it was not what made Abraham acceptable to God. Circumcision *did not confer* righteousness on him; it only confirmed that he was righteous. Circumcision did not convey righteousness on him; it only bore testimony that he was righteous.

Note that circumcision was both a sign and a seal. (See *Circumcision*, Phil 3:3.)

Circumcision was...

- a sign of celebration: it was a picture of the joy that the believer experienced in being counted righteous by God
- a sign of witness: the believer was testifying that he now believed and trusted God
- a sign of a changed life and a separated life: the believer was proclaiming that he was going to live for God, to live a righteous and pure life that was wholly separated to God
- a sign of identification: the believer was declaring that he was now joining and becoming one of God's people
- a sign pointing toward Christ's baptism

Circumcision was a seal in that it stamped God's justification upon Abraham's mind. Abraham had believed God, and God had counted his faith as righteousness. Circumcision was given as a seal or stamp upon his body to remind him that God had counted him righteous through belief. Circumcision was a seal in that it...

- confirmed
- validated
- strengthened
- assured
- authenticated
- verified
- substantiated

...what God had done for Abraham. Now note. The Bible never says that rites, rituals or ordinances bestow anything on anyone. They are merely signs of something that has already taken place. They are merely *shadows*, not the *substance* (Col 2:16-17).

This is not to take away from the importance of rites and rituals. They are extremely important, for they are the signs and seals of the believer's faith. To neglect or to reject a rite given by God is to be disobedient, and to be disobedient is a clear sign that one was never sincere in the first place. A person who believes, who truly trusts God, is ready to *obey* God, to follow Him even in the rites, rituals and ordinances of the church. We must always remember that Abraham was not saved by the ritual of circumcision, for circumcision had not yet been given by God as a sign.

=> But Abraham was *immediately circumcised* after God established circumcision as the sign of "righteousness by faith."

Very simply said, if circumcision had existed when Abraham first believed God, then Abraham would have been circumcised immediately. He would have obeyed God. How do we know this? Because Abraham truly believed God, and when a man believes God, he immediately begins to do what God says.

Note what other Scriptures say: circumcision (and all other rituals) are a matter of the heart, not a matter of being spiritually cleansed by physical and material substances.

Rom 2:28-29 *A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.*

Col 2:11 *In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision [operation, cutting away] done by Christ.*

Deut 10:16 *Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.*

Deut 30:6 *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. ■*

PHILIPPIANS 03:03 CIRCUMCISION

Before Christ, circumcision was the physical sign that a man was a follower of the true God. It was the sign that a man believed the promises that God had made to Abraham and Israel (see Gen 17:10-14; Rom 4:11). God never intended circumcision to have any value other than being a sign. It was not to bring righteousness to any man — not even to Abraham (Rom 4:9-10). It was given only as a sign — a sign of the faith that a man already had in God’s promises. Righteousness was imputed to the man because he believed God’s promises; then the man was circumcised as a sign of his faith in God (see Rom 4:11).

However, many abused God’s purpose for circumcision.

1. Some made circumcision a substitute for true righteousness. A man was thought to be safe and secure in the arms of God if he was circumcised. Believing God and loving men had little to do with being a child of God. Many forgot the circumcision of a pure heart and became Jews of the circumcision in name only. Circumcision became merely an external and physical sign.
2. Some used circumcision as a way to divide and categorize people. A great wall of division was thrown up around the uncircumcised (cp. Acts 10:1; 1 Sam 17:26, 36; 2 Sam 1:20). Any man who was uncircumcised was thought to be cut off and far off, not only from those thought to be the people of God (the Jews and the circumcised) but from God Himself. (See Acts 10:1-33.) An uncircumcised man was looked upon with bitter contempt. In the mind of the Jew, God was thought to love only Israel, despising and rejecting all other people (the Gentile nations).
3. God has done away with circumcision as a sign of righteousness since Christ has come (Gal 5:6; 6:15; Col 2:11). Righteousness is now of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter of rules and regulations (see Rom 2:25-29; 4:8-12, 23-25). The truly righteous man is the man who is God’s inwardly — the man whose spirit has been recreated into the very nature of God. God’s very own righteous nature is implanted into the very nature of man when he is born again. A man born again by the Spirit of God is God’s “new creation” (John 3:3f; 1 Pet 1:20; 2 Pet 1:4). □