

# Genesis 17 Commentary

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## Summary Chart of The Book of Genesis

Focus	Foundation Events (Four Events) (Events Predominant)				Foundation People (Four People) (People Predominant)			
Divisions	Creation (Ge 1-2)	Fall (Ge 3-5)	Flood (Ge 6-9)	Nations (Ge 10-12)	Abraham's Faith (Ge 12-24)	Isaac's Family (Ge 25-26)	Jacob's Conflicts (Ge 27-36)	Joseph's Calamity (Ge 37-50)
Topics	Beginning of the Human Race (Race As A Whole)				Beginning of the Hebrew Race (Family of Abraham)			
	Faithfulness of Mankind (Noah)				Faithfulness of One Man's Family (Abraham)			
	Historical				Biographical			

Place	Eastward From Eden to Ur	Westward From Canaan to Egypt
Time	~2000+ Years (20% of Genesis) (~4004-2090BC)	About 300 Years 193 Yr in Canaan, 93 Yr in Egypt (80% of Genesis) (2090-1804BC)
	Primeval History of Humanity	Patriarchal History of Israel
Author	Moses	

## BEGINNINGS

- Ge 1:1-25 - The Universe (Everything)
- Ge 1:26-2:25 - The Human Race
- Ge 3:1-7 - Sin Enters the World
- Ge 3:8-24 - God Promises Redemption from Bondage to Sin
- Ge 4:1-15 - Family Life
- Ge 4:16ff - Civilization
- Ge 10:1-11:32 - The Nations of the World
- Ge 12:1ff - The Story of Israel and the Jews



Abraham believed God (Gal 3:6<sup>±</sup>, Ge 15:5,6<sup>±</sup>)

[John Phillips - Exploring Genesis](#) (PAGE 20)

The Potential of Faith (Ge 17:1–27)

### A. How the Covenant Was Received (Ge 17:1–16)

1. In Absolute Subjection (Ge 17:1–3)
2. In Absolute Silence (Ge 17:4–16)
  1. The Substance of the Promise (Ge 17:4–8)
    1. The Principle Involved
    2. The People Involved Ge (17:4–6)
    3. The Period Involved (Ge 17:7)
    4. The Place Involved (Ge 17:8)
  2. The Seal of the Promise (Ge 17:9–14)
    1. Its Implications (Ge 17:9–11)
    2. Its Implementation (Ge 17:12–13)
    3. Its Importance (Ge 17:14)
  3. The Spirit of the Promise (Ge 17:15–16)

### B. How the Covenant Was Believed (Ge 17:17–27)

1. The Laughter of Faith (Ge 17:17)
2. The Logic of Faith (Ge 17:18–22)
  1. The Plea for Ishmael (Ge 17:18)
  2. The Pledge for Ishmael (Ge 17:19–22)
    1. The Reserve Clause (Ge 17:19)
    2. The Royal Clause (Ge 17:20–22)
  3. The Life of Faith (Ge 17:23–27)

1. A Limitless Obedience (Ge 17:23–24)
  1. Parental Obedience (Ge 17:23a)
  2. Patriarchal Obedience (Ge 17:23b)
  3. Positional Obedience (Ge 17:23c)
  4. Personal Obedience (Ge 17:24)
2. A Limited Ordinance (Ge 17:25–27)
  1. The State of the Rebellious Man (Ge 17:25)
  2. The Standing of the Righteous Man (Ge 17:26–27)

**Genesis 17:1 Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless.**

- **Now when Abram was ninety-nine:** Ge 16:16
- **the LORD appeared to Abram:** Ge 12:1
- **Almighty:** Ge 18:14 28:3 35:11 Ex 6:3 Nu 11:23 De 10:17 Job 11:7 Ps 115:3 Jer 32:17 Da 4:35 Mt 19:26 Eph 3:20 Php 4:13 Heb 7:25
- **walk:** Ge 5:22,24 6:9 48:15 1Ki 2:4 3:6 8:25 2Ki 20:3 Ps 116:9 Isa 38:3 Mic 6:8 Lu 1:6 Ac 23:1 24:16 Heb 12:28
- **blameless:** Ge 6:9 De 18:13 Job 1:1 Mt 5:48
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## EL SHADDAI APPEARS & COMMANDS A CORAM DEO LIFE

**Now when** - This time phrase is interesting because there is no record of God interacting with Abram over the previous 13 years. ([See note by John Phillips below](#) regarding the possible significance of this 13 year hiatus.) There are a number of commentators who seem to get a bit carried away with "numerology" and attach spiritual meanings to numbers (one needs to especially be a Berean with A W Pink who can have some excellent comments interspersed with "spiritualizing" of the text). For example, Pink (et. al. like John Phillips) think 13 is associated with evil including unbelief and thus they say Abram's unbelief accounts for the 13 years of silence in Scripture after his faith failure with Hagar in Genesis 16. While that is possible, one must be cautious in ascribing spiritual meanings to numbers and must rely on the context for accurate interpretation. When Scripture is silent we must be very cautious in our interpretations!

