

Baptism and the Abrahamic Covenant

Genesis 17:9-14

By Phillip G. Kayser

Please turn to Galatians 3. The passage we will read is one of many New Testament passages that connect baptism with the Abrahamic covenant. In fact, for the New Testament, this is *the* sign for the Abrahamic covenant. It is always linked with Baptism.

Read: Galatians 3:26-4:2

Now turn to Genesis 17 where we find the Abrahamic covenant established.

Read Genesis 17:9-14

Before we baptize Nattalie Collen this morning, I want to clearly ground what we are doing in the Scriptures because it is the Scripture alone that should guide our baptism. I had a friend who was trying to convince me of infant baptism in my early twenties, and he would from time to time point out that the church universally believed in infant baptism as far back as we have records, to within twenty years of the apostle John's death, and didn't practice anything different until the time of the Reformation. And my response was, "Hey, that's just the traditions of men. They could be wrong." He tried to point out, "But they go back almost to the apostles." For example, he quoted Irenaeus (born before the apostle John died and taught by Polycarp, John's disciple) as speaking of the apostolic practice of baptizing "infants and little ones and children and youths and older persons."¹ I told him, "Yeah, but those men were not infallible. They had other doctrines that you don't believe." He had one quote going to within twenty years of the apostle John's death. He pointed out that the very *first* church controversy that ever arose over baptism arose in 253 AD. And interestingly, the raging controversy was: on what *day* should an infant be baptized? Did it have to be on the eighth day?

And I told him, "I don't care. If you can't show it to me from the apostles themselves, I'm not interested." And that began an interesting debate that lasted over a year. I was a tough nut to crack. If I didn't see it in the Bible, I wasn't going to believe it. And I respect my Baptist brethren and relatives who are seeking to be Biblical. That's what they are seeking to do. And even though I will disagree with them this morning, I would urge you to

¹Against Heresies, III. xxii, 4, *The AntiNicene Fathers*.

respect them and honor them for that as well. “The Bible alone” is the cry of both the Baptists and the Presbyterians. I won’t be able to give all the verses that relate to this fantastic subject, but if you are interested, there are two booklets on the back table. One is by Rose, on the subject of the mode of baptism. The other is by me on infant baptism. Both can be downloaded for free from the www.BiblicalBlueprints.org web site.

I. The Mode of Baptism

Before we look at infant baptism, I want to first of all address the issue of mode. That too was controversial for me, although I was convinced of that a little bit more quickly. First of all, let me tell a story on us Presbyterians that came from a conference in Scotland. There was a party of Presbyterian pastors that was taking a walk during a long break in the conference. And not noticing a sign that said the bridge was unsafe, they wandered onto a dilapidated bridge that spanned the river on the conference grounds. The security guard came running out of his hut, and protested that they should get off the bridge. One of the ministers, thinking that it was an issue of not having a pass to get onto the conference grounds, said, “It’s all right. We’re Presbyterians from the conference.” The security guard said, “I’m no’ caring about that. But if ye dinna get off the bridge you’ll all be Baptists.”

My imitation of Scottish is a travesty, but I thought I would start with an explanation of why we don’t dunk; of why we baptize both adults and infants with pouring rather than immersion. Every adult I have baptized, except for one (whom I couldn’t talk out of it), I have baptized by pouring. We accept all three modes of baptism: immersion, pouring or sprinkling. I was immersed when I was baptized in my teens, but we believe that pouring or sprinkling best symbolizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And I have many Scriptures to demonstrate that baptism was always used in this way, but let’s just look at a few for now. First, let’s take a quick survey of what mode *God* used in Baptism. And we will start with Acts 1:5, if you want to follow along.

A. As shown by the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5,8; 2:3,17,33; 10:44; 11:15)

Acts 1:5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

You look through the Gospels and you will come to the conclusion that John’s Baptism symbolized the baptism of the Spirit. It was anticipating the

Baptism of the Spirit. Look next at verse 8 where this Baptism of the Spirit is once again talked about. Acts 1:8.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;

Notice that the movement is with the Spirit acting upon them, not them acting.

and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

John had earlier promised that they would be baptized with the Spirit and with fire. Look at Acts 2:3 for the baptism of fire:

Acts 2:3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.

Notice first that there is movement of the fire coming upon them, and second, that it rests on the head. They are not enveloped in fire. There are tongues of fire upon the head. There is no immersion. But it is still a baptism. Look next at verse 17.

