

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 17

This chapter treats of a covenant made with Abram, sometimes called the covenant of circumcision, the time when God appeared to him, and promised to make it, and did, (^{<0170>}Genesis 17:1-3); the particulars of it, both with respect to himself, whose name was now changed, and to his posterity, (^{<01704>}Genesis 17:4-8); the token of it, circumcision, the time of its performance, and the persons obliged to it, (^{<01709>}Genesis 17:9-14); the change of Sarai's name, and a promise made that she should have a son, to the great surprise of Abraham, (^{<01715>}Genesis 17:15-17); a prayer of his for Ishmael, and the answer to it, with a confirmation of Sarah's having a son, whose name should be called Isaac, and the establishment of the covenant with him, (^{<01718>}Genesis 17:18-22); and the chapter is closed with an account of the circumcision of Abraham, and all his family of the male sort, agreeably to the command of God, (^{<01723>}Genesis 17:23-27).

Ver. 1. *And when Abram was ninety years old and nine*, etc.] Which was thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael last mentioned; so many years more it was before he is expressly told he should have a son by Sarai, or had the promise of Isaac, which was for the trial of his faith; and his age is here observed, that the power of God might be more manifest in fulfilling his promise, and giving him a son by Sarai:

the Lord appeared to Abram; in a visible manner, in an human form very probably, even the Logos, the Word and Son of God: it seems as if the Lord had not appeared to him since the birth of Ishmael, until this time; and if so, it may be thought to be a correction of him for listening to the voice of his wife in marrying Hagar, without asking counsel of God:

and said unto him, I [am] the Almighty God; as the Word of God is, as appears by his creation of all things, his in sustaining of them, his government of the church, his redemption of it, and preservation of his people safe to glory, (see ^{<0108>}Revelation 1:8); and this epithet is very appropriate here, when the Lord was about to give out a promise of a son to Abram and Sarai, so much stricken in years. Some render it "all

sufficient”^{f1058}, as Jehovah is, sufficient in and of himself, and for himself, and stands in no need of any, or of anything from another; and has a sufficiency for others, both in a way of providence and grace:

walk before me: not as though Abram had not so walked, or had discontinued his walk before God, but that he would go on to walk by faith in a dependence on him for everything he wanted, both with respect to things temporal and spiritual; and to walk in all his commandments and ordinances, that he either had given, or should give him; and all this as in his presence, and under his watchful eye, that sees and observes all things, and before whom all things are naked and open, as all are to the essential Word of God, (^{<3842>}Hebrews 4:12,13);

and be thou perfect: upright and sincere in acts of faith, and in duties of religion, and go on to perfection; which though a sinless one is not attainable in this life, is desirable, and is to be had in Christ, though not in ourselves: but here it chiefly denotes an holy and unblamable life and conversation, which though not entirely free from sin, yet without any notorious ones, which bring dishonour to God, and disgrace upon a man’s character and profession, (see ^{<1009>}Genesis 6:9). This respects not perfection in his body or flesh, as the Targum of Jonathan paraphrases it, through circumcision, by which the Jews^{f1059} fancy Abram became perfect, but was not till circumcised.

Ver. 2. *And I will make my covenant between me and thee*, etc.] The covenant of circumcision, so called from the token of it, which God is said to make or give^{f1060}, being his own constitution, and depended on his sovereign will and pleasure, (see ^{<4178>}Acts 7:8);

and will multiply thee exceedingly; as he had before promised at several times, and now renews it, lest he should think that Ishmael was the promised seed; for though Hagar’s seed is promised to be multiplied, yet here Abram’s seed by Sarai is intended, which should be exceeding exceedingly, or in great abundance multiplied; and especially as this may include both his natural seed by her, and his spiritual seed among all nations, who are of the same faith with him, (see ^{<1112>}Genesis 12:2 13:16 15:5).