**Abram was ninety-nine years old** - Hebrew "the son of ninety-nine years." This most significant episode in the Abraham cycle begins with a "timestamp" that make the promises that constitute the centerpiece of this episode that much more amazing and miraculous. Abraham and Sarai are now definitely past childbearing age according to Abraham's own testimony (Ge 17:17). Genesis 16:16 ended with "Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him." Here is a summary of **Abraham's Chronology**:

- Age 75 (Ge 12:3-5+) (Sarah = 65). LORD's first revelation to Abram. God preached gospel (Gal 3:8+, cf promised seed = Gal 3:16+)
- Age ?? (Ge 15:6+) Abram becomes a believer.
- Age 86 (Ge 16:16+) Abram went into Hagar producing Ishmael,
- Age 99 (Ge 17:1, 17+) LORD appears to Abram.
- Age 99 (Ge 17:24+) When Abraham was circumcised.
- Age 100 (Ge 21:5+) Abraham fathers Isaac with Sarah
- Age 137 (Ge 23:1+) Abraham's wife Sarah dies
- "Old" (Ge 24:1+) - No exact age given.
- Age 140 (Ge 25:20+) Abraham's son Isaac marries Rebekah
- Age 175 (Ge 25:7+) Abraham dies

**The LORD (Jehovah = Yahweh) appeared to Abram and said to him** - While God is recorded as have spoken to Abraham several times, only 3 times do we see that He specifically **appeared** to Him. Did God appear to him in those other times when He spoke to him? Possibly, but we cannot be dogmatic. And so here are the definite appearances recorded. (1) The God of glory appeared to Abraham "when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran" and told him to depart to land God would show him. (Acts 7:2+). (2) In Ge 12:7+ the LORD "appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." (3) The LORD came to Abram in a vision (Ge 15:1+) (4) Ge 17:1+ LORD appeared as El Shaddai (5) The LORD would appear to Abraham one more time in Ge

18:1+ at the oaks of Mamre.

**I am God (el) Almighty (Shadday)** - Note that there are three names for God in these first 3 verses - (1) LORD ([Jehovah](#)), (2) God Almighty (El Shaddai) and (3) God ([Elohim](#)) (Ge 17:3). Phillips writes "The [Jehovah](#) of the Old Testament is the [Jesus](#) of the New Testament, El Shaddai is the Satisfier—He who pours Himself into believers' lives to make them fruitful, Elohim is God in the ultimate and absolute sense."

**God** in this verse is El ([el](#)) and it is fascinating that the Septuagint renders it with "ego eimi" the same designation Jesus gave to Himself in the New Testament (e.g., Jn 8:24+, Jn 8:58+, et al). The Hebrew for **Almighty** is [Shadday](#) and in this passage is translated in the Septuagint with [theos](#), the word for "God." God reminds Abram that He is the Almighty God and thus He is able to perform what He has promised, independent of Abram's age!

**THOUGHT** - There is an encouraging thought in this passage - Abram is very old, and yet God comes to remind him that He is not finished with him yet! Beloved, I don't care how old you are, as a son or daughter of the Most High God, you can be sure that if you are still breathing, God is not finished with you yet! Ask Him what it is He wants you to accomplish in the short time left. Then step out in faith and redeem the time! But perhaps you are reading this and you have strayed from Him and not experienced fellowship with Him for some time (Why is Scripture silent for 13 years with Abraham? Was their a fellowship issue? We cannot say.) You can mark it down with a diamond stylus, that He is still waiting for you and ready to restore you and use you if you are willing.

Play Michael Card's great song (he wrote it and sang it) [El Shaddai](#).

El shaddai, el shaddai  
El-elyon na adonia  
Age to age You're still the same  
By the power of the name  
El shaddai, el shaddai  
Erkamka na adonai  
We will praise and lift You high  
El shaddai

As discussed below there is some disagreement as to the derivation and meaning of this great Name of God, El Shaddai, but with that caveat, two aspects seem clear. El Shaddai speaks of God as all powerful and as all sufficient. Abraham and Sarah are "as good as dead" as far as their fertility is concerned, but now El Shaddai enters the picture and will show them that nothing is impossible with Him! For a more in depth study see article on [El Shaddai - God Almighty](#). We get some help from the Septuagint on the meaning of Almighty ([Shadday](#)) for the use in Ru 1:21 is translated with [hikanos](#) which in simple terms means enough, sufficient or adequate. In Job which uses [Shadday](#) 31 times (out of a total of 48 OT uses) translates Shadday with [hikanos](#) (Job 40:2) and more often with [pantokrator](#) which is a designation for God as the one holding all power and ruling all things. And from these we get the picture of God all powerful and all sufficient.

*Weary, downcast Christian toilers, hear Him say,*

*"Look unto Me; I am God all-sufficient."*

-- James Smith

**Warren Wiersbe** comments on El Shaddai in Genesis 17 noting that ""**El**" is the name of God that speaks of power; but what does "**Shaddai**" mean? Scholars do not agree. Some say it comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to be strong"; others prefer a word meaning "mountain" (**ED**: *sadu*) or "breast (*shad*). Metaphorically, a mountain is a "breast" that rises up from the plain; and certainly a mountain is a symbol of strength. If we combine these several ideas, we might say that "**El Shaddai**" is the name of "the all-powerful and all-sufficient God who can do anything and meet any need. **But why would God reveal this name to Abraham at this time, at the close of thirteen years of silence?** Because God was going to tell His friend (Jas 2:23+) that Sarah would have a son. The Lord wanted Abraham to know that He is the God who is **all-sufficient** (**ED**: THE SEPTUAGINT TRANSLATION OF "SHADDAI" IN Ru 1:21+ = "ho [hikanos](#)" LITERALLY "THE SUFFICIENT/ADEQUATE" ONE!) and **all-powerful** (**ED**: THE SEPTUAGINT TRANSLATION OF ALMIGHTY [SHADDAI] IN Job 5:17 = "[pantokrator](#)" = ALL POWER, ALL POWERFUL, OMNIPOTENT [ONE]), and that nothing is too hard for Him (Ge 18:14+). God says "**I will**" twelve times in Genesis 17 (**ED**: CORRECTION "**I WILL**" IS FOUND IN 15X IN 9 VERSES - Ge 17:2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 16, 19, 20, 21); He is about to do the miraculous. After Abraham's battle with the four kings (Ge 14:15+), God came to him as a warrior and told him He was his "**shield**." When Abraham wondered about his refusal of Sodom's wealth, God told him He was his "**exceedingly great reward**" (Ge 15:1+). Now when Abraham and Sarah were "as good as dead," (Heb 11:12+) **God assured them that He was more than sufficient to bring about the miracle birth.** God comes to us in the ways we need Him most. ([Be Obedient](#) - BORROW)

