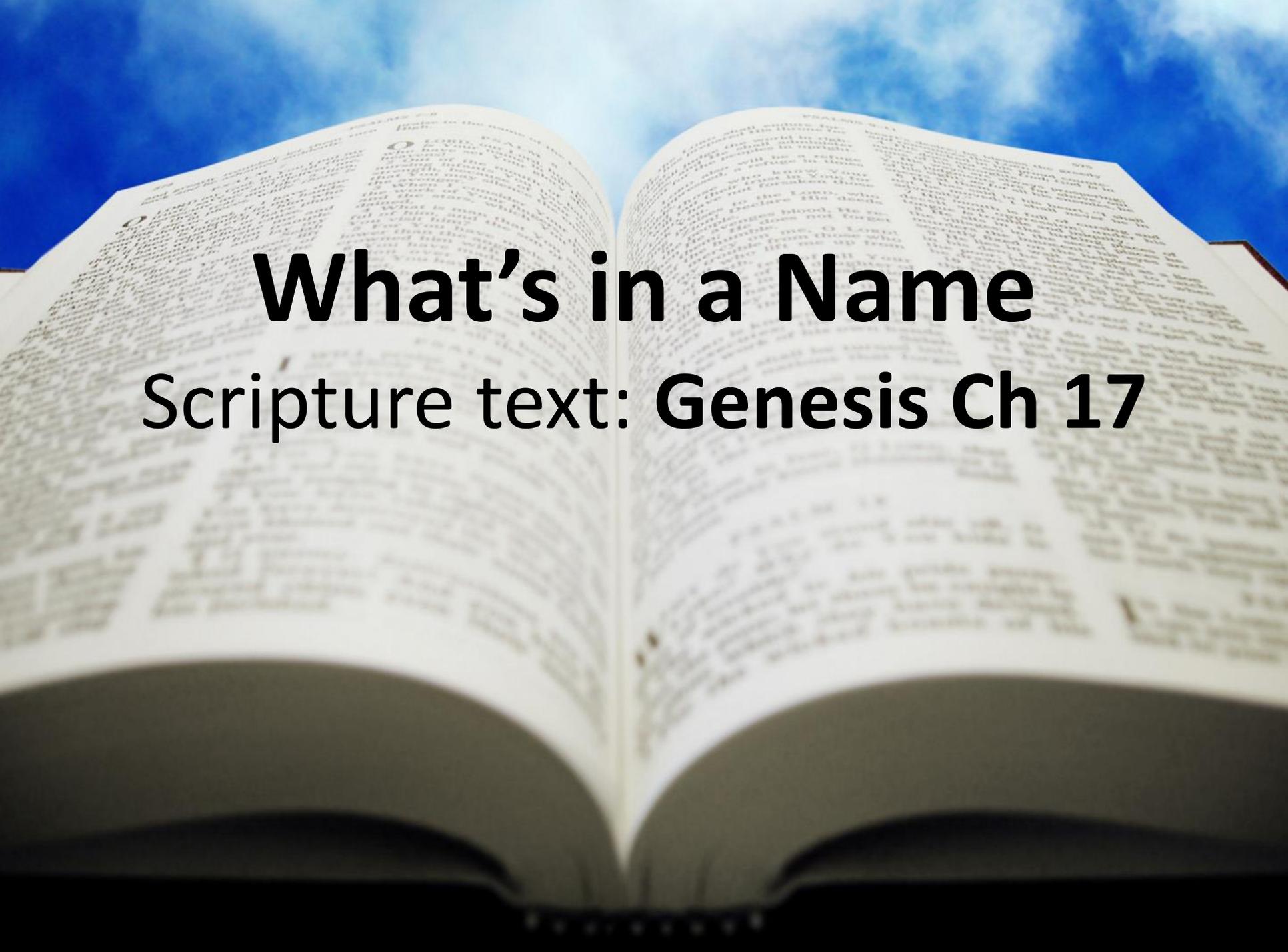


Welcome to Promise Land Bible Church
We're glad you're here!



An open Bible is shown from a low angle, looking up at the pages. The pages are filled with text, but it is out of focus. The background is a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

What's in a Name

Scripture text: Genesis Ch 17

At some point in your education, you may have read Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; and you discovered in act 2 that famous quotation:

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet.”