Ver. 3. *And Abram fell on his face*, etc.] At the sight of so glorious a Person that appeared to him, and in reverence of his majesty, and as sensible of his unworthiness of such a visit, and of having such favours

bestowed upon him; and not because he was not as yet circumcised, as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it; and so other Jewish ^{f1061} writers observe, that before he was circumcised he fell, when God spoke to him, but afterwards he sat and stood, (^{<0180E>}Genesis 18:1); but it may be observed, that not only uncircumcised persons, as Balaam, (^{<0423I>}Numbers 22:31), in whom Jarchi instances, but circumcised ones, as Ezekiel, (^{<30E3>}Ezekiel 1:28), Joshua, (^{<0654>}Joshua 5:14), and others, have fallen on their faces at a divine appearance:

and God talked with him; after he was raised up, and was strengthened and encouraged to stand up before God, and hear what he had to say to him; for after this we read of his falling on his face again, (^{<01717>}Genesis 17:17); which shows that he had been erect, after he first fell on his face: saying; as follows.

Ver. 4. *As for me, behold, my covenant [is] with thee*, etc.] Who was gracious to make it, faithful to keep it, and immutable in it, though Abram was but a man, and sinful:

and thou shalt be a father of many nations: as he was of many Arabian nations, and of the Turks in the line of Ishmael; and of the Midianites, and others, in the line of his sons by Keturah; and of the Israelites in the line of Isaac, as well as of the Edomites in the line of Esau; and in a spiritual sense the father of all that believe, in all the nations of the world, circumcised or uncircumcised, as the apostle explains it, (^{<6411>}Romans 4:11,12,16-18).

Ver. 5. *Neither shall thy name be any more called Abram*, etc.] Which signifies an “high father”, which name he bore for many years before he was the father of anyone:

but thy name shall be Abraham: with all addition of the letter **h** inserted into it, and makes the last syllable two, “raham”: which word in the Arabic language, as Hottinger ^{f1062} observes, signifies “numerous” ^{f1063}; so that with this addition his name Abraham may be interpreted, the father of a numerous offspring; and with this agrees the reason of it, as follows:

for a father of many nations have I made thee; not that he was so already in fact, but in the purpose and promise of God, (^{<6417>}Romans 4:17); Abraham has not only been the father of many nations, in a literal sense, as before observed, but in a mystical sense, of the whole world; that is, of all in it that believe, whether Jews or Gentiles; and so the Rabbins ^{f1064}

interpret it: at first, they say, he was the father of Aram, and therefore his name was called Abram, but now he is the father of the whole world, and therefore called Abraham; and so Maimonides^{f1065} himself says, quoting this passage,

“behold he is the father of the whole world, who are gathered under the wings of the Shechinah.”

Ver. 6. *And I will make thee exceeding fruitful*, etc.] In children, for he had not only a son by Sarai, from whom sprung a numerous offspring, but he had six sons by Keturah, who became the heads of large nations:

and I will make nations of thee; as the nations of Israel and Judah, of the Midianites and Edomites, of the Arabs, Saracens, and Turks:

and kings shall come out of thee; as the twelve princes of Ishmael, the kings of Edom and Midian, of the Arabs, Saracens, and Turks, and of Israel and Judah, and especially, as observed by Grotius, and others, the King Messiah: to which may be added, in a mystical sense, all Christian kings and princes of the same faith with him; nay, all believers, who are all kings and priests unto God.

Ver. 7. *And I will establish my covenant between me and thee*, etc.] Not only renew it, but confirm it by the following token of circumcision:

and thy seed after thee, in their generation; such blessings in it as belonged to his natural seed, as such he confirmed to them, to be enjoyed by them in successive ages; and such as belonged to his spiritual seed, to them also, as they should be raised up in future times in one place and another:

for an everlasting covenant; to his natural seed, as long as they should continue in the true worship of God; and in their own land; or until the Messiah came, in whom the covenant of circumcision had its accomplishment, and was at an end; and to all his spiritual seed, with respect to the spiritual blessings of it, which are everlasting, and are never taken away, or become void;

to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee; to his natural seed, as the God of nature and providence, communicating the good things of life unto them; protecting, preserving, and continuing them in the land he gave them, and in the possessive of all the good things in it, so long as they were obedient to him as their King and their God; and to his spiritual seed, as the

God of all grace, supplying them with grace here, and bestowing upon them glory hereafter.