*Revelation always brings responsibility*

-- Warren Wiersbe

**Walk before Me before Me** - **Revelation** of God as El Shaddai called for a **response** from Abram. **Before Me** is literally "before the face" or "before My face." **Walk** to and fro before Me (see [additional note below](#)). God is saying "*live the rest of your days on earth as if in My very sight*" (cf Pr 15:3+, 2Ch 16:9+, Heb 4:13+, et al). This is an awesome, albeit frightening, thought for it describes living [Coram Deo](#), "Before the Face of God" (cf the command to "conduct" ourselves in fear - 1Pe 1:17+). In the NT a "**Walk**" pictures the general course and direction of one's life.

**THOUGHT** - Oh, that God's Spirit would enable each of us to daily [live circumspect](#) lives in awareness that the eyes of the LORD are ever upon us --- our thoughts, our words and our deeds --- not walking in dread, but walking in adoration and reverence and with a desire to continually be pleasing to Him (Col 1:10+).

**Rod Mattoon** has another thought on **walk...before Me** - This is the place of security for us because God is behind us looking over us. Many times a child will walk before his parents in a shopping mall or store. They are happy and secure knowing that Mom and Dad are right behind them. Watch what happens though when they lose sight of their parents by getting too far ahead. The result is panic. We sometimes panic too because we get too far ahead of the Lord.

**Westermann** on **walk...before Me** - God directs Abraham (who here represents Israel) to live life before him, a life in which every step is taken looking to God and every day of which is accompanied by him. (Quoted by [Wenham](#))

**Reformation Study Bible** on **walk before me, and be blameless** - These phrases denote the service due a king. Even Israel's kings were commanded to "walk before" their greater Sovereign, the Lord Himself (1Ki 9:4; 2Ki 20:3). The covenantal arrangement again surfaces: God's gracious promises call for the obedient response of Abraham.

**Steven Cole** comments that **blameless** "refers to a person who walks honestly and openly before God, who fears God and seeks to obey Him, and who confesses and turns away from sin. The word "**walk**" implies a step by step process. A walk is not spectacular and not a quick fix. But if you keep walking in the same direction, eventually you will get where you're going. For the believer, that direction is holiness."

**And be blameless (tamiym)** - The Hebrew word for **blameless** is [tamiym](#) which conveys the ideas of complete or whole. It means all-sided so as to cover all aspects of a thing. Revelation always brings responsibility. Enoch and Noah had walked **with** God (see [note below](#)), but Abraham was to walk **before** God, that is, live in the knowledge that the eyes of God were always upon him (Heb 4:13+). **Blameless** does not mean "sinless," for that would be an impossible goal for anyone to reach (read 1Ki 8:46). The idea is single-hearted (Listen to the words of [Single Heart](#)), without blame, sincere, wholly devoted to the Lord, a heart undivided (Pray Ps 86:11NIV<sub>±</sub>). In Ex 12:5+, [tamiym](#) refers to an "unblemished" sacrifice (> half of the 85 uses describe a sacrificial animal), which is one that is acceptable to the LORD. One might sum up God's call to walk before Him and be blameless as a call for integrity, a life that is (so to speak) an "acceptable sacrifice" to Him! Blameless in the Septuagint is the adjective [amemertos](#) which means free from fault (cf NT uses 1Th 2:10, 1Th 3:13, 1Th 5:23+ = "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, **without blame** [[amemertos](#)] at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." I pray that great prayer for you as you read this note!).

Both **walk** and **be** (blameless) are commands in Hebrew and in Greek. In the Septuagint, **walk** and **be** are the [present imperative](#) calling for this to be Abram's lifestyle or habitual practice. It is not about *perfection* (that's called *glory*) but about *direction* (confessing so that you keep short accounts when you sin). In the Septuagint, **walk** is translated with the verb [euaresteo](#). This verb is used in the Septuagint to describe the walks of Enoch (Ge 5:22, 24+) and Noah (Ge 6:9+). In Hebrews 11:5+ [euaresteo](#) is used of Enoch which says that "before his being taken up he was pleasing ([euaresteo](#) in perfect tense) to God." Be blameless is [amemertos](#) which means faultless, without guilt.

**THOUGHT** - God's command to Abraham reminds me of Paul's charge to all believers in Romans 12:1-2+ "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And **do not be conformed** ([present imperative with a negative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) to this world, but **be transformed** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." A "Romans 12:1-2+ walk" is a surrendered walk, a walk that is acceptable to Him! Dearly beloved of the Lord (1Th 1:4+), based on these Biblical criteria, how would you describe your walk this past week (this past year)? My prayer for you (and myself) is that we "may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that **we may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects.**" (Col 1:9-10+). In Jesus'

Name. Amen.