Acts 2:17 “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh...”

Notice that the mode is pouring. The movement is with the Spirit coming upon them. (And we will see in a moment that that is very significant symbolism.) But right now (before we look at more verses from Acts), let me point out that every single Old Testament prophecy of this baptism of the Spirit uses the language of either pouring or sprinkling. This prophecy is quoted from Joel. But let me give you some other sample prophecies from the Old Testament.

Is. 32:15 - “**Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high.**”

Is. 44:3 - “**For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, ... I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring**”

The poured water symbolizes the poured Spirit. He says both water and Spirit will be poured out in the New Covenant.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 speaks of sprinkling clean water upon the New Covenant community as a symbol of the giving of the Spirit.

Three chapters later Ezekiel says,

“I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,” says the Lord GOD” (Ezek. 39:29).

Zech 12:10 - “**I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication...**”

Always, the Old Testament speaks of pouring or sprinkling as being God's mode for both water baptism and this baptism of the Spirit. Well, let's continue in Acts.

Acts 2:33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

Acts 10:44 ¶ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

Notice that in verse 47 Peter says,

“Can anyone forbid water [the literal Greek is “hold back water”] that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

The phrase “hold back water” shows the movement of the water corresponding to the movement of the Spirit.

Acts 11:15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.

B. As Prophesied in the Old Testament (Is. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 36:25-27; 39:29; Joel 2:28-32; Zech. 12:10)

C. As the Greek term for Baptism is used in other contexts (LXX of Dan. 4:25; 5:21; Mark 7:1-8; John 2:6; Heb. 9:10-23; etc)

The Jews of that time were used to thinking of pouring over one or two or sprinkling several with a branch dipped in water. This was the way they baptized. When priests came to office at the age of 30, they were baptized with sprinkling. The Greek translation of Daniel speaks of Nebuchadnezzar being baptized with the dew of heaven (Daniel 4:25; 5:21). That's not immersion. That's movement of the water upon him. And there is a large four-volume set of books by James Dale that shows every occurrence of the word *baptizo* in secular, biblical and religious Greek usage and shows that it could not possibly mean immerse. It is boring reading, but it has never been successfully refuted. But this morning I just want to stick to Biblical usage. Mark 7:1-8 speaks of the Jews of that day baptizing their couches and other furniture every day. It is inconceivable that they would immerse their couches every day in water. Edersheim, the Jewish scholar, said they did it be a ceremonial sprinkling. Hebrews 9:10-23 speaks of “various baptisms,” and lists those Old Testament baptisms as the sprinkling of this and the sprinkling of that. Some of the baptisms were with water. Some of the

baptisms were with blood. Well, there is no way that people were immersed in blood. But all those sprinklings were called baptisms.

D. Objections (Acts 8:38 [Is. 52:15]; John 3:23; Rom. 6:1-14)

I won't bore you with other Scriptures that my friend gave to me in Canada, but I do want to relate how I wrestled with this and came up with all kinds of objections. One of the objections that I gave at first was that the Ethiopian Eunuch was clearly immersed. My friend asked me to read the passage and show him where it said he was immersed. So I confidently read Acts 8:38, which says, **"So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water..."** etc. I said, "See, the eunuch went down into the water and came back up out of the water. That symbolizes his death, burial and resurrection with Christ." He asked me, "Were both baptized?" I said, "No. Only the Ethiopian eunuch." And then I saw my mistake. It said "they both went down into the water" and only after they were both down into the water did he begin to baptize the eunuch. It wasn't the baptism that was going down into the water, or they would both have been baptized. I objected, "How come they were both in the water if it was by pouring. He could have just poured a canteen over his head." He explained that Jewish Old Testament law required that baptism be done with clean or running water.² In fact, the *Didache*, a Christian document written before 70 AD, has the same requirements for baptism³ – and also mentions baptism by pouring.⁴ That document is actually in the time of the apostles – a very important document. Anyway, in any river, pond or lake you would have to wade out to about one to two feet before the water would be clean enough to scoop it up and pour. One of the times he brought some pictures from the first two centuries of baptisms being done exactly this way. Well, I had a hard time buying his explanation of that. So he said, "OK. Look at it this way. It is clear from verse 36 that the eunuch got his idea of Gentiles being baptized from the passage in Isaiah that he was reading. Let's look up the section that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah and see if it says anything about immersion. We looked it up and to my astonishment not only saw that it spoke of the Messiah saving Gentiles (Is. 52:10,15; 54:3; 55:5; 56:7), and even saving Gentile eunuchs (that's near the end of the section in Is. 56:3-4), but it said of this Messiah, **"His visage was marred**

² Running water was considered ceremonially clean (Leviticus 14:5-6; 50-52; 15:13), and so the water of the Jordan River would be used for its ceremonial purity, except during flood stage when it was particularly fouled.