Ver. 8. *And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee*, etc.] To him in right, and to them in possession, and for an inheritance:

the land wherein thou art a stranger; or “the land of sojournings” or “pilgrimages”^{f1066}, which were many; for he often removed from place to place, and sometimes sojourned in one place, and sometimes in another:

all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; this respects only the natural seed of Abraham, and those in the line of Isaac and Jacob, to whom this land was given to hold for ever, in case they were obedient to the will of God; and therefore whenever they were disobedient, they were carried captive from it, as they are at this day; but when they shall be converted, they will return to this land and possess it to the end of the world; and which was a figure of the heavenly inheritance, which is an eternal one, and will be enjoyed by all his spiritual seed to all eternity:

and I will be their God; as he was to all the natural seed of Abraham in a spiritual sense, to whom the adoption belonged, and whom he chose and separated as a peculiar people to himself, and bestowed in providence many peculiar favours upon them, both in a civil and religious way; and as he is to all his spiritual seed in an evangelic sense, to whom he stands in the relation of their covenant God and Father in Christ, in whom he blesses them with all spiritual blessings, and will continue to be so unto death, and to all eternity.

Ver. 9. *And God said unto Abraham, thou shalt keep my covenant therefore*, etc.] Observe the sign or token of it, circumcision, in the manner after related:

thou, and thy seed after thee, in their generations; in successive ages until the Messiah come, the end of the law for righteousness.

Ver. 10. *This [is] my covenant*, etc.] The token of it, for the promise itself was given before, which is more properly the covenant; circumcision is so called in an improper sense, being only the sign of it:

which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee; which was to be observed by Abraham, and the males in his house then with him,

as Ishmael, and those that were born in his house, or bought with his money, and by his posterity in succeeding ages, and it is what follows:

every man child among you shall be circumcised; this was the first institution of circumcision, and it was an institution of God, and not of man. Indeed Herodotus says^{f1067}, that

“the Colchi, Egyptians, and Ethiopians only of all men circumcised from the beginning; and the Phoenicians and Syrians, which are in Palestine, learnt it of the Egyptians, as they themselves confess.”

So Diodorus Siculus^{f1068} speaks of circumcision as an Egyptian rite, and says there are some who make the nation of the Colchi, and of the Jews, to come from the Egyptians: hence he observes, that with these nations there is an ancient tradition to circumcise their newborn infants, which rite was derived from the Egyptians: but as the original of the Jewish nation is mistaken, so likewise the original this rite. And they may as well be thought to be mistaken in the one as in the other. Those in Palestine that were circumcised were the Jews only, as Josephus^{f1069} observes; but they did not learn this rite from the Egyptians, nor do they ever confess it, but on the contrary suggest, that the Egyptians learnt it from them in the times of Joseph; for their principal lexicographer says^{f1070}, the Egyptians were circumcised in the times of Joseph, and when Joseph died they drew over the foreskin of the flesh. The Colchi indeed, who were a colony of the Egyptians, might learn it from them; and so the Ethiopians, who were their neighbours likewise, and agreed with them in many things. Artapanus^{f1071}, an Heathen writer, says, indeed, that the Ethiopians, though enemies, had such a regard for Moses, that they learned from him the rite of circumcision; and not only they, but all the priests, that is, in Egypt; and indeed the Egyptian priests only, and not the people, were circumcised. It is not very difficult to account for it, how other nations besides the Jews should receive circumcision, which was first enjoined Abraham and his seed; the Ishmaelites had it from Ishmael the son of Abraham; from them the old Arabs; from the Arabs, the Saracens; and from the Saracens, the Turks to this day: other Arabian nations, as the Midianites, and others, had it from the sons of Abraham by Keturah; and perhaps the Egyptians and Ethiopians from them, if the former had it not from the Israelites; and the Edomites had it from Edom or Esau, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham; so that all originally had it from Abraham, and he by a divine command. It is not so much to be wondered at, that Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus,

men either imposed upon by the Egyptian priests, as the former, or wrote in favour of that nation, as the latter, and wholly ignorant of divine revelation, should assert what they have done; but that Christian writers, who have the advantage of divine revelation, and have read the history of the Bible, such as Marsham, Spencer, and Leviticus Clerc, should incline to the same sentiment, is amazing; and especially when our blessed Lord has expressly said in (^{<R072>}John 7:22), that circumcision is “of the fathers”, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, first given to them, and practised by them. Even Theodotus ^{f1072}, an Heathen writer, agrees with this sacred testimony of Moses, when speaking of the circumcision of Shechem, in the times of Jacob, he traces this rite to its original, and observes, that when Abraham was brought out of his own country, he was ordered “from heaven” to circumcise every man in his house. It may indeed seem strange how it should obtain in the islands of the West Indies, as in Jucataka, Sancta Crux, and others, where the Spaniards found in the beginning of the sixteenth century those isles inhabited by idolaters, who were circumcised ^{f1073}.