**Matthew Henry - Ge 17:1-6.** The covenant was to be accomplished in due time. The promised Seed was Christ, and Christians in him. And all who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abram, being partakers of the same covenant blessings. In token of this covenant his name was changed from Abram, "a high father," to Abraham, "the father of a multitude." All that the Christian world enjoys, it is indebted for to Abraham and his Seed.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - A naturalist once took a cocoon of an emperor moth and kept it in his study for months, hoping to witness its emergence in due time. The cocoon was flask-shaped with a narrow opening at the neck through which the moth would emerge. The great difference between the narrow opening and the size of the moth made the naturalist wonder how ever the insect would get out of its prison. At last the day came and all morning the man watched the struggles of the insect. It never seemed to get beyond a certain point. The struggle to emerge is what forces the fluids of the moth's body into the wings and makes it possible for it to fly. The naturalist did not know that and, his patience exhausted, he decided to help things along. With the point of his scissors he carefully snipped the confining threads to make the exit just a little easier. At once the moth crawled out with perfect ease. But the naturalist watched in vain to see the gorgeous wings expand and fill. They never did. His impatience and false kindness had ruined the moth. It never became anything but a stunted abortion, crawling painfully through the brief life it should have spent flying through the air on rainbow wings. It is always a mistake to try to hasten the work of God

He has His own reasons for His seeming delays. But Abram could not wait. As a result of his impatience there followed a solemn silence in which, for thirteen long years, he received no further word from God. He was eighty-six when Ishmael was born and ninety-nine when God at last broke the silence. There were thirteen years during which Abram made no further progress in the things of God, in which he saw no fruit, and during which nothing worthy of note happened in his life. (Phillips - [Exploring Genesis - page 142](#) - borrow)

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**Arthur Pink**, "God has reasons for delays. Not until man comes to the end of himself will God put forth His power. Not until man's extremity is reached does God's opportunity arrive. Not until our own powers are 'dead' will God act in grace.....God has more than one reason for His delays. Often it is to test the faith of His children, to develop their patience, to bring them to the end of themselves. His delays are in order that when He does act His delivering power may be more plainly evident, that what He does may be more deeply appreciated and that in consequence He may be more illustriously glorified." ([Abraham at Ninety and Nine](#).)

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#### **James Smith - WALKING.**

- I. **Before God:** Divine Inspection (Gen. 17:1).
- II. **With God:** Divine Companionship (Gen. 5:22).
- III. **After God:** Divine Leadership (Deut. 13:4).
- IV. **In God:** Divine Indwelling (Col. 2:6). And the last includes all the others.

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**James Smith - WALKING WITH GOD** - while this deals primarily with Enoch, clearly the principles are applicable to the call on Abraham to walk before God blamelessly.

"Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24).

**Walking with God simply means living in the presence of God**(Gen. 17:1). **A life regulated by His will, inspired by His Spirit, and devoted to His purpose. It implies—**

- I. **Entire Self-surrender.** The name Enoch means "dedicated," one yielded up to God, to be conformed to His mind and will.
- II. **Unbroken Fellowship.** "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Good company makes the road short.
- III. **Continual Progress.** To walk with God means a growing knowledge of Him. The light on this path shineth more and more. There is no standing still with Him. The wheels that are full of eyes rest not.
- IV. **Complete Separation.** You could not think of Enoch taking part in the world's sinful pleasures. "Be ye holy" (Lev. 20:7), for I am holy. God is light, and those who love the light do not walk in darkness.
- V. **Unfailing Perseverance.** For 300 years he walked with God. Not once a week, not only in the morning or the evening for a few minutes, but continually, and amidst all the cares and trials of the ordinary family life. He was no hermit or recluse.

**VI. Fearless Confidence** (Psa. 23). When we can say, "Thou art with me," what need we fear? Greater is He that is with us than all that can be against us. Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory over sin, the world, death, and the devil (1 Cor. 15:57).

**VII. Intense Satisfaction.** "He hath this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11:5). What a consolation this is, "He pleased God." In so doing he would no doubt displease many. Because ye are not of this world therefore doth the world hate you (John 15:18).

**VIII. Future Blessedness.** "God took him." This is the epitaph written concerning a man who was buried in Heaven before he died. He went in "to walk with Him in white" (Rev. 3:4). A figure of the transformation of the Church at the Coming of the Lord (Jude 14, 15).

**IX. Simple Faith.** "By faith Enoch was translated" (Heb. 11:5). He evidently believed that God would take him in without tasting death, and He did it. By faith in Christ God still takes men into His company, enabling them to please Him, and transforming them into His own likeness. "Walk worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:10).

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**God** (0410)(*el*) 'lh is the assumed root of 'él, 'élōah and 'élōhîm, which mean "god" or "God." **W E Vine** - This term was the most common general designation of deity in the ancient Near East. While it frequently occurred alone, 'él was also combined with other words to constitute a compound term for deity, or to identify the nature and functions of the "god" in some manner. Thus the expression "God, the God of Israel" (Gen. 33:20) identified the specific activities of Israel's God. **El** emphasizes the might of God and was the most commonly used word for God in the ancient Near East. **El** was the name of the chief Canaanite god.