Juliet spoke those words as she talked to herself on her balcony, ignorant of the fact that Romeo was listening below. She was pondering the fact that she belonged to the Capulet family and he to the rival Montagues, and that this accident of birth hindered them from getting married.

What difference did two names make? No matter what his name was, Romeo was still her love!

Shakespeare notwithstanding, if you had asked a biblical character the question,

“What’s in a name?”

that person would have replied:

“Everything! Our names are very important!”

Names might record something significant about one's birth (Gen. 29:31–30:24) or about some life-changing experience. Jacob was renamed Israel after a night of wrestling with God (32:24–32), and Simon received the name Peter (rock) when he met Jesus Christ (John 1:40–42).

The names assigned to unborn babies even carried messages (Gen. 16:11; Matt. 1:18–25).

Names might record something significant about one's birth (Gen. 29:31–30:24 record the children of Jacob / Israel).

Genesis 30:22-24 Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, "**God has taken away my reproach.**" And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son!"

Jacob was renamed Israel after a night of wrestling with God (32:24–32)

Genesis 32:26-28 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "**What is your name?**" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "**Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.**"

Simon received the name Peter (rock) when he met Jesus Christ (John 1:40–42).

John 1:40-42 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "**So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas**" (which means Peter).

The names assigned to unborn babies even carried messages.

Genesis 16:11-12 And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. **You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction.** He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."

Matthew 1:21-25 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name **Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.**" All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and **they shall call his name Immanuel**" (which means, **God with us**). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. **And he called his name Jesus.**

In this chapter, you will discover four new names and a name that will always be old because it cannot be changed.

1. God Almighty (Gen. 17:1–2) *Revelation*. The Hebrew name is “**El Shaddai**” (shuh-DYE), and this is the first time it occurs in Scripture. “Shaddai” is translated as “**Almighty**” forty-eight times in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the Greek equivalent is used in 2 Corinthians 6:18 and Revelation 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7 and 14; 19:6 and 15; and 21:22. It is translated “**Almighty**” except in Revelation 19:6 (“**omnipotent**”).

“El” is the name of God that speaks of power; but what does “**Shaddai**” mean? Scholars do not agree. Some say it comes from a Hebrew word meaning “**to be strong**”; others prefer a word meaning “**mountain**” or “breast.”

Metaphorically, a mountain is a “breast” that rises up from the plain; and certainly a mountain is a symbol of strength. If we combine these several ideas, we might say that “El Shaddai” is the name of “**the all-powerful and all-sufficient God who can do anything and meet any need.**”

But why would God reveal this name to Abraham at this time, at the close of thirteen years of silence?

Because God was going to tell His friend that Sarah would have a son. The Lord wanted Abraham to know that **He is the God who is all-sufficient and all-powerful, and that nothing is too hard for Him.** God says “I will” twelve times in this chapter; **He is about to do the miraculous.**

After Abraham's battle with the four kings, God came to him as a warrior and told him He was his **"shield."** When Abraham wondered about his refusal of Sodom's wealth, God told him He was his **"exceedingly great reward"** (Gen. 15:1). Now when Abraham and Sarah were "as good as dead," **God assured them that He was more than sufficient to bring about the miracle birth.** **God comes to us in the ways we need Him most.**

Responsibility. Revelation always brings responsibility. Enoch and Noah had walked with God (5:22; 6:8–9), **but Abraham was to walk before God, that is, live in the knowledge that the eyes of God were always upon him.**

Hebrews 4:13-14 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

The word **“perfect”** does not mean **“sinless,”** for that would be an impossible goal for anyone to reach (1 Kings 8:46).

The word means **“single-hearted, without blame, sincere, wholly devoted to the Lord.”** In Exodus 12:5, the word refers to a **“perfect” sacrifice without blemish.**

It was a call for integrity.

This is not to suggest that God's people should settle for anything less than **striving to conform to His will. "His desire for us should be our aim and desire for ourselves,"** wrote Alexander Maclaren. **"It is more blessed to be smitten with the longing to win the unwon than to stagnate in ignoble contentment with partial attainments. Better to climb, with faces turned upwards to the inaccessible peak, than to lie at ease in the fat valleys"** (*Expositions of Holy Scripture, vol. 1, p. 120 [Baker Book House, 1974]*).