Ver. 11. *And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin*, etc.] Or “the foreskin of your flesh” ^{f1074}; by an hypallage ^{f1075}, the manner in which this was performed may be seen in the Jewish writers ^{f1076}, as well as the cure of the wound made, is particularly described by Leo Modena ^{f1077}, and which when performed, they used to provide a dish full of sand to put the foreskin into; which was done, as Buxtorf ^{f1078} relates, to show that their seed should be as the sand of the sea, and to call to mind what Balaam said of them, (^{<R230>}Numbers 23:10); and with respect to the old serpent that deceived man, whose food is the dust of the earth, (^{<R084>}Genesis 3:14): the instrument with which this operation was performed, according to the Jewish canons, was as follows ^{f1079},

“they may circumcise with anything, with a flint, or with glass, and with anything that cuts, excepting with a cane or reed, because of danger; but it is best to circumcise with an iron instrument, either with a knife or a razor; all Israelites use a knife.”

The persons who might perform it, according to their rules, are these;

“all are fit to circumcise (says Maimonides ^{f1080}), even an uncircumcised person, and a servant, and a woman, and a little one may circumcise where there is no man, but a Gentile may not circumcise at all; and if he does circumcise, there is no need to repeat it, and to circumcise a second time.”

It is a little differently expressed by another ^{f1081} writer of theirs,

“all are fit to circumcise, even a servant, a woman, and a little one, and an uncircumcised Israelite, whose brethren died through circumcision; but if there is an Israelite grown, and knows how to circumcise, he is to be preferred before them all; (some say a woman may not circumcise;) but an idolater, though he is circumcised, may not circumcise at all; but if he does, there is no need to repeat it, and to circumcise else a second time:”

and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you: of the promise of God to Abraham, that he should be the father of many nations. The apostle explains it, (^{f1081}Romans 4:11); to be a seal, or what gave assurance to Abraham, or was a sure token to him, that righteousness would be wrought out by Christ, by his obedience, and the shedding of his blood, which is received by faith; and that this was imputed to him while he was uncircumcised, (^{f1082}Genesis 15:6); and that this also would “be in the uncircumcision”, or uncircumcised Gentiles that should believe as he did, and be imputed to them, as to him, and so he would appear to be the father of them all. Moreover, this was a sign or token of that part of the promise or covenant, which gave to his seed the land of Canaan: this was a seal of the lease of that land, which was made while Abraham was in it, and which the Israelites were obliged to submit to, upon entrance into it in Joshua’s time, as a token of it; and which they were to observe while in it until the Messiah’s coming, and by which they were distinguished from other nations, and kept a distinct nation, that it might appear he came of them: and to use the words of Tacitus ^{f1082}, this rite was instituted “ut diversitate noscantur”, that they might be distinguished and known from others; it was typical of Christ, the end of it, who submitted to it, that it might appear he was really man, a son of Abraham, and a minister of the circumcision, and was made under the law, and so laid under obligation to fulfil it; and that he was to satisfy for the sins of men by the effusion of his blood, and endure pains and sufferings, signified thereby: it was also an emblem of spiritual circumcision, or circumcision of the heart, which ties in the putting off the body of sin, in renouncing man’s own righteousness, and in his being by the grace of God, and blood of Christ, cleansed from the impurity of his nature, propagated by carnal generation, in which the member circumcised has a principal concern.