In the ancient world, knowledge of a person's name was believed to give one power over that person. A knowledge of the character and attributes of pagan "gods" was thought to enable the worshipers to manipulate or influence the deities in a more effective way than they could have if the deity's name remained unknown. To that extent, the vagueness of the term 'él frustrated persons who hoped to obtain some sort of power over the deity, since the name gave little or no indication of the god's character. This was particularly true for El, the chief Canaanite god. The ancient Semites stood in mortal dread of the superior powers exercised by the gods and attempted to propitiate them accordingly. They commonly associated deity with the manifestation and use of enormous power. Perhaps this is reflected in the curious Hebrew phrase, "the power [']él of my hand" (Gen. 31:29, kjv; rsv, "It is in my power"; cf. Deut. 28:32). Some Hebrew phrases in the Psalms associated 'él with impressive natural features, such as the cedar trees of Lebanon (Psa. 80:10) or mountains (Psa. 36:6). In these instances, 'él conveys a clear impression of grandeur or majesty.

Names with 'él as one of their components were common in the Near East in the second millennium b.c. The names Methusael (Gen. 4:18) and Ishmael (Gen. 16:11) come from a very early period. In the Mosaic period, 'él was synonymous with the Lord who delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and made them victorious in battle (Num. 24:8). This tradition of the Hebrew 'él as a "God" who revealed Himself in power and entered into a covenant relationship with His people was prominent in both poetry (Psa. 7:11; Psa. 85:8) and prophecy (Isa. 43:12; Isa. 46:9). The name of 'él was commonly used by the Israelites to denote supernatural provision or power. This was both normal and legitimate, since the covenant between "God" and Israel assured an obedient and holy people that the creative forces of the universe would sustain and protect at all times. Equally, if they became disobedient and apostate, these same forces would punish them severely. ([Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words](#))

**Almighty** (shaddai) ([07706](#)) (**Shadday**) means Almighty, most powerful. As alluded to in the preceding table and elaborated on in more detail in the following notes, the Name **Shaddai** conveys the truth on the one hand that He is **omnipotent** and on the other that He is **sufficient**. El Shaddai = God Almighty the ever-present God who protects and provides, presents Himself as the One who makes a covenant with a human being named Abraham. There are 48 OT uses of **Shaddai** (see below) and in every use the reference is to God. Approximately one third of these uses of Shaddai are translated in the **LXX** by the Greek word **pantokrator** (pas = all + kraeteo) meaning "all strength" and used only of God in the NT and almost exclusively in the Revelation (2 Co. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; Rev. 4:8; Rev. 11:17; Rev. 15:3; Rev. 16:7; Rev. 16:14; Rev. 19:6; Rev. 19:15; Rev. 21:22)

Lest we become too dogmatic in our interpretation of the etymological derivation of **Shaddai**, Davison makes a cogent point noting that...

The exact origin, history, and etymology of the name (Shaddai) are highly debated. Traditionally, it has been connected to Hebrew šādad, "deal mightily with," but the verb actually has the connotation "deal violently." Other scholars associate it with Assyrian šadu, "mountain" or "high," thus rendering the Hebrew as "High God" or "God of the Mountains." The usual English translation, "Almighty," derives from the rendering of the Hebrew

in the LXX (**Ed note:** See [pantokrator](#) below) and Vulgate (**Ed note:** E.g., [Genesis 17:1](#) = "ego Deus omnipotens"), which was a free translation of what was by then an obscure term. (Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible)

There are some authorities (most notably Nathan Stone - see [note](#)) who feel that the Hebrew **Shaddai** is derived from the Hebrew word **shad** which means breast (an etymology also made popular by the Scofield Reference Bible). If this is valid, it in turn suggests that Shaddai might signify the one who nourishes or supplies. El Shaddai then would be the one who is able to pour out His promises of provision and power in abundance. Those who hold to this interpretation call attention to [Genesis 49](#) where we read of Joseph (as Jacob is preparing to die)...

But his bow remained firm, and his arms were agile, from the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), from the **God** ('El) of your father who helps you (cp notes [Jehovah Ezer - LORD our Helper](#)), and by the **Almighty** (Shaddai) who blesses you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the **breasts** (Hebrew = **shad**) and of the womb. ([Genesis 49:24, 25](#))

In this passage note that it is '**El**' Who gives strength to the arms, and it is the **Almighty** or **Shaddai** Who brings the blessings of the breast and the womb, including the blessing of the promised seed from the line of Abraham. Nevertheless while the meaning of Shaddai as the God Who nourishes and Who blesses the breasts and the womb is certainly a possible derivation, many commentators do not favor this etymology.

**John Davis** in Grace Journal (Volume 4) writes that...

The basic understanding of the conservative view is that the name "El Shaddai" is of divine, not natural origin. The name, it is asserted, was revealed by God, and not conceived by man. While all conservative scholars agree on this basic principle, **there is little agreement as to the etymology and significance of this name in relation to the patriarchs.** There are four basic views in this regard. The first view is that Shaddai comes from the root šādad (shadad) "to be strong" or "powerful." This view seems to be the more popular. The emphasis, therefore, in respect to the patriarchs, is that of God's power and strength. Oehler favors this view in his Theology of the Old Testament.

The second view of the name Shaddai is that its root is šādad (shadad) "to destroy" or "to terrify." This view is held by Mack.

The third view maintains that Shaddai comes from a compound word (from še (šer) and day which in Hebrew means "sufficiency." For a statement of this view compare John Calvin.

