

**Thought for Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021**  
**Pastor Gordon Hamilton**

**Read Genesis 17:1-27** *'My word is my bond!'* is the motto of the London Stock Exchange. The motto is used to express and encourage adherence to the highest standards of integrity in financial markets. Its origins include its use to create binding agreements without the need for written forms of contract. I'm not terribly certain how it would stand up in law nowadays if you said that someone had promised to pay £X for something and then reneged on it. I believe I have even heard of people who have written things down but it has then been argued that the written word is not actually what the agreement or whatever meant. I believe that wills can be contested in court because the 'correct' words weren't used. There are some clubs or organisations that, if you want to join them, you have to go through an initiation ceremony, even children have their own little ceremonies to join their gangs. What God was asking of Abram, or as we see in verse 5, Abraham as he is now to be called, *'I am making a covenant with you Abraham,'* but not only with Abraham, but all who are in his family and his household, and in verse 9 we read; *'Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.'* I am sure you have heard of female circumcision but this has nothing to do with what God taught as being part of the covenant he made with Abraham. Interestingly as well, we see that Abraham circumcised Ishmael, v23, and Islam came through the line of Ishmael but circumcision is not mentioned in the Koran although wisely practised. For Jews this is still a very important part and parcel of being a Jew. In Luke 2:21 we see that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, was circumcised. In Christian circles circumcision is not felt to be important and would only be carried out for health reasons. Let's come back to the beginning of our reading; *'The Lord appeared to Abraham... and Abram fell face down.'* If you remember during this look at Abraham's life we have read several times that; *'The Lord said...'* or, *'The Word of the Lord came to him...'* in chapter 15 we even see Abram talking back to the Lord, but not this time; *'The Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.' Abram fell face down...'* That, I am sure will be our response when we meet God face to face, to fall prostrate before a mighty and holy God, awesome in power. Many hymns convey those words, and too often we sing them gustily, without the full awesomeness of our God. There's a song written by Rich Mullins in 1989; *'Our God is an awesome God, He reigns from heaven above, With wisdom, power and love, Our God is an awesome God! Our God is an awesome God, He reigns from heaven above, With wisdom, power and love, Our God is an awesome God!'* It got me thinking what the definition of awesome actually is, according to a dictionary, it is; *causing or inducing awe; inspiring an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, or fear: an awesome sight.'* John the Baptist talks of Jesus in John 1:27; *'He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'* I remember back in the 60's when the Beatles were around and beatlemania was around, girls were swooning when they got near them. That will be nothing compared with meeting Jesus / God face to face. There will be only one response, and that is to fall prostrate, to face down. If you want a relationship with the King of kings, then you have to be open to His leading, the call for Abraham was to do as God wished, to join in a covenant relationship with Him, for Abraham that meant adhering to the covenant of circumcision, the sign for life that you are in a relationship with the one true God. Abraham was also given a further promise, thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, v15 & 16; *'God also said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless*

*her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.'* And the next verse says; '*Abraham fell face down.*' Of course the next few words were to come back and haunt him; '*he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?'*' and God responds; '*Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.*' Be wary if you are going to laugh at what God tells you what is going to happen. Ephesians 3:20; '*God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,*' I believe that there is one thing we have to remember, being a Christian carries a cost. It is not just about going to Church, it is about being a witness for the King of kings. We don't have a physical attribute, as in circumcision. The apostle Paul puts it this way in **Colossians 2:9-17 read...** Even as a former Baptist, and I believe in believers baptism, full immersion, that is an outward recognition of an inward transformation. Paul talks of; '*the circumcision of the heart.*' **Romans 2:25-29 read...** Abraham took his role, his responsibility very seriously as the final 5 verses of Genesis 17 tells us; '*On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen; Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that very day. And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.*' We should take our relationship with Jesus just as seriously and make sure, male or female, that our hearts are circumcised with Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me;  
I once was lost, but now am found was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed!

*My chains are gone, I've been set free  
My God, my saviour has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy rains  
Unending love, amazing grace.*

The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

*My chains are gone...*

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, the sun forbear to shine.  
But God who called me here below will be forever mine.

*My chains are gone, I've been set free  
My God, my saviour has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy rains  
Unending love, amazing grace.*