Ver. 12. *And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you,* etc.] A son or infant of eight days old; it might not be circumcised before, but for some reasons might be deferred longer. The reasons why this rite was ordered to be performed in infancy, according to Maimonides ^{f1083}, were, because if it had been deferred to riper age it might have been neglected, and never performed; and because at such an age the pain is not so sensibly felt, by reason of the tenderness of the skin, and the weakness of the imagination; as also because the affections of parents are not then so strong as they are when one year, and especially three or four years old; and particularly it was ordered on the eighth day, because all animals, as soon as born, on account of their great humidity, are very weak, and scarce any other than they were in their mother's womb, until the end of seven days, after which they begin to be reckoned among those that perceive the air of this world; and so he remarks the same is to be observed in beasts, that seven days they were to be with their dam, (⁽¹⁰²³⁾Exodus 22:30). According to the Jewish canon ^{f1084},

“an infant might be circumcised on the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, neither less nor more; (not less than eight days, nor more than twelve ^{f1085};) according to the usual custom on the eighth; if he was born between the two evenings, he is circumcised on the ninth; if between the two evenings of the evening of the sabbath, he is circumcised on the tenth; if on a festival day, after the sabbath, he is circumcised on the eleventh; if on the two days of the beginning of the year, he is circumcised on the twelfth: an infant that is sick, they do not circumcise it until it is well.”

Which sickness they interpret not of sore eyes, and the like, but of an ague or fever; and when a child on the eighth day is red or yellow, or a woman has lost her children through circumcision, two or three one after another, then it is deferred; and they reckon seven days from a child's recovery from sickness, and then circumcise it ^{f1086}; but circumcision on the eighth day was always reckoned most valid and authentic, and according to rule, (see Gill on “⁽³⁰⁸⁵⁾Philippians 3:5”); and the Jews were careful to do it on the eighth day as soon as they could, though only when and while it was day. Their canon or rule runs thus ^{f1087},

“they do not circumcise until the sun shines out on the eighth day of a child's birth, and all the day is fit for circumcision; but they that

are prepared hasten to the commandment, and circumcise immediately in the morning; and indeed circumcision, which is not in its proper time, is never performed but in the day:”

for they observe ^{f1088}, it is said on the eighth day, (^(812B)Leviticus 12:3); the day, and not the night. And this was to be done to

every man child in your generations; in all succeeding ages until the Messiah came, the end of the law; and when the lease of the land of Canaan, of which this was a seal, would be out; and when the righteousness of faith, it was also a seal of, would come upon the uncircumcised Gentiles:

he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which [is] not of thy seed; concerning which Maimonides ^{f1089} gives these rules,

“a servant is born in the power of an Israelite, and another that is taken from Heathens, the master is bound to circumcise them; but he that is born in the house is circumcised on the eighth day; and he that is bought with money is circumcised on the day that he is received, even if he received him on the day he is born, he is circumcised on that day; if he receives a grown servant of Heathens, and the servant is not willing to be circumcised, he bears with him a whole year, but more than that it is forbidden to keep him, seeing he is uncircumcised, but he must send him again to the Heathens.”

No man was to be forced to embrace the true religion, or obliged against his will to submit to its ordinances.

Ver. 13. *He that is born in thine house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised*, etc.] Or “in circumcising shall be circumcised” ^{f1090}, shall certainly be circumcised; this is repeated to denote the necessity of it, and what care should be taken that this be done, because there was to be no uncircumcised male among them, (⁽⁰¹⁷⁰⁾Genesis 17:10); nor any conversation and communion to be had among them, especially in a religious way.

And my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant; circumcision was to be seen in their flesh, and no methods were to be taken to draw over the foreskin again, but it was to continue as long as they

lived; and so in their posterity, in all succeeding ages, as a sign of the covenant and promise which should remain until the Messiah's coming.

Ver. 14. *And the uncircumcised man child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised*, etc.] Whose circumcision was neglected by his father, or by his mother, or by the civil magistrate, or by himself; for each of these, according to the Jewish canons, were obliged to see this performed;

“the commandment lies upon a father to circumcise his son, and upon a master to circumcise his servants born in his house, or bought with money ^{f1091}.”

and it is elsewhere said ^{f1092},

“if a father does not circumcise his son, the sanhedrim are bound to circumcise him; and if they do not circumcise him, he is obliged when he is grown up to circumcise himself; and if he does not circumcise himself, he is guilty of cutting off,”

as it here follows:

that soul shall be cut off from his people; which Jarchi interprets of his being childless, and dying before his time; and which, according to some in Aben Ezra, is, when a man dies before he is fifty two years of age; and some erroneous persons, as the same writer calls them, thought that if a child died, and was not circumcised, it had no part in the world to come. The simplest and plainest meaning of the phrase seems to be, that such should be cut off, and deprived of all civil and religious privileges with the Israelites in the land of Canaan, and be reckoned as Heathens. Concerning this matter, Maimonides ^{f1093} thus writes;