³ See *Didache* 7:1-2.

⁴ It says in 7:3, "...pour water three times on the head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; so shall He sprinkle many Gentiles..." (Is. 52:15). That's the only reference to water in that whole section – "So He shall sprinkle many Gentiles." He had been reading of Gentiles being sprinkled by the Messiah, so he said, **"What hinders me from being baptized?"** "I fit the description of Isaiah – The Messiah has already come, and I'm a believing, Gentile, eunuch.

Well, I still wasn't quite convinced. I could see he had a point, but I said, "Well what about John the Baptist? Weren't his baptisms always immersions?" He said, "No. None of them were." I couldn't believe he could be so stupid. It seemed obvious that they were immersions to me. So I quickly turned to John 3:23 and said, "Look here. It says, **'Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.'**" I said, "Why would he need much water if baptism wasn't by immersion?" He responded by pointing out six things: first, if this baptism was legitimate in the eyes of the Jews, this baptism was Old Testament baptism and you would search in vain for any immersions in the Old Testament. Second, this was Jewish proselyte baptism, and that's why the Pharisees were offended. John was treating them as being excommunicated and in need of converting and coming back into the community of faith. We know that this proselyte baptism was applied to the whole family, including babies. Third, he pointed out that tens of thousands of Jews were in the wilderness all day long hearing him preaching and being baptized. He would need to pick a place that had much water for drinking purposes and ritual purification purposes even if he sprinkled. Fourth, he pointed out that the inspired text clearly tells us where this baptism was taking place. It was in Aenon, near Salim. He said, "You can search in vain in that location for any place to immerse a person."⁵ There are

⁵ Though there have been many attempts to find a different location (both north and south; both east and west of the Jordan), the early church historian, Eusebius, who lived 263-339 AD, and who had access to many early documents, identified Aenon as a place just north of modern Umm el-'Umdan and eight miles south of Scythopolis (Beth-Shan). This identification fits many lines of evidence: 1) There is a town to this day with the name Ainun near there, 2) it gave John four borders to flee to (depending upon which ruler was after him), 3) since it close to the borders of Samaria, Perea and Decapolis and was also near Galilee, it was a central location for people to travel to, 4) the name Aenon means "springs" and corresponds to the fact that there were "many waters" there, 5) it was Spring time and the Jordan was flooded and too fouled for purification purposes (see Josh 3:15), 6) so John needed to travel to a place that had clean running water, 7) the Madaba Map of Palestine (542 AD) clearly places Aenon in this location (notice that the words "Aenon near Salim" are only on the northern part of the map with the other Aenon not having "near Salim"), and 8) there are seven springs at Aenon within a quarter mile of each other. However, this site is rejected by many simply because it is impossible to immerse people in the waters. Christy says, "these springs trickling through marshy meadow land on their way to the Jordan, offer little or no facilities for immersion" (Christy, *A Modern Shibboleth*, p. 82). Christy believes that John left the Jordan for the "many springs" of Aenon to avoid "the foul, muddy flood of the Jordan overflowing all its banks, as it usually did at this season of the year (Joshua 3:15)." After all, "clean water" was "the insistent requirement of the law" (quoted in Jay E. Adams, *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, [Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Philippsburg, NJ], p.13.) Edmund Fairfield said, "There is not at the present time any "body" of water at Aenon, nor any indication that there has ever been, in historic times, such a body: but there are

numerous springs bubbling from the water, but not enough collected water to immerse even a midget.” Sixth, the literal Greek of the passage says, “many waters” not “much water.” And there are numerous springs of water coming up from the ground that would meet the Jewish purification requirements for clean water. So he said, “You simply can’t get any immersions in Aenon.” Well, I had never heard that before, so I told him I would do some research. Well, none of my Baptist materials were able to find any other Aenon that seemed credible to me, though they had some guesses of where Aenon might be. However, the Aenon that we do know about has no pools; only springs. So I was stumped.

