

## 10. THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

We need not dwell long on the events immediately following the flood. God continues to bless his children, as he promised, and we read in Genesis 10 about the growth and expansion of humanity. We discover also that mankind is still sinful, and that the rebellion against God continues, despite the severe warning in the judgment of the flood.

At this point “the whole world had one language and a common speech” (Gen 11:1). In these circumstances it is not hard for mankind to make an alliance against God. As people settle in the plain of Shinar, the idea takes hold to build a mighty city with a tower that reaches up to heaven.

This tower will not only be an expression of human prowess, but also a rallying point for all people. The city of man will be the “centre” of the earth. The fact that the tower is to reach up to heaven indicates that in this striving there is the desire to protect oneself against further judgments of God. People do not want to live by God’s promise but by their own power. Also, they want to “make a name for themselves” and not be “scattered over the face of the whole earth.” The idea is to become invincible through numerical strength and unity of purpose.

The NIV notes correctly, “If the whole human race remained united in the proud attempt to take its destiny into its own hands and, by its man-centered efforts, to seize the reins of history, there would be no limit to its unrestrained rebellion against God. The kingdom of man would displace and exclude the kingdom of God.”

The flood may have changed much in the world, but the sinful character of human nature has not changed. God’s covenant of love again recedes into the background; people seek their strength in a human alliance. The fact that there must be enmity with Satan and his seed is forgotten.

God comes down to deal with the situation. He recognizes the possible danger (Gen 11:6: “...nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them”) and he breaks the unity of mankind by confusing their language. Unable to understand one another, people begin to trek away from the city they were beginning to build. Thus God scatters mankind over all the earth.

## **Babel versus Jerusalem**

This act of God was an effective method to disperse people and break their communal striving. We now get many separate peoples, each with their own language, territory, and culture. The city which people were building and which was supposed to show their unity is called Babel, and in the Hebrew there is a word-play: Babel, intended to be a symbol of unity, has similarities with the Hebrew word for confusion. The community effort ends in chaos; the covenant of man falls apart. As much as the world likes to be one, the attempt leads to confusion and chaos.

It is important to note that Babel or Babylon becomes the great enemy of God's people. The king of Babylon later lays siege to Jerusalem, the city of God, and Babylon becomes the place of the great exile of God's people. Babylon, called "the jewel of kingdoms" (Isa 13:19), symbolizes the powers of man which are set against the people of God.

This symbolism is continued in the New Testament. Babylon is the ultimate anti-Christian power, the great harlot, drunk with the blood of the saints (Rev 17:6), mankind at its most powerful. But both the Old and the New Testament speak of the fall of Babylon!

There is an important element: Babylon will not come to its greatest height until Jerusalem has been fully established, i.e., until the church has been completely gathered. God will keep the world divided for the sake of the gathering of his covenant people. Final judgment takes place only when all God's children have been brought to Christ (2 Pet 3:9, 10). Satan will be bound (Rev 19) and lawlessness restrained (2 Thess 2:7) so that the Gospel may be proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

The glory of Jerusalem, where God dwells in the midst of his people, will always outshine the decadent splendour of Babylon. The city of man will pale in the light of the city of God. In the end, Babylon will fall, while the new Jerusalem, the city of God's covenant peace, descends from heaven through the victory of Christ, our Lord (compare Revelation 18 with Revelation 21).

### **“All peoples on earth will be blessed through you”**

With the calling of Abraham, recorded in Genesis 12, the focus of the Bible appears to shift away from mankind in general and to concentrate on one people. God makes his covenant with Abraham and his seed (Israel) and it seems that he virtually ignores the rest of the world. Many Bible scholars are relieved when in the New Testament God again approaches all the world, and they see the episode with Israel as only a necessary interlude which brings forth the promised Messiah, but which has no other significance. The time of the old covenant is fortunately long behind us.

I will later deal in greater detail with the relation between the old and the new covenant. It is important now to note that the calling of Abraham is shown against the background of the dispersed peoples moving about to find a place and build a nation. They are out to “make a name” for themselves, now outside Babel. Everyone seeks to establish his own kingdom. Meanwhile God is in the process of establishing the kingdom of heaven.

Through Abraham the LORD proceeds to build *his* nation. While other peoples seek to achieve nationhood by their own strength, God will realize this purpose in the case of Israel by his sovereign grace. God says to Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation.” The peoples seek to establish a great name for themselves, but God says to Abraham, “I will make your name great.” And while the nations of the world will achieve success only at the cost of others, God says to Abraham, “You will be a blessing.” Indeed, to Abraham it is said, “All people on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:1-3).