“a father or a mother that transgress, and circumcise not, make void the affirmative commandment, but are not guilty of cutting off; for no cutting off depends but upon the uncircumcised person himself; and the sanhedrim are commanded to circumcise a son or a servant in its time, that they may not leave an uncircumcised person in Israel, nor among their servants; if the thing is hid from the sanhedrim, and they do not circumcise him, when he is grown up, he is bound to circumcise himself; and every day that passes over him, after he is grown up, and he does not circumcise himself, lo, he maketh the commandment to cease; but he is not guilty of

cutting off until he dies, and he is a presumptuous uncircumcised person;”

and so, according to him, this must respect his punishment after death in another world:

he hath broken my covenant; made it null and void, neglecting the token of it, circumcision.

Ver. 15. *And God said unto Abraham*, etc.] After he had changed his name, and given him the covenant of circumcision:

as for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah her name [shall be]; her former name Sarai signifies “my princess”, or rather “princesses”, being to him in the room of many, and better than ten thousand; yet only a princess to him, and in his family, being sole mistress there: but Sarah signifies, as Jarchi observes, “princess” absolutely, because she was princess over all the princes and people that should come of her, as well as be the mother and princess of all female believers, who are called her daughters, (~~Gen~~ 1 Peter 3:6).

Ver. 16. *And I will bless her*, etc.] The Targum of Jonathan adds, “in her body”, with fruitfulness, who before was barren, and in her soul with spiritual blessings, and in both with the blessing of eternal life:

and give thee a son also of her; as he had given him one of Hagar: God had before promised Abraham a son that should be his heir, but he had not till now told him that he should be born of Sarah his wife:

yea, I will bless her; which is repeated for the confirmation of it, and for the greater strengthening Abraham’s faith in it:

and she shall be [a mother] of nations; of the twelve tribes of Israel; of the two nations of Israel and Judah;

kings of people shall be of her; as David, Solomon, and others, and especially the King Messiah.

Ver. 17. *Then Abraham fell upon his face*, etc.] In reverence of the divine Being, and as amazed at what was told him:

and laughed; not through distrust and diffidence of the promise, as Sarah did, for he staggered not at that through unbelief, but for joy at such good news; and so Onkelos renders it, “and he rejoiced”, with the joy of faith; it

may be our Lord refers to this in (^{<0186>}John 8:56); he saw Christ in the promise of Isaac, and rejoiced that he should spring from his seed: the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem paraphrase it, “and he wondered”; he was amazed at the grace of God that gave him such a promise, and he was astonished at the power of God that must be exerted in the fulfilment of it: and therefore it follows,

and said in his heart; within himself, without expressing anything as to be heard and understood by any creature; but the omniscient God knew what he said, and the language of it, whether of unbelief or not:

shall [a child] be born unto him that is an hundred years old? not that he was now a full an hundred years old, he was ninety nine, and going in his hundredth year; but then he would be, as he was, an hundred years old when this child was born to him, (^{<0205>}Genesis 21:5). It had been no unusual thing for a child to be born to a man when an hundred, and even many hundred years old, but it was so in Abraham’s time; though indeed after this we read that Abraham himself had six sons by Keturah, when, his natural strength was afresh invigorated, and his youth was renewed like the eagle’s; and besides Abraham said this, not so much with respect to himself, though his age was a circumstance that served to heighten the wonder, as with respect to Sarah, and the circumstances in which she was, who was to bear this son to him:

and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? and with whom it had ceased to be after the manner of women, which made it more difficult of belief how it could be. Some think that Abraham said this, as somewhat doubting of it, until he was more strongly assured by the Lord that so it would be indeed, as is expressed in (^{<0179>}Genesis 17:19); but meeting with no reproof for what he said and did, as Sarah, it seems to show the contrary.