The fourth, and not too well accepted view is that proposed by the Scofield Bible. This view contends that the name comes from šad which has primary reference to the female breast. The name, therefore, signified nourishment and strength to the Patriarchs.

**Wayne House** writes that **El Shaddai** means - "The God of Strength" Probably related to the word "Mountain" and suggests the power or strength of God. This name also emphasizes God's covenant keeping nature ([Ge 17:1](#))... Some feel Shaddai is derived from a root that refers to a mother's breast, sustaining a newborn infant. If so, it conveys love, tenderness, mercy, all that a mother is to a dependent newborn, God is to his children... Job chastened by God. God often corrects His own to make them fruitful. Used this way in the book of Job 31 times. Job was a "perfect" man. God wanted to refine him still more, make him even more fruitful. And by the end of the book, God had given to Job more than he had to begin with. (H. Wayne House: Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992)

**Wiersbe** writes that...Hebrew scholars traditionally have interpreted El-Shaddai to mean "God Almighty" or "God All-Sufficient," relating it to the Hebrew word for "breast." Thus He is the God who nourishes and provides, who sustains and enables. Recent studies have suggested "the God of the mountain" (strength, stability) or "God my destroyer" (power against the enemy). (Wiersbe, W. W. Be Authentic. An Old Testament Study. Victor Pub)

Louis Berkhof (Systematic Theology) points out that whereas God as **El Shaddai** is indeed presented as the all-powerful One who overpowers nature, the name, where it occurs in the Bible, does not present God as an object of fear or terror, but rather as a source of blessing and comfort.

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**NET NOTE** summary of Shaddai (THESE ARE COMBINED NOTES ON Ruth 1:21 and Genesis 17:1)

The name אל שדי ('el shadday, "El Shaddai") has often been translated "**God Almighty**," primarily because Jerome translated it *omnipotens* ("all powerful") in the Latin Vulgate. There has been much debate over the meaning of the name. For discussion see W. F. Albright, "The Names Shaddai and Abram," *JBL* 54 (1935): 173–210; R. Gordis, "The Biblical Root sdy-sd," *JTS* 41 (1940): 34–

The etymology and meaning of this divine name is uncertain but its significance is clear. It may be derived from:

- (1) **Shadad**, “to be strong”, cognate to Arabic sdd, meaning “The Strong One” or “Almighty”;
- (2) **Shadah**, “mountain”, cognate to Akkadian shadu, meaning “The Mountain Dweller” or “God of the Mountains”;
- (3) **Shadad**, “to devastate” and **shad**, “destroyer”, Akkadian Shendum, meaning “The Destroyer” or “The Malevolent One”; or
- (4) **She** “who” plus **diy**, “sufficient”, meaning “The One Who is Sufficient” or “All-Sufficient One” (HALOT 1420-22).

In terms of use, Shaddai (or El Shaddai) is presented as the sovereign king/judge of the world Who grants life/blesses and kills/judges. In Genesis He blesses the patriarchs with fertility and promises numerous descendants.

Outside Genesis He blesses/protects and also takes away life/happiness. In (Ruth 1:20) in light of Naomi's emphasis on God's sovereign, malevolent deprivation of her family, one can understand her use of this name for God. For discussion of this divine name, see T. N. D. Mettinger, In Search of God, 69-72.

Shaddai/El Shaddai is the sovereign king of the world who grants, blesses, and judges. In the Book of Genesis He blesses the patriarchs with fertility and promises numerous descendants. Outside Genesis He both blesses/protects and takes away life/happiness. **The patriarchs knew God primarily as El Shaddai** (Ex6:3). While the origin and meaning of this Name are uncertain its significance is clear.

#### **The Name is used in contexts where God appears as the source of fertility and life.**

In Ge 17:1-8 He appeared to Abram, introduced Himself as El Shaddai, and announced His intention to make the patriarch fruitful.

In the role of El Shaddai God repeated these words (now elevated to the status of a decree) to Jacob (Ge 35:11 - "I am **God Almighty**; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you.").

Earlier Isaac had pronounced a blessing on Jacob in which he asked El Shaddai to make Jacob fruitful (Ge 28:3 = "May **God Almighty** bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.").

Jacob later prayed that his sons would be treated with mercy when they returned to Egypt with Benjamin (Ge 43:14 "may **God Almighty** grant you compassion in the sight of the man"). The fertility theme is not as apparent here, though one must remember that Jacob viewed Benjamin as the sole remaining son of the favored and once-barren Rachel (see Ge 29:31; Ge 30:22-24; Ge 35:16-18). It is quite natural that he would appeal to El Shaddai to preserve Benjamin's life, for it was El Shaddai's miraculous power which made it possible for Rachel to give him sons in the first place.

In Ge 48:3 ("God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me") Jacob, prior to blessing Joseph's sons, told him how El Shaddai appeared to him at Bethel (see Ge 28) and promised to make him fruitful.

When blessing Joseph on his deathbed Jacob referred to Shaddai (we should probably read "El Shaddai," along with a few Hebrew MSS, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the LXX, and Syriac) as the one who provides abundant blessings, including "blessings of the breast and womb" (Ge 49:25). (The direct association of the name with "breasts" suggests the name might mean "the one of the breast" [i.e., the one who gives fertility], but the juxtaposition is probably better explained as wordplay. Note the wordplay involving the name and the root תְּשַׁׁדְּדֵד, shadad, "destroy"] in Isa 13:6 and in Joel 1:15.)