In the calling of Abraham and in focusing on him and his seed, God has not abandoned the world. On the contrary, he has its salvation and blessing in mind. In his covenant of love God continues to work towards the coming of the Saviour of the world. He does so by calling Abraham and by establishing his covenant especially with Israel. Out of Israel will come the Saviour of the world.

### **The power of sovereign grace**

I mentioned earlier that in the history of his covenant God picks the most unlikely candidates. Abraham seems hardly qualified to become the father of a great nation. He is an old man with a barren wife. Surely, from a human angle, nothing good can come from this choice.

Also amazing is the command that comes to Abraham, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Gen 12:1). Abandon everything? Abraham must isolate himself from all that is close and dear to him, and depart for an (as yet) unknown destination. From a human viewpoint, this move is foolish and suicidal. A man was simply nothing without the support of his people and his family.

The *promise* to a man like Abraham of becoming a great nation is unrealistic. The *command* to leave one’s family would appear to be counter-productive. Obedience to this command is only possible if one believes that God is able to give what he promises. But isn’t this always the way of the covenant? The power of God’s grace becomes evident in human weakness. Patriarchs and apostles have experienced it: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). Already in the old covenant it becomes clear: there is no boasting, except in the LORD.

### **Why into isolation?**

What did God want to achieve by taking Abraham out of his country and away

from his family? Why this enforced isolation? It cannot be meant to keep Abraham from sin. After all, we realize that sin is not merely around us, but also in us. No matter where we go, we cannot escape its influence.

But remember the statement of God in paradise after the fall: I will put *enmity*. Time and again it appears that when God's children live in the midst of this world, they easily become a part of it. Worldly alliances begin to prevail over the covenant with the LORD. Abraham is called out of his family and country for a good reason. First, God wishes to ensure that he will be dependent only on the LORD, trusting in his promise. God alone will make Abraham rich, as Abraham later reminded the king of Sodom after rescuing Lot (Gen 14:23). Second, it must become clear in the life of Abraham and his seed that there can be no friendship between God's children and the sons of man.

The enmity implies an antithesis which the LORD now demands as never before. For out of Abraham will come the Messiah, the promised Saviour, and the forces of evil will do everything to prevent his coming into the world. Therefore God sets apart and sanctifies Abraham for a special task.

There are many physical dimensions to Abraham's isolation. It involves living in a foreign land, having a separate national identity, and remaining separate from other peoples. These things are not required anymore of us today, although the covenant with God also today has its physical aspects. But Abraham's isolation has spiritual dimensions as well, and these are still fully in force today. When we look at the meaning of the new covenant these elements will be noted. At this point I want to stress the fact that, as the following section will show, the covenant with Abraham was also and first of all a spiritual relationship.

## **Abraham justified by faith**

Abraham obeys the command of the LORD. We do not read of any struggle that he may have had in complying with God's express wish. Abraham simply goes. "So Abram left, as the LORD had told him..." (Gen 12:4). We do read that Abraham's nephew, Lot, goes with him, and this may have provided a measure of security, but Abraham and Lot later separate upon Abraham's suggestion.

Why does Abraham obey God's instruction to leave? It is only by the power and activity of faith. Abraham did not consider the journey away from his family to an unknown and perhaps inhospitable land too great a risk, because he believed in the LORD's word. "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Heb 11:8).

How could Abraham continue to believe that the land of Canaan would one day fully belong to him and his descendants? "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise" (Heb 11:9). Abraham

did not look back, agonizing over what he had lost, but he looked forward, anticipating what he would receive. Abraham knew that God would one day deliver what he had promised, “For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10).

And with respect to the promise of a son in his old age, Abraham also accepted the word of God. “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise” (Heb 11:11). The power of faith is truly great: “And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore” (Heb 11:12).

The Bible speaks of this faith in a simple manner. We do not read how and when Abraham was regenerated from death to life, but we know that it was by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith is given to him through the Mediator, Jesus Christ, who said of Abraham, “[He] rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). Abraham saw the day of Christ especially when Isaac was born and God opened the door to the future in the child of the promise.

In both the Old and the New Testament it is testified that Abraham was justified by faith alone, apart from works (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3). This is important. For it follows that “it [salvation] may be by *grace*” (Rom 4:16). Faith becomes evident in works, but Abraham’s justification was not achieved by his works. It was granted out of grace through faith. This is the bottom line in all covenantal thinking.

