

RELATED SCRIPTURES

Genesis 15:1–21 | Exodus 34:6–7 | Isaiah 54:10

STUDY FOR SERMON FROM 03.02.25

SUMMARY

The Sacraments are signs and seals rooted in God’s covenant promises. In remembering God’s covenant promises, it’s essential to understand that when God makes a promise, it is not contingent upon anything beyond his holy character; if he says it, he will do it. In Genesis 15, we see the execution of a covenant between the Lord and Abraham (then called Abram). The Lord’s promise to Abraham was to bless all the nations of the earth through him and his offspring (Genesis 15:1). In return, the Lord required obedience to all that he commanded. To seal this covenant, the Lord asked Abraham to prepare animal sacrifices and to cut and separate them in two. In the ancient world, when two parties executed a covenant in this manner, both parties would be expected to walk through the animal parts sealing their oath as if to say, “If either one of us breaks the terms of this covenant, may he be torn asunder just as these animal sacrifices.” But in Genesis 15:12, we read that the Lord put Abraham into a deep sleep while the Lord *alone* maneuvered through the animal sacrifices (Genesis 15:17). It was as if the Lord said, “I will take it upon myself to uphold the covenant for both parties.” In other words, the covenant would not fail because of Abraham’s inability to keep it. Though the Lord would see to it to uphold the covenant’s terms, he would require obedience nonetheless, and as such, he required Abraham to seal the terms of his covenant with the sacramental sign of circumcision (Genesis 17:1–13). Abraham was to apply this sign to himself and all the male members of his household who were eight days old and older. It was a covenant and a sign—not just for Abraham—but for his household. This act of cutting away the flesh corresponded to Abraham and his household cutting themselves away from the world and setting themselves apart. The sign of circumcision also corresponds to a negative seal: to fail to keep the terms of the covenant—to obey the voice of God—would result in being cut away, or cut off, from the favor of God. But because Jesus kept the terms on behalf of his people, we need not fear being cut off; *he was cut off for us*. Nonetheless, we are still marked as his and are set apart for his glorious purposes in Jesus Christ.

GROUP QUESTIONS

Share something that surprises, encourages, or troubles you from the sermon or your direct reading of Genesis 17:1–13.

If the Lord took it upon himself to keep the covenant on behalf of Abraham and his offspring, why should we still obey the voice of the Lord?

Do you have difficulty tying the act of circumcision to the sacrament of baptism? What similarities do you see between the two ordinances? What differences are there?

If there’s one thing Jesus would want you to walk away believing and receiving as a result of this portion of Scripture, what is that thing?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

As you pray, be sure to include today’s themes in what you bring before God.