Outside Genesis the name **Shaddai** (minus the element "El" ["God"]) is normally used when God is viewed as the sovereign king who blesses/protects or curses/brings judgment.

The name appears in the introduction to two of Balaam's oracles (Nu 24:4, 16) of blessing upon Israel.

Naomi employs the name when accusing the Lord of treating her bitterly by taking the lives of her husband and sons (Ruth 1:20-21).

In Ps 68:14; Isa 13:6; and Joel 1:15 Shaddai judges his enemies through warfare, while Ps 91:1 depicts him as the protector of his people.

In Ezek 1:24 and 10:5 the sound of the cherubs' wings is compared to Shaddai's powerful voice. The reference may be to the mighty divine warrior's battle cry which accompanies his angry judgment.

Finally, the Name occurs **31 times in the Book of Job**. Job and his “friends” assume that Shaddai is the sovereign King of the world (Job 11:7; Job 37:23a) Who is the source of life (Job 33:4b) and is responsible for maintaining justice (Job 8:3; Job 34:10–12; Job 37:23b). He provides abundant blessings, including children (Job 22:17–18; Job 29:4–6), but He can also discipline, punish, and destroy (Job 5:17; 6:4; 21:20; 23:16). It is not surprising to see the Name so often in this book, where the theme of God’s justice is primary and even called into question (Job 24:1; 27:2).

The most likely proposal is that the Name means “**God, the one of the mountain**” (an Akkadian cognate means “mountain,” to which the Hebrew **תָּוֹךְ**, **shad**, “breast”] is probably related).

For a discussion of proposed derivations see **T. N. D. Mettinger, In Search of God, 70–71** ([See links below](#)). The name may originally have depicted God as the sovereign judge who, in Canaanite style, ruled from a sacred mountain. Isa 14:13 and Ezek 28:14, 16 associate such a mountain with God, while Ps 48:2 refers to Zion as “Zaphon,” the Canaanite Olympus from which the high god El ruled. In Isa 14 the Canaanite god El may be in view. Note that Isaiah pictures pagan kings as taunting the king of Babylon, suggesting that pagan mythology may provide the background for the language and imagery.

#### References:

- W. F. Albright, “The Names Shaddai and Abram,” JBL 54 (1935): 173–210;
- R. Gordis, “The Biblical Root *sdy-sd*,” JTS 41 (1940): 34–43;
- T. N. D. Mettinger, **BORROW THIS BOOK** In Search of God (CLICK FOLLOWING FOR HIS DISCUSSION [PAGE 69](#) [PAGE 70-71](#), [PAGE 72](#))

Below are all 48 uses of **Shaddai** in Scripture. Observe that 31 uses occur in **Job** where 16 of these uses are translated in the [Septuagint](#) with the Greek word [pantokrator](#) and 3 uses are translated with the Greek adjective [hikanos](#) which means sufficient, adequate, enough, able, competent, qualified. In summary, when one compares the way Shaddai is translated in the [Septuagint](#), two main ideas emerge All powerful and All sufficient.

Gen. 17:1; Gen. 28:3; Gen. 35:11; Gen. 43:14; Gen. 48:3; Gen. 49:25; Exod. 6:3; Num. 24:4; Num. 24:16; Ruth 1:20; Ruth 1:21; Job 5:17; Job 6:4; Job 6:14; Job 8:3; Job 8:5; Job 11:7; Job 13:3; Job 15:25; Job 21:15; Job 21:20; Job 22:3; Job 22:17; Job 22:23; Job 22:25; Job 22:26; Job 23:16; Job 24:1; Job 27:2; Job 27:10; Job 27:11; Job 27:13; Job 29:5; Job 31:2; Job 31:35; Job 32:8; Job 33:4; Job 34:10; Job 34:12; Job 35:13; Job 37:23; Job 40:2; Ps. 68:14; Ps. 91:1; Isa. 13:6; Ezek. 1:24; Ezek. 10:5; Joel 1:15

**Blameless** (without defect or blemish, perfect, integrity) ([08549](#)) **tamim** from the verb **tamam** = to be complete, entire or whole (literal sense in Lev 3:9, Ezek 15:5), refers to a action which is completed) has both physical (without defect) and spiritual (blameless, devout, upright) significance. Tamim has the fundamental idea of completeness or wholeness. Tamim deals primarily with a state of moral or ceremonial purity (e.g., animal sacrifices - 51x tamim refers to unblemished animals - Passover lamb in Ex 12:5 picturing of course Christ sinless perfection - 1Cor 5:7, "knew no sin" = 2Cor 5:21). Tamim can mean blameless, complete, whole, full, perfect. Tamim can refer to the "entirety" of a period of time (7 complete Sabbaths = Lev 23:15; full year = Lev 25:30). Joshua 10:13 records the miracle of the sun standing still for a "whole (tamim) day," allowing Joshua to extract vengeance on the Amorite coalition that had attacked him. Pr 1:12 refers metaphorically to the fate of the innocent being swallowed "whole" by the wicked, even as happens to those who go to the grave.