Therefore Abraham can also be called in the New Testament “the father of us all” (Rom 4:16), that is, the father of Christians from the Jews and from the Gentiles, who are all justified by faith alone. It means that there is a fundamental bond between Abraham and us today, a fellowship that we have in the one covenant of God’s love. Abraham and Israel then, and we today, can be justified only by faith in Christ.

### **Abraham’s faith tested**

We see Abraham in faith going to the land that God will show him. This faith, however, is sorely tested in many ways, so that Abraham learns more and more to trust in the LORD. The first test occurs when Abraham, having arrived in Canaan and travelled through it, is resting near Shechem, near the great tree of Moreh, the heart of the Canaanite empire and a centre of its idolatrous practices. The LORD appears to him there and says, “To your offspring I will give this land” (Gen 12:7). The Bible mentions specifically that “at that time the Canaanites were in the land” (12:6). This means that the Canaanites were in control. What can a lone stranger do against these people? The land would not be given over voluntarily.

Abraham also learns that he himself will not see this promise fulfilled. The land will be given to his offspring. Would Abraham think that God had somehow

misled him or not given him the complete picture while he was still in Haran? The appearance of the LORD at Shechem does not necessarily make things easier for Abraham.

The second test follows during the stay in Egypt. A famine in Canaan forces him to go to that country. Because of the beauty of Sarah, who is very likely to be taken into the harem of Pharaoh, Abraham fears for his life. Therefore he instructs her to state that she is his sister, so that his life will be spared and he will be treated well. The LORD makes clear in what follows that Abraham may trust in the LORD to protect him and his wife. What a lesson, indeed.

If Abraham is tested with respect to the promise concerning the land, he is tested even more in the case of the promise concerning a son. It takes a long time for this son to be born. The patience wears thin, and Sarah persuades Abraham to have a child through her maid-servant Hagar. But this experiment backfires. Ishmael is not a lawful heir but a dangerous competitor. The LORD repeats the promise and assures Abraham that he will receive a son through Sarah. In Genesis 17 we read that Abraham falls on his face and laughs when the LORD assures him that Sarah will be the mother of nations and kings. The idea of an elderly woman bearing a child seems ludicrous.

We see Abraham's faith sorely tested. One almost wonders if the apostle Paul is correct when he writes about Abraham, "Without weakening in his faith, [Abraham] faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Rom 4:19-21).

Paul does not mean that Abraham did not experience difficult times and moments of anxiety. The life of faith is not always undisturbed. The point is that Abraham steadily *grew* in his faith, learning more and more to believe God's promises, and when it came to the key issues, there was in Abraham's mind and heart no doubt that God would do exactly as he had promised.

The greatest test of Abraham's faith comes when he is called to offer Isaac to the LORD (Gen 22). How utterly difficult this must have been. Abraham waited so long for this son, finally received him and deeply loved him, and is now at the point of losing him. Yet we see Abraham going immediately on his way and doing all that God has commanded, knowing that somehow the LORD would provide. How could Abraham do it? "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (Heb 11:19). Here we see the complete victory of faith given by God.

## **The old covenant: a spiritual relationship**

More than once I have read the suggestion that the old covenant was a physical relationship and that a person belonged to Israel simply by birthright, while the

new covenant is purely spiritual. The old covenant does not, therefore, become the new covenant; it is completely terminated. But it becomes clear in the life of the patriarch Abraham that the relationship with God in his covenant of love is governed by faith, and faith is fully spiritual. Spiritual means: worked by the Holy Spirit, who alone gives faith. Isaac and Jacob also learned to walk by faith alone. In this sense the old covenant is not different from the new.

The same faith of people like Seth and Noah, who trusted in God and believed his promises, is evident in the life of Abraham. He is God's friend, a man who walked with God in an ever-deepening faith. Abraham knew that God would take care of him according to his promises, and in love he obeyed God's commands from the heart. The covenant has always been a spiritual relationship, determined by faith, governed by love, visible in dedication and obedience.

We see the spiritual nature of the old covenant even more clearly when we consider how it stressed the need for atonement and reconciliation.

### **Atonement: the basis of the covenant**

The question needs to be faced: how could God relate so closely in a covenant of love with sinful man? How can the holy God associate with unholy creatures? This question does not arise only in connection with Abraham; it could be asked already immediately after the fall. But since Abraham is called "God's friend" (Isa 41:8; James 2:23), the question should certainly receive attention now. Is there a way of reconciliation opened by God so that he can treat sinners as his friends?

There is a way of atonement. While we do not know much about the exact sacrificial practices of the people of old, nor about the origin of the sacrifices, it is clear that from the start some form of atoning sacrifice was brought to the LORD.

