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The Family of Abraham: Part 7—The Covenant of Circumcision

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Within this episode, I discuss Genesis 17 and the meaning of circumcision. I mention Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's book, 'The Savage in Judaism': <https://amzn.to/2HufFVD>.

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Transcript

Welcome back. We have now reached Chapter 17 in our study of Abraham and his family, which is the seventh part of this series. Within this chapter, we see the events taking place in the 99th year of Abraham's life.

Now, this is 13 years after the events of the previous chapter. And at the end of the previous chapter, Abraham is 86, and so 13 years elapsed between those points. Abraham was 75 when he left Haran, so 11 years passed between the end of Chapter 11 and the end of Chapter 16.

And then between Chapter 16 and Chapter 17, 13 years. And now, for the next few chapters, you have one or two years and all these events that take place within them. So that's spread out until Chapter 21.

There's a significant series of events that occur at this period of time around the birth of Isaac. Why 99 years old? And what is the significance of the ages of people here? Ishmael would be 13. He's entering puberty.

And Abraham is 99. Now, what are those numbers associated with? Well, one thing you could think of is 100 is a super jubilee. It's a double jubilee.

And 14 is two weeks of years. It's 14 years. It's 2 times 7. And so you have in both cases 7 times 7, the 49, and then the 50th year is the jubilee.

So this is 50 times 2, and then you have 7 times 2 for the age of Ishmael. This is a significant transition point. Something's about to change.

And this is an event that prepares them for this. The giving of the covenant of circumcision prepares Abraham for what is about to take place for the birth of Isaac. Look through this chapter and you might see there are traces of chiasmic structures.

If you look in verse 3, it says, Then Abraham fell on his face and God talked with him, saying. And in verse 17, it says, Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart. So Abraham falling on his face at both ends.

The next verse, it says, As for me, behold, my covenant is with you and you shall be the father of many nations. And the previous verse before the end is, And I will bless her and also give you a son by her. Then I will bless her and she shall be a mother of many nations.

Kings of people shall be from her. So in both cases, you have Abraham promised that he will be the father of many nations. And then Sarai is told that she will be the mother of many nations.

What happens next? He's told that his name will be changed. No longer will he be Abraham. He will be Abraham.

At the other end of the narrative, you have, As for Sarai, your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. So there's another transition that occurs there. Next thing, that God will establish his covenant between me and you and your descendants after you and their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and your descendants after you.

And at the end, and the uncircumcised male child who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant. This is a weaker connection, but I think the connection might be in the everlasting generation.

Oh, the everlasting covenant. In both cases, that's mentioned. And the establishment

and the breaking of the covenant, that these are juxtaposed and the fruitfulness and the being cut off.

In one case, you have fruitfulness. In the other case, you have a sort of imposed barrenness cutting off from the life of the people. And then in the centre, you have this event flanked by two smaller chiasms.

You have the covenant declaration and the covenant declaration is found in verses 9 to 11. And God said to Abraham, as for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep between me and you and your descendants after you.

Every male child among you shall be circumcised and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins. And it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. This is a very significant event.

It changes a number of things. Abraham's had this relationship with God. He's been given all these promises.

And this actually solidifies a lot of these things. It's a sign. It's a symbol.

A symbol would be a better word that this actually manifests something of the reality of the covenant. It brings the covenant to light. The fact that it takes this particular form is not accidental.

It takes that form because that form is appropriate for what is taking place. The covenant is in part a cutting of the covenant. And there is a sense also that Israel is being cut off from other nations.

One of the things that circumcision does is it establishes a new body of people. Before this point you have Abraham very much associated with the line of Terah, with his brothers and others. And now you have this new body of people that are defined by this ritual.

And this differentiates them from other forebears. It differentiates them from brothers and others who would be associated with the broader line. And it gives them a very distinct identity.

Now what does circumcision mean? There are a lot of ways in which we can explore the meaning of circumcision. But I think the best thing to do is to focus upon the ways that the theme of circumcision is brought into relationship with other things in Scripture. So for instance in Exodus chapter 22 we read It's the end of chapter 22 of Exodus.

And as you look at that one of the things you notice, or you should notice, is that animals are fit to be sacrificed after the eighth day. When they've been separated from their

mothers and then they can be sacrificed, their fitting sacrifices. So circumcision I think is associated in part with sacrifice.

It's giving the child, dedicating the child to God. And we see this theme playing out throughout the story of Genesis. This giving over of the son to God.