Ver. 18. *And Abraham said unto God*, etc.] Being told he should have a son by Sarah, that should be his heir, he is concerned for Ishmael what would become of him; and who, being grown up, had doubtless a large share in his affections, and it is highly probable he began to think he was the promised seed, since he had lived to such an age, and had no other son, and Sarah was past bearing children: but now perceiving it would be otherwise, he puts up a petition for Ishmael, whom he did not neglect upon the promise of another, and to show his love to him, and regard for his welfare:

O that Ishmael might live before thee; he prays that his life might be preserved, and that it might be spent in the fear, worship, and service of God; so the Targum of Jonathan,

“O that Ishmael might live and worship before thee,”

and to the same sense Jarchi also; that he might enjoy the favour of God, his gracious presence and communion with him; that he might live a holy spiritual life here, acceptable and well pleasing to God, and possess eternal life hereafter: for we must take this prayer in as large a sense as we can suppose the heart of a father to be drawn forth in it for the good of his child; though it may greatly respect his sharing with the promised son in his blessings, and particularly regards the propagation of his offspring, or his living in his posterity at least; this was what the Lord took notice of, and answered him in.

Ver. 19. *And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed*, etc.] This is repeated for the confirmation of it, and thus expressed to remove all doubt about it, if any there were, that hung upon Abraham’s mind; as well as to let him know that the promise of a son by Sarah was not to be superseded by his prayer for Ishmael, for whom he might have a greater flow of natural affection than for his unborn son, in whom his seed should be called:

and thou shall call his name Isaac; which signifies “laughter”; and which name was given him from the laughter of Abraham at the promise of him, and not from the laughter of Sarah, which as yet was not; wherefore Josephus^{f1094} is wrong when he suggests, that Isaac had this name from Sarah’s laughing at God’s saying, that she should bear a son: though his birth was matter of laughter and joy to both, as it was to all good people that heard of it, (⁰²⁰⁸Genesis 21:8). So Polyhistor^{f1095} from Melo, an Heathen writer, speaking of Abraham, says, that of his married or lawful wife one son was born to him, whose name in Greek is “Gelos”, that is, laughter. Isaac is one of those the Jews^{f1096} observe had his name given him before he was born, (see Gill on ⁰¹⁶¹“Genesis 16:11”):

and I will establish my covenant with him, for an everlasting covenant, [and] with his seed after him; the covenant of circumcision just made with Abraham, the promise of the land of Canaan to him and his posterity, and of the Messiah that should spring from him, until whose coming this covenant would continue, and therefore called everlasting.

Ver. 20. *And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee, etc.* Took notice of his prayer for him, and accepted of and would answer him, and did, as follows:

behold, I have blessed him; determined in his mind to bless him, promised to bless him, (^{f1060}Genesis 16:10,12); had blessings laid up and in reserve for him:

and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; as he did, many of the Arabian nations, the Hagarenes, Saracens, and Turks, all springing from him:

twelve princes shall he beget; whose names are given, (^{f1023}Genesis 25:13-15); and their number there exactly agrees with this prophecy. Melo ^{f1097}, the Heathen writer above mentioned, says, that Abraham, of his other wife, the Egyptian servant (that is, Hagar), begat twelve sons, which he mistakes for twelve sons of Ishmael, his son by Hagar; and, adds he, these going into Arabia, divided the country among them, and were the first that reigned over the inhabitants of it; hence down to our times the kings of the Arabians have twelve names like to those. So the Saracens were divided into twelve tribes, of which there were so many “phylarchi”, or governors; and the Turks also are divided into the same number of tribes ^{f1098}. And

I will make him a great nation; as the nation of the Turks especially is; and the Turkish empire is frequently called in Jewish writings the kingdom of Ishmael, as the Arabic language is called the Ishmaelitic language.

Ver. 21. *But my covenant will one establish with Isaac,* etc.] The covenant of circumcision; for though Ishmael was circumcised, and his posterity practised that rite, yet it was not enjoined them of God; nor was it to them, or served the same purpose as to the Israelites; and particularly the promise of the land of Canaan, made in that covenant, belonged only to the posterity of Isaac, and to those only in the line of Jacob, and especially that of the Messiah springing from him, which circumcision had a respect unto:

whom Sarah shall bear unto thee, at this set time, in the next year: that is, at the end of nine months, which is the set time a woman goes with child.

Ver. 22. *And he left off talking; with him,* etc.] After he had finished all he had to say to him at this time. It was great condescension in the divine Being to talk with a creature; it was wonderful grace and kindness to make such promises to him, as he did, and indulge him with answers of prayer

and communion with him; but the highest enjoyments of God here are not lasting; uninterrupted communion with him is reserved for another world:

and God went up from Abraham; from the earth, where he had been with Abraham, and ascended above him up to heaven, in a visible, and very likely in an human form, in which he descended: the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan paraphrase it, “the glory of the Lord”, the glorious Shechinah, the Lord of life and glory.