The secret of a perfect walk before God is a personal worship of God.

Like Abraham, every believer must fall before the Lord and yield everything to Him.

If He is “El Shaddai—God Almighty,” then who are we to resist His will?

Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**

Relationship.

The phrase “**My covenant**” is used nine times in this chapter and defines God’s relationship with Abraham. This was not another covenant, different from the one God had already established with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–21).

It was a reaffirmation of that covenant, with the important addition of circumcision, the sign and seal of the covenant.

God promised once again to multiply Abraham's family, even though he and his wife did not have any children. His descendants would be "**as the dust of the earth**" (13:16) and as the stars of the heavens (15:5).

These two comparisons—earth and heaven—suggest that Abraham would have a physical family, the Jews (Matt. 3:9), and a spiritual family made up of all who believe in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26–29).

Matthew 3:9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, **God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.**

Galatians 3:26-29 for in Christ Jesus you are all **sons of God, through faith.** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ **have put on Christ.** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for **you are all one in Christ Jesus.** And if you are Christ's, then **you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.**

2. Abraham (Gen. 17:3–14, 23–27)

The people. “Abram” means “**exalted father**”; “Abraham” means “**father of a multitude.**”

When Abraham informed the people in his camp that he had a new name, some of them must have smiled and said, “**Father of a multitude! Why, he and his wife are too old to have children!**” Whether he looked beneath his feet or up into the heavens, or whenever anyone called him by name, **Abraham was reminded of God’s gracious promise to give him many descendants.**

Keep in mind that Abraham's descendants include not only the Jewish people, but also the Arab world (through Ishmael) and the nations listed in Genesis 25:1–4. All who trust Jesus Christ as Savior are spiritual children of Abraham (Gal. 3:6–9), and that will be a vast multitude.

Revelation 7:9 After this I looked, and **behold, a great multitude that no one could number**, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

Galatians 3:6-9 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? Know then **that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.** And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "**In you shall all the nations be blessed.**" So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

In being fruitful for God, we have nothing in ourselves that will accomplish the task.

Abraham and Sarah had tried their own plan, and it failed miserably. Jesus said, “Without Me, ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

“We say that we depend on the Holy Spirit,” wrote Vance Havner, “but actually we are so wired up with our own devices that if the fire does not fall from heaven, we can turn on a switch and produce false fire of our own.”

I read about a young Scottish minister who walked proudly into the pulpit to preach his first sermon. He had a brilliant mind and a good education and was confident of himself as he faced his first congregation. But the longer he preached, the more conscious everyone was that “the Lord was not in the wind.” He finished his message quickly and came down from the pulpit with his head bowed, his pride now gone. Afterward, one of the members said to him, “If you had gone into the pulpit the way you came down, you might have come down from the pulpit the way you went up.”

The land. God's everlasting covenant also included an **everlasting possession**: the land of Canaan. This land is a **battleground today** and always will be until the Lord returns to reign. **But as far as God's covenant is concerned, the land belongs to Israel.**

The Jews' **ownership of the land depends solely on God's gracious covenant with Abraham**: God gave them the land. But their possession and enjoyment of the land **depends on their faithfulness to obey the Lord.**

This was the theme of Moses' messages in Deuteronomy.

More than sixty times in that book, Moses told the people they would inherit or possess the land; and at least twenty-five times, Moses reminded them that **the land was a gift from the Lord**. God's name was there (Deut. 12:5, 11, 21), and He would watch over the land to bless it, **if His people walked in His ways**.

The only piece of ground all the patriarchs possessed was the cave Abraham purchased from Ephron, the son of Zohar, to become a family burial place (Gen. 23; 49:29–31).

Jacob and his family had to leave the land and go to Egypt (Gen. 46), but God had promised that they would return to Canaan at the appointed time (15:13–17).