Of course, I had a bunch of other objections that we won’t go over here. I’ll just repeat one more. I said, “Well, Romans 6 clearly shows that water baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Only immersion fits the bill. When you die you go down into the ground and come back up out of the ground. In Baptism you go down into the water and come back up out of the water.” He pointed out that this was not the way the Jews buried people. They dug a tomb out of rock, lifted the body up onto a platform and kept the body from contact with the dirt. No baptism symbolizes that. But he asked me to show him one single verse in Romans six that mentions water or that would indicate symbolism. I said, “Well, it does say ‘baptized, and we all know that the Greek word means ‘to dip’.” He responded that I was not letting the Scripture define the terms. He also pointed out that we need to determine whether this is talking about water baptism or Spirit baptism. He said that Romans 6 is clearly talking about

plenty of springs.” (*Letters on Baptism*, Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society, 1893, #138.) Below is a picture of one of the springs of Aenon as well as a map.



what Spirit baptism actually does, not what water baptism symbolizes. I objected. But he asked me to read it again and notice that if we put the word “water” in front of baptism (like I was assuming), then those verses clearly teach that water baptism saves us, regenerates us, unites us to Christ’s death, burial and resurrection and it empowers us to live our Christian lives. He said, “That’s not what you are wanting to teach is it? You’re not trying to teach baptismal regeneration.” And in fact, he pointed out that in recent years some professors at our Baptist Seminary and numerous Baptist books (Beasley-Murray’s included) have been forced to say that water baptism does indeed regenerate and save. That’s the only way they can rescue their doctrine of immersion in Romans 6. There is not a drop of water in Romans 6. It is talking about Spirit baptism (and what it actually accomplishes), not water baptism (and what it symbolizes).

Anyway, the long and the short of it is that I became convinced that water baptism only symbolizes one thing. It symbolizes Spirit baptism. And how was Spirit baptism performed by God? We’ve already seen. It was always done by pouring, shedding forth or sprinkling. If God’s mode of baptism is by pouring or sprinkling, then our belief is that it is wisest to imitate God. There is actually an entire Baptist denomination that has been convinced of this and uses pouring for their adult baptisms.

Why did God use this mode anyway? I believe it was to symbolize the fact that salvation is 100% of God. Infant baptism symbolizes that as well. In both cases we are passive. It is not our action or our work that saves us. Scripture says that we are born from above. We are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13). In the words of the prophets, God said, **I will sprinkle clean water on you (Ezek. 36:25) I will pour water on him who is thirsty... I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring.** I don’t think the mode needs to be a point of contention. I was immersed and I didn’t get rebaptized. I have been willing to baptize by immersion a teenager whose parent I could not talk out of immersion. But I wanted you to see that we didn’t invent the idea of pouring out of the thin air. The Scripture doesn’t say that we are plunged beneath the blood of Christ (like one Baptist hymn does). Consistently it says that we are sprinkled by the blood of Christ. Well enough on that. Let’s move on to point II.

II. The subjects of Baptism – Five reasons why the Abrahamic covenant is still relevant

Many people are also puzzled by the fact that Presbyterians and many other denominations baptize the babies of believers. I know I grew up being

puzzled by that. In fact, there were Presbyterian jokes. They weren't very good jokes. The word Presbyterian has five syllables. Way too long to sustain humor.

In past meditations we have looked at the household baptisms of Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailor, Crispus, Gaius and Stephanas. We have also looked at 1 Corinthians 7:14 – “**otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy**,” which basically means, “Otherwise your children would be unbaptized, but now they are set apart.” And we have looked at several other New Testament passages. But today I want to go back to the roots of this doctrine in Genesis 17, if you would turn there with me.

Genesis 17:9-14

We read verses 9-14 earlier. And at that time you may have wondered why I would read a passage about *circumcision* when I am teaching about *Baptism*? Let me give you five reasons:

A. Because we continue to be in the Abrahamic Covenant (Rom. 4:12-16; Gal. 3:7-9,14-18; 3:26-4:7; Acts 2:39; 3:25; etc [50 more references])

First, Genesis 17 is relevant because the New Testament says that New Testament believers are in the Abrahamic covenant, and it refers to that fact over 50 times. In fact, every discussion of baptism connects baptism with the Abrahamic covenant. It must be relevant in some way – and we'll get to that in a bit. But first of all it is important that we understand that we are in the Abrahamic covenant. If believers covenant with God like Abraham did, then it explains why we include children in the covenant, as well. Including children in the covenant was an essential feature of being in the Abrahamic covenant. Look at verse 10 for example: **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 in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and You.** He says that this is at the heart of the covenant. The covenant must be applied to the children.