Both Cain and Abel, as we saw earlier, brought an offering, and this they had most likely learned from their father (Gen 4:3, 4). Noah's first act, after coming out of the ark, was to build an altar and sacrifice a burnt offering on it (Gen 8:20). Abraham built altars at Shechem and Bethel (Gen 12:7, 8).

A sacrifice is made in recognition of God's holiness and glory, as well as man's sinfulness, and takes place in the setting of worship. It denotes atonement for sin, and expresses gratitude for God's grace. The sacrifice therefore becomes an essential element in the functioning of the covenant of God's love.

This becomes clear in Genesis 15, where we read how God officially makes his covenant with Abraham. The LORD promises to Abraham that he will have a son, even offspring as innumerable as the stars of heaven, who will receive Canaan as their possession. Abraham is overwhelmed by all this and asks, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" (verse 8). The LORD then instructs Abraham to bring a heifer, a goat and a ram, a dove, and a young pigeon. These animals are slaughtered and the pieces laid opposite each other (except in the case of the birds). In this way a "street of blood" comes about (see Schilder, *Schifftoverdenkingen II*, 97ff.). Abraham must then wait to see what will

happen. Will God accept this sacrifice?

The remarkable thing is that *God alone* passes through this street of blood (verse 17, "...a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces"). Here we see again that the covenant is not an arrangement between two equal parties who voluntarily enter into a bond, but that it exists by God's will alone, through his sovereign grace. He alone atones for the sins of his people. This becomes abundantly clear on Golgotha: the covenant exists by the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross! This is foreshadowed in Genesis 15.

There can be no covenant without atonement. God shows his love in providing the altar and the sacrifice. So he himself lays the basis for the covenant of love and ensures its continuation.

### **The spiritual character of the sacrifice**

Since in the Old Testament sacrifices animals were offered, the danger exists that we see only the outward, physical aspect of the ceremony. There is in every religious ritual the danger of formalism, of only going through the motions. Israel did not always escape this danger.

But throughout the Old Testament it is made clear that God does not want sacrifices when these are brought automatically. If the heart is far from God, and the sacrifices are given without faith worked by the Spirit, these offerings are not pleasing to the LORD. We are in the covenant not to give things but to offer ourselves in love as a living sacrifice of thankfulness to God.

Samuel explained to king Saul that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Sam 15:22). David knew that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps 51:17). God is not interested in the flesh of bulls and goats (Ps 50) but requires true thank offerings.

The prophets complained bitterly about the superficial manner in which Israel served the LORD. "The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me'" (Isa 29:13). The Lord Jesus Christ quoted these very words of Isaiah to unmask the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders of his time who were strong on human tradition but weak in the real service of God (Matt 15:7, 8).

The covenant of God may never become an external, formal, and traditional arrangement but must always be seen as a living relationship in which we fully dedicate ourselves to the LORD in gratitude. This is taught us in both the old and the new covenant. And so Paul can write to the Romans, "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1)." God wants us to dedicate ourselves to him body, soul, and spirit.

We learn already from Abraham that the covenant is fully a spiritual relationship, based on faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

## **Circumcision: the sign of the old covenant**

We read in Genesis 15 how God officially established his covenant with Abraham. In Genesis 17 God appears to Abraham again, this time to confirm the covenant that had been made. This confirmation was necessary in the light of the episode with Hagar and Ishmael. The LORD announces now also the time of the birth of Sarah's son.

It is important to note how the LORD introduces himself to Abraham: "I am God Almighty [El-Shaddai]; walk before me and be blameless" (17:1). Many years have passed since God first called Abraham. Also, it is thirteen years since Ishmael was born (see 17:25). Abraham and Sarah have become older still, and the possibility of their having a child is even more remote. Therefore the LORD reminds Abraham that he is the Almighty with whom all things are possible.

There is also the call: walk before me and be blameless. It is the basic demand of the covenant, which always stands. We are to live in close, conscious fellowship with God and obey his commandments. It was testified of Enoch (Gen 5:23) and Noah (Gen 6:9) that they walked with God; it is demanded also of Abraham. God's covenant is always the same. It is, as this chapter calls it, an everlasting covenant.

Then follows a new element, namely the institution of circumcision as the sign of the covenant. Circumcision means to cut (all) around, and it denotes the removal of the foreskin from the male reproductive organ. Circumcision was practised more widely than in Israel. It was only in Israel, however, that it received a special, religious significance. In other cases, it was often a rite preparing men for marriage and was therefore commonly applied to young adult males. Some believe that it may also have had something to do with the fertility rituals that were common among the peoples surrounding Israel, but this is not generally accepted.