Handing over of the son. This holding of the son with the open hand so that God might actually take or acquire it from the hand of the person who offers. Circumcision is also associated with rendering an organ functional.

If you look through the Old Testament and even in the New, you'll see references to circumcision in association with other bodily organs. The uncircumcised heart. The uncircumcised lips.

The uncircumcised ears. And in each of these cases the uncircumcision is the inability of that wild organ. That organ that has not been tamed.

That has not been circumcised to perform its proper function. And so there is a cutting off to render something functional. And I use the word wild there.

We'll get to that in a moment. The uncircumcised is something that's wild. That's not been tamed.

It's not domesticated. It doesn't belong to the house. Circumcision is also associated with fruitfulness and removing an obstacle to fruit fertility.

If you go to Leviticus chapter 19 and verse 23 following, you read When you come into the land and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten, but in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy.

A praise to the Lord. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase. I am the Lord your God.

So here you have the trees planted for fruit and for food. And they are not supposed to eat of those for the first three years. In the fourth year the fruit is dedicated to the Lord and after the fifth year they can eat.

So these juvenile trees which have just been planted, they're dedicated or they're uncircumcised. No one can eat of them. Until the fourth year that fruit is dedicated to the Lord, the first fruits.

And then in the fifth year the people can eat. Now what does this tell us about circumcision? Well it connects the symbolism of the fruit and the tree with the organ of generation, the male organ of generation. And that is seen as something that brings forth fruit, that sows seed, that is prepared for bearing offspring in some way.

What we see as we look in the example of the fruit tree, the cutting off or the pruning that would occur before that point. Pruning the tree before it becomes fruitful. That that is preparing for greater fruitfulness.

It allows it to be more fertile later on. And that's part of the promise that is given where it says, and in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase. It's one of the things that makes it more fruitful.

Now throughout the Old Testament what you'll notice is that there is a close, and we've already commented upon this at various points, there's a close correlation between Israel and the land and animals and other things like that. So when we look at Israel we'll see connections with the bull, with the ram, with the goat, with the turtle dove and the pigeon. I mentioned that already.

Israel is defined around these five sacrificial animals. And so those are the animals that are laid out as symbolism of Abram's descendants in chapter 15. In chapter 16 we see Ishmael described that he will be a wild ass man.

It's one of those expressions that gives us a sense of this is a wild donkey of a man. This is a man that's not tamed. This is a man who will dwell among his brethren but he's one of the strangers in the land.

The donkey or the ass was a creature that was within the land but was not tamed, was not domesticated, was not a clean animal in the same way. And so you have this ornery ass that's part of the farm for instance and it would be out there in the field and it would be tethered and would be part of the broader order of the household. But in some ways it wouldn't be able to be sacrificed in the same way as a son of the herd could or ram or some other animal like that.

Those are domestic animals whereas the ass is the resident stranger. And that's not unsurprising that the ass should be associated with the son of Hagar, the stranger. As you look throughout the Old Testament you'll see the way that the ass itself is treated in a way that shows that analogy between the ass and the stranger within the land.

The foreigner who's part of many of the rites, who can participate in many respects but in other respects is held out and restricted from what they can do. Now if we look through the other parallels that we see in scripture we'll see parallels for instance between untended vines which are called Nazarites and the Nazarite who has untended hair. If we look through scripture the hair is compared to foliage and so the land and the person, human person, are very closely related together.

And within that sort of association the fruitfulness of the person, the person as a fruitful vine or something like that, that is something that's related to trees of the land. And so Israel, if it's going to be a tended vine, if it's not just going to be a wild vine then it has to

be circumcised. And circumcision is in some sense a domestication of the fruitfulness of the vine so that it will be fruitful, it will bear more fruit and its fruit will be better.

Now this is significant. Circumcision is something that tames the natural wildness of fertility, particularly of the male sowing of the seed. That wildness is something that can be seen in the more general context that you see in Genesis where you have for instance Shechem and the relationship with Dinah or Abram and the relationship with Hagar.

We have other stories of Sodom. These sorts of stories are stories that show untamed sexuality, sexuality that's just wild, that's not being pruned in any way. And so this is the creativity of the human person is being pruned so that it would be fruitful in the proper way.

There is a restriction of that fertility and a taming of it and a bringing it into subjection to God. There's a sign of a sacrifice of that fertility to God that is dedicated to God. Now that difference between the wild and the cultivated and circumcision being the pruned man is important.