Ver. 23. *And Abraham took Ishmael his son*, etc.] To circumcise him; he took his son first, to set an example to his servants, and that they might the more readily comply when they saw that Abraham’s son, and at that time his only son, was circumcised before their eyes:

and all that were born in his house; which were three hundred and eighteen when he rescued Lot from the kings, (^{<OH44>}Genesis 14:14); and perhaps they might be now increased:

and all that were bought with his money; how many those were, it is not easy to say, no doubt they were many:

every male among the men of Abraham’s house; whether children or servants, and those little or grown up:

and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin, in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him; he performed this operation in the manner God directed him, the same day he spoke to him of it; he was not disobedient, nor dilatory to obey the command of God, but at once complied with it, not consulting flesh and blood, not regarding the pain he and his should endure, or the shame or danger they should be exposed unto through the Heathens about them; but trusting in God, and committing himself to him, and having his fear before his eyes, he hesitated not, but cheerfully did the will of God. In doing this work he might have some assistance: it is highly probable he began it himself, and circumcised several; and having taught some of his servants how to perform it according to the divine prescription, they might assist him in going through with it.

Ver. 24. *And Abraham [was] ninety years old and nine*, etc.] (see ^{<OH70>}Genesis 17:1). This circumstance of his age is observed the more to commend his faith and obedience, that though he was an old man, he did not consider his age, or make that an objection; that he was unable to bear

the pain, or it would be shameful for a man of his years to be uncovered before his servants:

when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin; who circumcised him is not said, very probably Eliezer his head servant: the Jews, who affect to know everything, say ^{f1099}, that he sent for Shem, the son of Noah, who circumcised him and his son Ishmael; but it is most likely that Ishmael was circumcised by Abraham himself, as seems from (⁴¹⁷²³Genesis 17:23); and Abraham might circumcise himself, as Ben Melech thinks.

Ver. 25. *And Ishmael his son [was] thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.*] Hence the Arabians, as Josephus ^{f1100} relates, circumcise their children when at thirteen years of age, because Ishmael, the founder of their nation, was circumcised at that age; and Origen ^{f1101} asserts the same; and with which agrees what an Arabic writer says ^{f1102} of the Arabians before Mahomet, that they used to circumcise at a certain age, between the tenth and fifteenth years of their age. So Rauwolf says ^{f1103}, there are some, chiefly among the Arabians, that imitate their patriarch Ishmael. As for the Mahometans, though they circumcise, they do not always do it in the thirteenth year, as some write; for it is performed by them sometimes in the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, or sixteenth, and sometimes in the sixth or seventh year ^{f1104}. The Egyptians, according to Ambrose ^{f1105}, circumcised their children at fourteen years of age, which comes pretty near to the time of the Ishmaelites or Arabs, from whom they might receive circumcision, if not of the Israelites, as before observed. A certain traveller says ^{f1106}, the modern Egyptians, as the rest of the Mahometans, are not circumcised until the thirteenth year. The Africans circumcise on the seventh day, which comes nearer to the Jews ^{f1107}.

Ver. 26. *In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son.*] This is repeated, that it might be taken notice of that both were circumcised according to the command of God, and on the very day in which it was given. Jarchi observes, it was in the day, and not in the night; which shows, says he, he was not afraid of the Heathen, and of mockers; and that his enemies, and the men of that generation, might not say, if we had seen him, we would not have suffered him to be circumcised, and keep the commandment of God: and some of the Jewish writers ^{f1108} fable, that he was circumcised on the day afterwards appointed by Moses for the day of atonement, and that in the place where he was circumcised the altar was

built; but all this is without any foundation. This affair was transacted, according to Bishop Usher^{f1109}, A. M. 2107, and before Christ 1897.

Ver. 27. *And all the men of his house*, etc.] All the males, whether children or adult:

born in the house, or bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him; by their will, and with their consent; not forced to it, as Aben Ezra rightly observes; and these being before trained up by him in religious exercises, were more easily prevailed upon by him to follow his example; this also is repeated, that it might be served, and be an example to follow in after generations.