If the Abrahamic covenant in its essence includes children, how can we exclude children today? Keep your finger in this Genesis 17 passage, and turn with me to Galatians 3:26-4:2. The book of Galatians (just like the book of Colossians) explains why baptism permanently replaces circumcision. In Colossians 2:11-12 Paul calls baptism “Christian circumcision.” But here in Galatians he points out simply that faith and baptism is all we need to be in the Abrahamic covenant. We read this earlier,

but let me read it again. **For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 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 neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.** We will talk about this passage again in a bit, but right now I want you to notice that when we put our faith in the Lord Jesus and are baptized into the church, at that moment we become Abraham's seed and are heirs according to the promise. On this, Baptists and Presbyterians are agreed. Paul is saying that the faith of the adult brings him into the covenant of Abraham and makes *at least* the believer an heir of the covenant promises. I won't take the time to do it right now, but check out every promise made to Abraham in the book of Genesis and you will see that it is a promise to him and to his children. The promise always includes the children.

That's why it is so sad that there is a chapter break here. Chapter breaks are not inspired. They were added to the text in 1228 AD (less than a 1000 years ago). We should not stop reading in verse 29. It's not just believers that are heirs. The children of believers are heirs as well, just like they were under Abraham. This includes the children of believing slaves and free, men and women, Jews and Gentiles. Chapter 4:1 says, **Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child...** Let me stop there for a moment. My dictionary gives as a definition of the word for child there (*napios*) as "a very young child, *infant*, *child*." Did you get that? A child continues to be part of the Abrahamic covenant because children are the very heart of the Abrahamic covenant. It doesn't mean the child is saved. That child must be nurtured and led to faith. It says, **Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child does not differ at all from a slave** [in other words, he has no choice in the matter now any more than he did under Abraham. Continuing on...], **though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.** The parents are called guardians or stewards of the children. God owns them, but we are merely stewards of them. And chapter 3:24 has already told us the role of tutors, guardians or stewards: **Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.** We parents have the same role that the law did – to lead our children to faith in Christ. The law doesn't save; parents don't save; circumcision doesn't save; and water baptism doesn't save. God includes the children in the covenant so that we can lead them to Christ. We can look forward to the time when our children will come to faith.

But the bottom line that needs to be seen is that Galatians says we are in the Abrahamic covenant and (in the context of discussing baptism) it indicates that children continue to be heirs of that covenant. That's why Peter's sermon on the Abrahamic covenant ends with a call to repentance and for all to be baptized (that's in Acts 2). And then Peter says, **for the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off**. He was referring to the Abrahamic promise, which is still to our children. You see the message in the Old Testament was to repent and be circumcised. But then the children of believers also received that circumcision. It was a family covenant. By the way, that's why Moses didn't let the wilderness generation circumcise their children. Only the children of believers can receive the sign of the covenant. And the next generation professed faith at Gilgal and all of them were circumcised, including their children (Josh. 5). That's why Acts 3 says that in Christ "**all the families of the earth shall be blessed**" according to the promise to Abraham. He is saying that it is still a family covenant in the New Testament. And that is why the Collens are bringing their child. So the first reason Genesis 17 is very relevant on this occasion is that the New Testament says that we are in the Abrahamic covenant and essential to that covenant is children being welcomed.

B. Because baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant⁶

A second reason why this passage is relevant is that Colossians 2:11-12 (among other passages) says that baptism corresponds to circumcision and replaces circumcision. In fact, several translations translate the baptism there as "Christian circumcision." The literal rendering is the "circumcision of Christ" or "the circumcision that pertains to Christ." But it all has the same meaning. Now to the Jews that would not have seemed like an odd thing since baptism had acted as a substitute for circumcision for 1500 years of years in the case of women and of excommunicated men who were restored. Let me explain: From the time of Moses on, males were circumcised and baptized on the eighth day; females were baptized on the 16th day and their baptism was treated as a circumcision – it was a substitute. So infant baptism actually began at the time of Moses. But praise God, in the case of women, there wasn't a literal circumcision since the