As we look through these texts I think what you'll notice is that the phallus, the male penis, is associated with the flesh. It's associated with a lot of the other things that the flesh is associated with too. So if you look in the New Testament you'll see the flesh being spoken of as a sort of natural power of the spirited man.

It's something that's associated with the body. It's something that's associated with sinful nature in some senses. It's something that's also associated, particularly focused upon the penis and upon the phallus.

And that's not an accidental association. It's an association with male creative power. The power to form civilizations, to make names for oneself, to make a generation, to be a powerful fruitful vine.

And that is something that we see in all societies, this danger of the untamed phallus. That sort of phallic power that's just left to run wild, that's untamed, that's undomesticated and just exercises its fertility in whatever way it wants. God is taming this.

And to ensure that one of the great signs of the covenant is the male generative organ, the male organ of creativity that symbolizes the man's thumos and spiritedness more generally, is something that is brought under divine control, that's sacrificed to God. There's a sort of symbolic castration involved here as well, that part of that organ is cut off. That organ that symbolizes a man's virility is symbolically offered to God.

Now, that is a very important thing to do. It's something that suggests the death of that organ, that Abraham is as good as dead. There's a sense of a giving up of the life of this organ.

Now, he can bear a child of the flesh beforehand, but now he's a tended person. Now he's a pruned man. And as a pruned man, he's no longer bearing wild fruit.

He's one who's going to bear the child of promise, the child that is the true seed that is being given by God himself. God, who has now taken the people into the covenant, tending them as his vine and preparing them to bear fruit. What else is going on here? It's the eighth day.

The eighth day is the day that the child is freed from the impurity that's associated with childbirth. So if you look in Leviticus chapter 12, it says, if a woman has conceived and born a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days, as in the days of her customary impurities, she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

So there's a transition here. For seven days, the child is associated with the uncleanness of the mother. And on the eighth day, the earliest possible time, the child is circumcised.

Now, if you look at other societies, many other societies celebrate circumcision independent of Abrahamic influence. This is something that plays on a more general body symbolism. It's not something that's just it's not just something that's instituted by God.

It's something that has a natural symbolic significance. And you'll see the same connections with fruit and fertility and trees and the male generative organ in various African rights. Person to read on this who I found very helpful and is at the root of many of these thoughts is Howard Eilberg Schwartz, whose book *The Savage in Judaism* is an absolutely splendid treatment of this particular issue of circumcision and the fruitful cut, as he calls it.

Circumcision is a symbolic cutting off of the flesh. Then it's something that tames the virility of man and it's something that brings it into cultivation. It happens at the earliest possible time on the eighth day.

It's not a choice. This is something that is part of your identity. It's not something that's just a rite of passage that occurs at puberty.

It's not coming of age, right? It's something that is a cut occurs at the very possible earliest possible point. It's a sign of one's belonging. It's the start of a new week as well.

And it creates a new body of people, as I mentioned earlier. Before the institution of circumcision, the boundaries of Abraham's house are not so clear. Who belongs to this new nation that God's going to make great? Who belongs to this new people? Who is in who is out? Circumcision helps define the lines of that.

It helps define the new peoplehood that's cut off from these previous peoplehoods, from

these previous nations that we see in the events after the events of Babel. It also creates a solidarity of men and a difference between men and women. The young male child is brought into the male community at that very early stage at the age of eight days of age.

He's connected with the male community and there's a solidarity that's formed there. There is something patrilineal about this that this connects fathers and sons. And as we look through the book of Genesis, we'll see a focus upon patrilineality and this nation being formed from fathers to sons and then all the way down sons, lines of sons.

And it's associated also with the giving of the name. We see this in the book of Luke as both John the Baptist and Jesus receive their names at the time of circumcision. It's something that is an acknowledgement of that person, of that child's belonging.

They've been released from their impurity and now they belong to the community. They've been marked out as those who have this identity as part of this pruned vine, that they will be part of this people that will be fruitful. And so the connection of circumcision with the promise of seed is very important.

The flesh that is cut off is again important. It's associated with the male genitive organ that brings forth fruit. And so the cutting off of this is preparing to bear seed and it creates a juxtaposition between men and women.

This is a right that is restricted to men. Women aren't circumcised. Men are circumcised.

And in circumcising men, it creates a sense of this male community, this bond between men and children. And that is always something that has more of a customary or cultural aspect to it. It needs to be constructed in a way that the relationship between mother and child does not.

When the child is born, there is a very natural connection with the mother, not just in the fact that it's proceeded from the wound, but also that's being drawn to the breast, things like that. Whereas with the child who's born, in that case, the male child is connected with the father as the father is particularly responsible for circumcising that child. There is an owning of that child.