It is clear that in the case of Abraham and Israel, circumcision has a different function. It signifies that someone belongs to God's covenant people. "It will be the sign of the covenant between me and you" (Gen 17:10, 11). Therefore it is to be administered to infants, to signify that children from the time of birth belong to the covenant people of the LORD. Since circumcision is surgery which can lead to infection and requires antibodies for healing, it was not to be administered immediately upon birth, but on the eighth day, when the blood-supply of an infant had sufficiently stabilized.

Circumcision may be an external, physical sign, yet it portrays a much deeper and spiritual truth: what must be cut away is sin and what is required is a new heart in the service of the LORD. Israel is to be holy unto the LORD. Something that is "uncircumcised" does not function properly. This can be said of the heart: the nations round Israel also know of circumcision, says the LORD, but it does not mean anything. "For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart" (Jer 9:26). An uncircumcised ear is closed and cannot hear (Jer 6:10, King James Version). Uncircumcised lips cannot

properly speak (Exod 6:12, 13, King James Version). Circumcision apparently has as much to do with the heart, the ears, and the lips as with the male sexual organ.

Jeremiah's complaint is that Israel is the covenant nation of the LORD, and bears the sign of the covenant in circumcision, but they are not different from the nations around them; people who are also circumcised but are fully heathen. The administration of a physical sign can easily become a traditional ritual that ceases to be meaningful and functional. The same applies, of course, to baptism, the sign which replaced circumcision. Therefore Jeremiah must speak of a new covenant which will have as feature that God's law is in the minds and hearts of his people (Jer 31:33).

Circumcision means that as a member of God's people one needs a new heart in order to love God and the neighbour. As Moses reminds Israel, "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer" (Deut 10:16). They should not repeat the sins of the past. And Paul writes in Romans 2:28, 29, "A man is not a Jew if he is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."

Also in the old covenant it was *sola fide* (by faith alone), *sola gratia* (by grace alone) and *solī Deo gloria* (all praise to God alone). Those who see circumcision only as something physical, and in those terms describe the old covenant as well, do not do justice to the Word of God.

## **An everlasting covenant**

We want to look yet at one word of the LORD in Genesis 17:7: "I will establish my covenant as an *everlasting* covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." The question is what is meant here by the adjective everlasting. It must be an important word, because it is often repeated, for example in the Psalms and by the prophets. "He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant" (Ps 105:10). "He remembers his covenant forever" (Ps 111:5).

The same word is also connected to the new covenant: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David" (Isa 55:3). The apostle Paul sees this as being fulfilled in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. "What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus" (Acts 13:32-34). The covenant promise given to Israel of old is applied without question to the people of the New Testament time ("...us, their children..."). In Hebrews 13:20, 21 we find the same notion: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good

for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

So Jeremiah may say of the exiles who will return, “They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them...” (Jer 32:38-40). See also Ezekiel 16:60: “Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.” The covenant that God makes with the spiritual Israel will by nature be everlasting. What is the implication of this word?

The word everlasting may normally be taken to mean: without end. But in Hebrews 8:13 we read that the old covenant was made “obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.” What then is everlasting and what is not? We conclude that even though a certain dispensation of the covenant must disappear, the covenant itself as relationship of love between God and his people never ends. Paul refers to this in Romans 8:35: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

Just as the covenant always exists, so there will always be a covenant people. The Lord Jesus spoke in the same terms about his church, after Peter’s confession of him as the Christ: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt 16:18). Therefore we may confess about the church of Christ, “This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end, for Christ is an eternal King who cannot be without subjects” (Belgic Confession, Article 27).

The apostle Paul speaks in covenantal terms when he writes these words of comfort: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38, 39). God’s covenant of love is forever.

## **Continuity and perpetuity**

When we read the word everlasting in the context of Genesis 17 it is clear that it has to do with circumcision and children. The covenant is not made with one man, but in him with his family, and with the generations that come after him. The sign of the covenant is administered to that part of the body which is used for the continuation of the generations. One generation may go, but another comes to take its place as God’s people, and so the covenant line continues.

The word everlasting therefore also speaks of the continuity and the perpetuity of the covenant through the generations. This continuity is not determined by the obedience of future generations but lies in the very nature and character of the covenant as a relationship with believers and their seed. As such it has no end, and

in Psalm 105 the number thousand (ten times one hundred, ten centuries, a full period of time) is used to denote an endless stream of generations.

When God established his covenant with Abraham, many generations of covenant children had already gone before him, and many would follow. God will gather his covenant people throughout time until the number is full, and they may live with him forever on the new earth. His covenant is indeed everlasting.