⁶ See the Appendix in my book, which shows how both circumcision and baptism were applied to infants, with males being circumcised and baptized on the eighth day, and females being baptized on the 16th day. The New Testament removes all bloody aspects of the Old Testament sacraments, but retains the essence of the Passover in the Lord's Table and retains the essence of circumcision in the baptism. Thus, in various translations of Colossians 2:11-12, baptism is called "Christian circumcision" (Weymouth, Ferar Fenton, John Eadie, J. O. Buswell and Lightfoot), "circumcision according to Christ" (NJB), "circumcision of the Messiah (Peshitta), "Christ's circumcision" (Phillips).

baptism was counted as a circumcision. This is why Romans 2:26 says that Gentiles who come into the church are **counted as circumcised** and in the next verse the excommunicated Jews are counted as uncircumcised. When Israelites were excommunicated from the community they were treated as Gentiles; they were treated as uncircumcised. They were cut off from Israel.

So the question came, “What does a Jew do when he is excommunicated and repents and comes back into the believing community?” You can’t physically recircumcise him. That would be impossible. Instead, they were rebaptized with the Baptism of *nida* or what was sometimes called the baptism from the dead or Proselyte baptism. I was fascinated when younger about the vigorous debates that some of my Baptist friends had over John the Baptist. I wondered why some of them were so insistent that John’s baptism was a brand new baptism never authorized by the Old Testament, or why they said that it was not Jewish proselyte baptism (which I believe it was). I came to discover why: Jewish proselyte baptism baptized the whole family upon the parent’s profession of faith. All of that flowed from the Abrahamic covenant and became more explicit under Moses.

And so, it should be no surprise that John the Baptist tied his baptism in with the Abrahamic covenant. It should be no surprise that the discussion of baptism in Acts 2 is tied in with the Abrahamic covenant. The New Testament discussion of whether Gentiles could come into the church is based on the Abrahamic covenant which says in both Genesis 12:3 and 28:14 that **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed**. The discussion of baptism in Galatians 3-4 is based on the Abrahamic covenant. So the second reason this passage is relevant is that baptism replaces circumcision and just as circumcision is applied to infants and households, baptism must be also. In fact (as I’ve already mentioned) Colossians 2:11-12 calls baptism (at least in some translations) “Christian circumcision.” You can see that in your outline.

C. *Because the New Testament keeps appealing to the “promise” of the Abrahamic Covenant (Luke 1:72; Acts 2:33,39; 3:25; 13:32-33; 26:6-7; Rom. 4:13-16; 9:8-9; Gal. 3:14:16,17,18,19,21,22,29; 4:23,28; etc) and every time God promised Abraham something, he included his children.*

A third reason why this passage is relevant is because the New Testament keeps appealing to the *promise* made to Abraham applying to us and to our children. So 1) we are in the Abrahamic covenant, 2) baptism

replaces circumcision and 3) we still have Abraham's promises. If you examine every promise made from Genesis 12-25 you will see that they are all made to both Abraham and his descendants. For example, look at Genesis 17:7. **And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.** God promises to be a God not only to Abraham, but to his descendants. And he makes that promise something that can never be superseded by later revelation because this is an everlasting covenant. And Paul makes a big point of that in Galatians 3:17-18 when he says that the covenant under Moses which came 430 years later, cannot annul the covenant made with Abraham that it should make the promise of no effect. No later covenant can annul the Abrahamic covenant. It's eternal. Genesis 17 continues to apply. Thus we find in Acts 2 that Peter applies the promise of Abraham to New Testament children when he says, **for the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off.** That's the language of Genesis 17. Children were clearly included in that call for baptism in the previous verse because the whole discussion was based on the Abrahamic covenant – that when an adult believed, he had to apply the covenant to his children. Why does Galatians 4:1 include children as being heirs even before they come to faith? Because the verse before says that believers become **Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.** (Gal. 3:29) That whole passage is discussing baptism from the perspective of the Abrahamic promise and so it is no wonder that Paul concludes, **Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child...** etc. Children are heirs of the promise just as believing adults are. In Acts 17 Paul does the same with the Philippian jailor when he says, **believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved; you and your household.** His sign that he really did believe the Abrahamic promise was receiving baptism, the sign of the covenant, for his whole household. And we see a similar Abrahamic pattern with the baptism of five other households. The only baptisms in the New Testament where we know children were excluded were ones where children were not present: like Christ and Paul who had no children at that time, or the Ethiopian eunuch who couldn't have any. The New Testament applies the promise to Abraham and his children to believers and their children today. It is explicitly tied to baptism.