There's a sense that that child is brought into a new solidarity. And there is also a sense that this is a people that has a destiny that is not individualistic. We tend to think about signs of the covenant in a very individualistic sense.

It's a thing for each individual. It's very much a sign of what is true for me. But the point of circumcision is it's a sign of a peoplehood and your participation in that peoplehood.

In the same way with baptism, we all have one baptism. Baptism is associated with childbirth. We are reborn.

We are born of the spirit and we are begotten again. And all these themes help us to understand why it is that baptism takes the form that it does, why it is that baptism, for instance, is for males and females, not just for men. But within this particular symbolism, how does the woman relate to circumcision? She's implicated.

We see that later on in Chapter 34 where they say after the seduction of Dinah or seduction, rape, however you interpret that, we'll get to that later on, that if they are circumcised, then they can intermarry. But if they are not circumcised, then they can't intermarry. And the assumption is that women who are part of a house in which the males are circumcised are brought into that, are implicated within that circumcision.

Now, this is a strange way of thinking for us. We think very individualistic. Individualistically, each person is working out their own identity.

But within Israel, one of the things that you'll notice throughout is that people are implicated in each other. The husband is the head of the house. The firstborn son is a priestly figure who represents the household.

But then we see the firstborn son is often replaced, as we see it in the story throughout the book of Genesis, the firstborn son replaced on many occasions. And then the firstborn son replaced in the story of the Exodus with the Levites. Now, in the story of Numbers from Exodus, but if we see in all of those stories, we'll see that the firstborn son and the sons more generally have implications for every other person within the family.

What happens to them, what they do is something that covers everyone else. So the sacrifice of the lamb is something that is for the whole family. It's not just for that individual.

In the same way, the mother is the tree of life at the heart of the family. She is the heart of the life of the family. She's the one from whom the family grows.

And the husband is the head of the family. He's the one who is the one from which it's named. He's the one who kind of sets the line of the tree, as it were, the patrilineal tree.

And all these different relationships are ones that are implicated in each other. So the woman has an interest in maintaining the tree of her husband. So if the tree of if the husband dies, she wants to maintain his name with the brother.

And so that's the Leverett marriage, right? And in all these different cases, I think what you're seeing is the fact that people are implicated in each other, that there is a common good. And each part is each person is a member who represents part of that common good. I think I've discussed this in a recent video on equality and the way that modern minds think about and how that differs from the Old Testament and New Testament text in various ways.

This also creates a relationship with circumcision. Circumcision creates a relationship with priesthood. The person who's circumcised is set apart for a sort of priestly vocation.

And this is something that I think you see also in the priestly initiation rites, where the priest had blood put on his big thumb, on his thumb, on his big toe and also upon his ear. And in each of these cases, these are corners of the human body. And I think that the phallus is another one.

So we have the four corners of the human body, like the four corners of the altar. It's associated with hearing, with walking and stepping and moving out into the world. The hand is the place of action, the thumb.

And then also the ear is the side of hearing and obeying. Each of these are dedicated to God in the same way as the foreskin is dedicated to God. The priest, in all the extremities of his body, is dedicated to God.

There's a sacrificial dimension to this. And if you look at the priestly initiation rites, there are sacrificial dimensions to that. Baptism is also associated with priesthood or withdrawing near.

Whether that's priesthood or bridehood, these things are closely associated. And I could get into that in another occasion. But the body is dedicated to God.

There is a sacrificial element. We have present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Our bodies are presented to God.

And in the same way, I think that circumcision and its association with priesthood show the way that the body as a whole is sacrificed to God, is presented. What else can we see? What happens in this particular context? I've mentioned already it's in the 99th year. And the 13th year, 99th year of Abraham's life, it's in the 13th year of Ishmael's life.

There's a transition about to occur. And as I've mentioned, there's a series of events that occur one after another. But particularly, there's judgment.

There's judgment that falls upon the cities of the plain at this point. There's a cutting off point. And the cutting off of flesh should be connected, I think, with the cutting off of flesh that occurs in Sodom.

We've seen the cutting off of flesh in the story of the flood. But I think the significance of circumcision is connected with that cutting off of flesh. What happens in circumcision? In circumcision, part of the flesh is cut off, the symbolic part, dedicating the whole body to the Lord.

There's a pruning of the body so that the body would be dedicated to the Lord. And it's

pruned so it will not just be all burnt up and destroyed. That then connects the cutting off of flesh that we see in the judgment on the cities of the plain, where we see a sort of wild, untamed sexuality.