Joshua led them into their land where they conquered the inhabitants and claimed their inheritance. **But the people did not stay true to the covenant, so God had to discipline them in the land (Jud. 2:10–23).**

He raised up enemy nations to defeat Israel and put her in bondage. **Israel was in the land, but she did not control it or enjoy it (Deut. 28:15ff).**

During the reigns of David and Solomon, the people enjoyed their inheritance and served the Lord faithfully. **But after the kingdom divided, Israel and Judah both decayed spiritually** (except for occasional interludes of revival) and ended up in bondage: Assyria defeated Israel, and Babylon conquered Judah. It was then that God disciplined His people outside their land. It was as though He were saying, **“You have polluted My land with your idols, so I will put you in a land that is addicted to idols.**

Get your fill of it! After you have been away from your land for seventy years, maybe you will learn to appreciate what I gave you.”

God permitted a remnant to return to the land, rebuild the city and the temple, and **restore the nation**; but it never became a great power again. However, whether Israel is faithful or faithless, the land belongs to her; and one day she will inherit it and enjoy it to the glory of God. **Israel's title deed to the land is a vital part of God's everlasting covenant with Abraham.**

The sign. In Genesis 17:4, God said, “As for Me”; but in 17:9, He said, “As for you” (NKJV, NASB, NIV). **Abraham’s part in the covenant was to obey God and mark each male in his house with the sign of the covenant.** Circumcision was not a new rite, for other nations practiced it in Abraham’s time; but God now gave it new importance and special meaning. **For the descendants of Abraham, circumcision was not an option; it was an obligation.**

It is important to note that circumcision was not a “sacrament.” The performing of it did not convey spiritual blessing to the recipient. An eight-day-old baby boy (Lev. 12:3) would not even understand what was going on; and when he got older, the ritual would have to be explained to him. **It was the obedience of the parents that was important; for if they did not obey God in this matter, their son would be cut off from his people (Gen. 17:14). The covenant people must bear the mark of the covenant.**

Since God's covenant involved Abraham's "**seed**," it was fitting that the mark of the covenant be on the male organ of generation. Since all people are conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5), **this special mark would remind them that they were accepted by God because of His gracious covenant. *It was God who chose the Jews, not the Jews who chose God*** (Deut. 7:1–11); and He chose them to be a holy people. Immorality was rampant among the Canaanite peoples, and was even a part of their religion; **but the people of Israel were "marked" to be separate from the evil around them.**

Unfortunately, the Jewish people eventually made this ritual a means of salvation.

Circumcision was a guarantee that you were accepted by God. (Some people today place the same false confidence in baptism, Communion, and other religious rites that can be very meaningful if rightly used.) They did not realize that circumcision stood for something much deeper: the person's relationship to God. God wants us to **“circumcise our hearts”** and **be totally devoted to Him in love and obedience.**

Deuteronomy 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:28–29).

Jeremiah 4:4 **Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds."**

Romans 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and **circumcision is a matter of the heart**, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Romans 4:9–12 makes it clear that the physical operation had nothing to do with Abraham's eternal salvation. Abraham had believed God and received God's righteousness before he ever was circumcised (Gen. 15:6). Circumcision was not the means of his salvation but the mark of his separation as a man in covenant relationship with God. The legalistic element in the early church tried to make circumcision and obedience to the Law a requirement for salvation for the Gentiles, but this heresy was refuted (Acts 15:1–35). In his Galatian Epistle, Paul argues convincingly for salvation by grace alone.

What does all of this mean to Christian believers today? **The seal of our salvation is not an external rite but the presence of an internal witness in the person of the Holy Spirit of God.** We have experienced a “spiritual circumcision” (Col. 2:9–12) that makes us part of the “true circumcision”. 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.

Ephesians 1:13-14 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, **were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit**, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Romans 8:8-10 Those who are **in the flesh cannot please God**. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, **if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you**. Anyone who **does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him**. But if **Christ is in you**, although the body is dead because of sin, **the Spirit is life because of righteousness**.

Romans 8:16 The **Spirit himself bears witness** with our spirit **that we are children of God**,

Philippians 3:1-3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, **look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.** For we are the circumcision, **who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—**

Circumcision removes only a part of the body, but the true **“spiritual circumcision”** puts off **“the body of the sins of the flesh”** and deals radically with the sin nature.

Colossians 2:11-12 In him also you were **circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ**, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

This “**spiritual circumcision**” is accomplished at conversion **when the sinner believes in Christ and is baptized by 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.