

A (Mercifully) Short Explanation of Infant Baptism

- Imagine that I am a shepherd in a field and looking over my flock → I can tell which sheep belong to me because I have placed my mark on them.
- By placing my mark on them, I am promising to watch over them, care for them, and provide for them because they are part of my flock → This mark visibly separates my sheep from other flocks
- When others see my mark, they think of the shepherd's ownership, not the sheep's decision to be included in my flock...because sheep are notoriously fickle, dumb, and helpless
- When a new lamb is born into my flock, that lamb IMMEDIATELY becomes part of my flock and so I put my shepherd's mark on it → that visible sign that points to my promise getting passed on to a new generation of sheep in my flock (from the second they are born into the world)

We see similar signs like this throughout the Bible that point to promises God has made

- Most of these covenant signs (ex: rainbow, tablets of stone, throne of David, stars in the sky) are in the Old Testament... and are referenced AGAIN in the New Testament → CONNECTION!
 - Visible signs, given by God, that point to His promise to care for his visible flock
- When Jesus walked the earth, He constantly referred to the Old Testament → because that's the only Scripture that was written down at the time (Law, the prophets, and the writings)
 - After His resurrection, He appeared on the road to Emaus (Luke 24:27) *"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things **concerning himself**. → 'Somebody's coming' (Old Testament) → 'Somebody's here right now!' (Gospels)*
 - The rest of the New Testament → *"Somebody's coming again!"* (Ex: Rev 22)
 - Gen 3:15 (The 1st time the gospel is announced), the whole rest of the Bible is an outworking of that gospel promise → "The promised Redeemer is coming!"
- Once you admit that the Bible is one connected story about Jesus (*"somebody's coming, somebody's here, somebody's coming again"*), you can't remove your view of baptism from this larger framework
 - You CAN'T suddenly remove baptism from its Old Testament roots
 - Just like the Lord's Supper has its Old Testament roots in the passover meal

So..if God makes what he calls an "everlasting promise/covenant" in the Old Testament, you have to admit that (unless God Himself reverses it), it is STILL ongoing/everlasting today

- Genesis 17:7 *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.* → Promise God made to Abraham and his descendants
- What was the mark/sign God used to point others to this promise He made? → circumcision
 - What did it mean? → signified the removal of uncleanness from God's people and communicated that God's provision of blessing was being passed on from one generation to the next (hence, the physical location of that sign on the male body)
 - It also pointed to God's promise to bring redemption to His people through a redeemer who would be born of a woman and be blood-related to Abraham/David (Matthew 1)
- Who was the sign applied to? → Believers AND their children (8 day old infants)
 - God explicitly commanded Abraham to circumcise Isaac (Gen 21:4)
 - No one disputes that male children received this sign in the Old Testament

So...Where do we see this connection in the New Testament?

- Jesus Himself received the covenant sign of circumcision at 8 days old (Luke 2:21), so did Paul
 - Circumcision was never just an ethnic marker, it always pointed forward to God's promise

- Galatians 3:7, 26–29 [7] *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.... [26-29] for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 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 no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.* → A new, better, more inclusive covenant would build upon the old covenant...Gentiles were included too!
- Abraham has spiritual descendants (Those who trust God by faith, regardless of sex/ethnicity) are still covered by God's promise to him in the Old Testament → those who, like Abraham, trust God BY FAITH alone
- In 1st Cor 7:14, the apostle Paul (who was an Old Testament expert) wrote that the children of at least one believing parent, even one married to an unbeliever, are considered "holy" (set apart) before God (ie- are in covenant relationship with God, part of the visible covenant community), instead of being seen as unclean (ie- outside of the camp) → Paul is intentionally using Old Testament covenant language
 - Because if one of the sheep belong to the shepherd, the lambs do too...immediately
- Just like EVERY OTHER sign, it had nothing to do with the faith of the recipient, but it pointed to the faithfulness of the one who made the covenant and promised redemption (God Himself)
 - God's promise was to be believed....by faith alone, in Christ alone (the promised redeemer in Gen 3:15)
 - This promise was given by God's grace alone → it could neither be bought nor earned
- What about the change in sign from circumcision to water baptism?
 - Romans 2:28-29 → circumcision of the heart is what matters...comes by grace through faith
 - Colossians 2:11–12 *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, [12] having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*
- So...1st generation adult believers in Christ received the new covenant sign of baptism....along with their children (just like Abraham in the Old Testament)
 - Abraham was given the sign AFTER faith (1st generation believer) but was given to his infant son Isaac BEFORE faith (because he was a child of one or more believing parent)
 - This was reaffirmed by Peter in Acts 2:38–39: *And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."*
- The sign itself is not what brings salvation, the sign communicates the REALITY of the spoken covenant promise of God and visibly points to the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ to be received by faith → just like Abraham and the rest of the Old Testament believers look forward to

So....Where in the New Testament do we see God reversing His everlasting covenant? → We don't

- There is not a single word in the New Testament about a change in the covenant inclusion of children
- Applying the new covenant sign is assumed (early church history backs this up). It seems odd that a large change would never be mentioned in Scripture. It's an argument from silence....but a very LOUD silence
- So...in summation (via R. Scott Clark): *The Abrahamic covenant is still in force. The administration of the Abrahamic covenant involved believers and their children (Gen 17). That's why Peter said, "For the promise to you and to your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). That's a New Testament re-statement of the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 17 and in the minor prophets (e.g., Joel 2). Only believers have ever actually inherited, by grace alone, through faith alone, the substance of the promise (Christ and salvation) but the signs and seals of the promise have always been administered to believers and their children. It's both/and not either/or.* → In other words, Baptism is NOT a sign from us to God showing Him that we believe, it is a sign from God TO us showing that we belong... to God's visible covenant community