A sexuality characterised by rapacious relations, not honouring boundaries between men and angels. And a sort of relationship that's also seen in Lot's relationship with his daughters, not honouring the differences of the family. This is not honouring the significance of the danger of incest.

And so all these boundaries are broken down and the boundaries that the difference that should be established between the sexes is also broken down in a vision of homosexual rape. And in each of these cases you're seeing untamed sexuality and circumcision is to tame that procreative power. To ensure that man's procreative instinct and also his phallic spiritedness more generally would be tamed to God.

And there's a sense in each of these cases of death and sacrifice that Abraham is symbolically castrating himself so that he will be brought back to life. And then these great powers that have not been tamed, that are wild, will be cut off. And that cutting off is something that we see elsewhere in scripture.

Where else do we see a significance of circumcision? In Exodus chapter 4 as Moses is entering into the land of Egypt, as God is about to come near and judge, he has to have his son circumcised. So Gershom is circumcised and it's a crisis moment because God comes near, God meets them on the way and if he has not circumcised his son, his son could be forfeit. Again this is a connection with priesthood.

Circumcision equips the person to come into God's presence. And God talks about the wholeness of Abraham and that wholeness I think is associated with circumcision. Circumcision renders through a fruitful cut the person whole.

Where else do we see circumcision? Circumcision must occur before someone participates in the Passover. And if someone does not participate in the Passover they will be cut off. That there is this threat with the coming of the angel of death.

And also where else does circumcision occur? It occurs just before they enter into the promised land. When they're coming into God's presence, when they're coming into the land, they must be circumcised. Now I think there may be some sort of almost Freudian theme there that as you're entering into the land you must prune the phallus.

You must be prepared for entering into the land to sow the seed, to be rooted within the land. You must first be pruned before you can do that. You can't be the wild people of the wilderness anymore.

Now you have to be prepared to no longer just be like the strangers who are the wild asses and things like that. The camels, the creatures of the desert that may be part of

the broader household but they're strangers. They're not fully residents.

They're not domesticated. You must be a domesticated people. And so circumcision must occur before they enter into the land.

And the land is seen in feminine terms in various ways that entrance in and circumcision I think are associated for that reason. When God comes near, if the human being is not prepared, if flesh has not been cut off, then there is a threat. And that cutting off of the flesh I think is also one of the reasons why the cross can be talked about as the circumcision of Christ.

It's the final decisive circumcision. It's the cutting off of the flesh in death. The cutting off of the Messiah is the cutting off that leads to this fruitfulness that can arise.

We are now, those who were once part of a wild vine, we're now planted into a cultivated vine. There is this cutting off of the tree as well. Christ is placed upon the tree.

He's the fruit on the tree and he's cut off. And this preparation for fruitfulness I think is part of what might be the underlying symbolism of Christ being crucified on the tree. And why Paul can speak about the circumcision of Christ.

And then baptism associates with that as we are baptised into Christ, the fruitful one, the Son. And as we are baptised into Christ, we are baptised on the other side of circumcision. The cutting off has occurred, the flesh has been removed and now we're placed within Christ.

And if the flesh is not cut off, then we are subject to the cutting off of all flesh. So the person who is not circumcised can be cut off from his people. In the ritual of circumcision that's what happens to the person who has broken the covenant.

The covenant then is intimately associated with circumcision. You cannot understand the covenant properly unless you connect it with this symbol. This symbol that brings to light what the covenant actually is.

This is something that's performed upon all the members of the household. It's not restricted to biological descendants of Abraham. It's to everyone who's within his household.

And that, I believe, is important because everyone is implicated within this, not just by natural generation, but by divine promise, by inclusion within Abraham. This is something that you see later on in the story of the Exodus. Israel is surrounded by a great multitude, a mixed multitude, and that mixed multitude is a distinct body from those who are just directly descendant from Israel.

This is a body of people that is brought into the life of Israel and gradually becomes

incorporated into the nation. They have Gentile ancestors, but they become part of the tribal order and they get included into tribes. This, I believe, helps us to understand that circumcision is not just about the flesh.

It occurs on the flesh, but it is about a negation of the flesh. And so tribes have marks in the flesh. They're very much about the flesh.

But this symbol is about the cutting off of the flesh, the pruning of the flesh, so that we might be fruitful in the spirit. God gives life where there is death. And this story is not just a story about the cutting off of the male foreskin.