So we have seen three reasons why this passage is relevant: First, that we are under the Abrahamic covenant and its requirements. This is where that covenant is spelled out. Secondly, baptism replaces circumcision.

Thirdly, the promise to Abraham applies today because it is an everlasting promise that cannot be annulled - a promise to believers and their children.

D. Because it helps to correct errors (Gen. 17:18-21)

The fourth reason why Genesis 17 is so relevant is that when you go back to the foundations of a doctrine, you can often correct major errors. There are those who say that when the sign of the covenant is applied to children, they are regenerated. Roman Catholics say this and Lutherans say this. We Presbyterians vigorously disagree. And I think there can be no better example than Ishmael to prove that the sign of the covenant (whether circumcision or baptism) does not regenerate children. God made it very clear that Ishmael had to be circumcised, but in verses 18-21, He makes it equally clear that this did not mean that Ishmael would be saved. That was Paul's point in Romans 3. The Jews were trusting in their circumcision, and Paul said that it didn't save them. He said that there was much value in circumcision in the Old Testament, but regenerating was not one of those values. Many Lutherans insist that 1 Corinthians 7:14 teaches that when a child is outwardly cleansed by water, it also made the child inwardly holy. But the passage completely reverses what they say. It says that because the believing spouse sets apart the whole family to God's working (that's the outward sanctification or holiness), that the child can be outwardly cleansed in baptism as well. Without the outward holiness, Paul says, **otherwise your children would be unclean**. The context indicates that both the holiness and the cleansing are outward. And Paul says, "How do you know O husband whether you will save your wife?" (1 Cor. 7:16). We could say the same thing about our children. Baptism doesn't save, but it shows that they have been set apart.

E. Because it shows the seriousness of excluding children from the covenant (Gen. 17:14)

Fifth, this passage shows the seriousness of excluding our children from baptism. Verse 14 says, **"But 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."** Without the circumcision, the children were cut off from the church. This is why Moses was rebuked for failing to circumcise his child when God claimed his child. In fact, God appeared to Moses with a sword drawn to kill Moses. It was only after he circumcised Gershom that God relented. Leaders are held to a higher standard, and Moses knew better. In Ezekiel, when God speaks of children, He calls them children "whom you bore to Me" (Ezek. 16:20) and "My

children” (Ezek. 16:21). God claimed them for His covenant, and they should not have excluded them from the covenant. And in the same way, when His disciples sought to exclude children (and Luke says, “infants”), Christ said, **Allow the little children to come unto Me and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.** They are at least outwardly in the kingdom, if not really in the kingdom. Some of them (like John the Baptist) were really in the kingdom – they were regenerated in their mother’s womb (long before the sign of the covenant was applied).

If the New Testament had not replaced circumcision with baptism, and had not called baptism circumcision, we would be forced to continue to circumcise our male children and baptize all our children. Why? Because we are in the Abrahamic covenant. But all bloody rites passed away with Jesus and just as the Passover (as an eternal sign) gives way to the Lord’s Table, circumcision (also called an eternal sign) gave way to New Testament baptism. The baptism continued from the Old Testament, and it was treated as a substitute for circumcision.

There are many who have objections to the wisdom of infant baptism, but as John Calvin said long ago, every argument that could be brought against the wisdom of infant baptism could be equally brought against the wisdom of infant circumcision in Old Testament times. And thus, it is really a questioning of God’s wisdom.

As the Collens come forward at this time I want to encourage them and all of you parents to lay claim to the promises of Abraham, that he will be a God to you and to your descendants after you. What a great promise. Resolve to be tutors who lead your children to Christ. Amen.

William and Sarah:

1. Do you acknowledge your child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do you claim God's covenant promises on her behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for her salvation, as you do for your own?
3. Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God?
4. Do you promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before her a godly example, that you will pray with and for her, that you will teach her the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all means of God's appointment, to bring her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

Do you as a congregation undertake the responsibility of praying for and encouraging these parents in their Christian nurture of this child? If so raise your right hand.