It's also a story about the opening of the womb. There's a paralleling between the promise given to Abraham and the promise given to Sarai. Both of them have their names changed, Abraham to Abraham, father of many nations.

That change is significant because it's not just that he will be the father of Ishmael's nation. He will be the father of, I believe this is referring not to Ishmael at this point, but to the nation that's descended from Jacob, the nation that's descended from Esau. And perhaps also Midianites and others that descended from Keturah.

But that descent is something that makes Abraham the father of many nations, a number of peoples. Likewise with Sarai. Sarai's name is changed from my princess to princess, a more absolute statement about her identity.

And she is the mother of a great many nations. She will be a mother of nations, kings of people shall be from her. Something also that you see earlier on in the statement, or later on, where Abraham says, if only Ishmael would live before you.

And God promises, no, Sarah will bear a son and you will call his name Isaac. God will establish his covenant with him. But Ishmael will be blessed.

He has already been blessed and he will be made fruitful and he will multiply exceedingly. So there's a sort of mirroring of the experience of Abraham. Ishmael and Isaac mirror each other to some extent.

And later on it says, he shall beget 12 princes and I will make him a great nation. Now we should recognise that. 12 princes, 12 tribes.

There is a mirroring of Isaac and Ishmael. Again, I've talked about diptychs. We have a diptych between Abraham and Lot.

We have a diptych between Sarai and Hagar. We have a diptych now between Ishmael and Isaac that's starting to emerge. These two characters that will be juxtaposed to each other.

And we'll understand them better as we explore their relationship with each other. What

else can be said? As we look through this passage, I think one of the things that stands out is the significance of Isaac's name. Isaac is called Laughter and Abraham laughs.

That's his response, a laugh of joy. And later on you'll see that in chapter 18, Sarah laughs. As you look through the story of Isaac, you'll see that theme of laughter occurring on a number of occasions.

So Ishmael is laughing at Isaac. And so there's a threatening of - Ishmael is laughing. There's a threatening of Isaac's status.

And this is something we discussed on a recent Theopolis podcast that will be going out shortly. But look at these connections and you'll see the way that a person's name plays out their destiny. As you look through the story, you'll see that Isaac's name, Laughter, is played upon in a number of different ways.

First of all, in Abraham's response to the news. Then in Sarah's response to the news. Then in the way that Ishmael laughs, he Isaacs in a way that he is seen to be a threat to Isaac's status.

If Isaac is going to be part - if he's going to be the heir, then as long as Ishmael is there and Isaacing, he would seem to be a threat to the clarity of Isaac's status. So he has to be cast out. Later on we'll see Isaac, Isaacing with Rebecca and Abimelech finding that out and discovering the relationship between the two of them.

These are all significant ways in which we see that name playing itself out. There is a preparation here. Then Israel is pruned or Abraham and his family are pruned in preparation for judgement.

There's going to be a burning up of the false trees of the land, the wild trees, so that God can sow a cultivated and a tamed and a pruned nation. This is the pruning that prepares for God's advent. This is something that occurs on the eighth day, it occurs on the foreskin and I've discussed the significance of those things.

This is an event that I think is pivotal for understanding the story of Abraham. There is a movement here into an even greater stage of the covenant. We've looked as we've gone through at the way that the covenant promises ramp up stage by stage.

First of all God promises that he will make Abraham's names great, he will be a blessing and he will bless many nations etc. Then he promises that he will make his descendants numerous as the sand of the sea, numerous as the dust of the earth etc. That he will give them a place in the land.

Then all these different promises ramp up. There's a promise that the land will be given as an inheritance. There's the comparison to the stars of heaven not just the dust of the earth.

And here we have a cutting off of Israel from the other nations. A marking them out with the covenant, the covenant of circumcision. They are now a vine tended by the Lord.

A vine that will be fruitful, a vine that will receive the promise of seed that God has given. And now they're prepared for that time of judgement where God will come upon the land. And there will be this initial judgement as the cities of the plain in the decisive act of judgement will be removed from the scene.

Thank you very much for listening. If you have any questions about this or anything else please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you would like to support this and other videos like it, particularly the transcription at the moment.

I'm trying to get every single one of these videos transcribed and it's expensive to do so. But if you could help support that it would be wonderfully appreciated. If you have found these videos helpful I would love to get them accessible to more people.

You can do so using my Patreon or PayPal accounts. The links for both of those are in the notes. Lord willing I'll be back again tomorrow with the eighth part of this series.

Thank you very much for listening. God bless.