The first OT use of **tamim** describes Noah "These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, **blameless** (Lxx = [teleios](#) = "meeting the highest standard" [BDAG]) in his time; Noah walked with God." (Ge 6:9) In the second use God tells Abraham " I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be **blameless**." And remember God's commandments always include His enablements! It is thus fitting that David describes the Law of the LORD" as "perfect" (Lxx = [amomos](#) = without defects) (Ps 19:7). In fact, not only is His Word perfect, but His work is perfect (Dt 32:4) and His way is blameless (Ps 18:30) David says that the man who "may abide in" God's tent and "dwell on" His "holy hill" is the man "who walks with **integrity** (Lxx = [amomos](#) = without fault, morally blameless)." (Ps 15:2) Joshua in some of his parting words of wisdom to Israel declared "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in **sincerity** (Lxx = [euthutes](#) = rectitude, honesty, integrity, uprightness) and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD." (Josh 24:14) The psalmist offers a great prayer we would all be wise to echo "May my heart be **blameless** (Lxx = [amomos](#)) in Thy statutes, that (expresses purpose or result of a blameless heart) I may not be ashamed." (Ps 119:80) One of my favorite verses in Psalms uses tamim - "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk **uprightly** (Lxx = [akakia](#) = guilelessness, innocence, integrity; "state of not being inclined to that which is base" [BDAG])." (Ps 84:11) The psalmist links tamim with a state of blessedness writing " How blessed are those whose way is **blameless** (Lxx = [amomos](#)), Who walk in the law of the LORD. (Ps 119:1)

Arthur W. Pink on be **blameless** (perfect) explains the kind of life we are to live before God -- "It [the word 'perfect'] is the same word which is translated 44x 'without blemish.' Then, did God really say to Abram, 'Be thou perfect?' He certainly did. And how could He say anything less? What lower standard than that of perfection can the Perfect One set before His creatures? Only too often men whittle down the Word to make it square with their own conceptions. All through the Scriptures, the standard of perfection is set before us. The law required that Israel should love the Lord their God with all their hearts. The Lord Jesus bade His disciples, 'Be ye therefore perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Mt 5:48). And the teaching of the Epistles is all summed up in that Word, 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps' (1Pe 2:21). Is not that [the steps of Jesus] the standard of perfection? Brethren, such is the standard set before us. This is that which we are constantly to strive after. With nothing short may we be satisfied. It is because such is the standard that none in the flesh have ever realized it, that each and all must say with the apostle, (Phil 3:12-14). Yet, nevertheless, the Word to us today is the same as that to Abram of old: 'Be thou perfect.' Does some one murmur, 'An impossible standard!' Then remember that it was El Shaddai who gave it. Who dares to talk of 'impossibilities' when the Almighty is our God? Has He not said 'My grace is sufficient for thee'? (2 Cor 12:9-10) Then, do not charge Him with setting before us an unattainable standard: rather let us charge ourselves with failure to rest upon His Almighty arm, and confess with shame that the blame is ours through not appropriating His all-sufficient grace"

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**Spurgeon in Your Available Power** alludes to **El Shaddai** writing that...

There are a few things that I would have you remember, and then I will be done. Remember that the Holy Spirit has His ways and methods, and there are some things that He will not do. Remember that He makes no promise to bless compromises. If we make a treaty with error or sin, we do it at our own risk. If we do anything that we are not clear about, if we tamper with truth or holiness, if we are friends of the world, if we make provision for the flesh, if we preach halfheartedly and are allied with those in error, we have no promise that the Holy Spirit will go with us.

The great promise runs in quite another strain:

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (**pantokrator**). ([2Co 6:17, 18](#))

Only in that one place in the New Testament, with the exception of the book of Revelation, is God called by the name of "the Lord God Almighty." If you want to know what great things the Lord can do as the Lord God Almighty, be separate from the world and from those who apostatize from the truth.

"El-Shaddai," God all-sufficient, the God who nurtures and provides. We will never know the utmost power of God for supplying all our needs until we have cut connection once for all with everything that is not according to His mind. It was grand of Abraham when he said to the king of Sodom, "I will not take from you"—a Babylonian garment or a wedge of gold? No, no. He said, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet" ([Ge 14:23](#)). That was a clear-cut separation. The man of God will have nothing to do with Sodom or with false doctrine. If you see anything that is evil, cut yourself off from it. Be done with those who are done with truth. Then you will be prepared to receive the promise, and not until then. (**Borrow Spurgeon's Your Available Power**)

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**A B Simpson** writes...Beloved, have we learned, as we bow the knee in prayer, that we are talking with Him Who still says to us as to Abraham, "I am **El Shaddai; the Almighty God**"; to Jeremiah, "I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?"; to Isaiah, "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding." (A. B. Simpson. The Life of Prayer)

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**Paul Enns - GOD Is ALL-POWERFUL - [page 24 in Approaching God](#)**

Nothing is too difficult for Thee. (Jeremiah 32:17)

Skeptics sometimes challenge Christians with questions: "Is there anything God can't do?" "No, He can do everything."

"Can He create a rock so big that He can't move it?" Of course, that is a trick question. There are things that God cannot do. He cannot act contrary to His nature. But the fact is that most people have too small a concept of God, not recognizing that He is all-powerful. J. B. Phillips wrote a book titled **Your God Is Too Small (borrow)**, in which he exposed people's caricatures of God. Many people have a God of their own making—but it is not the biblical God.

God can do anything He pleases that is in harmony with His nature. God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11); "He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3). Nothing can hinder God's plan and purpose. Whatever He decides to do will come to pass.

Almighty is a word that describes God's power. As God Almighty (El Shaddai) He could make ninety-nine-year-old Abram a father (Genesis 17:1); He caused cunning Jacob to be the father of nations and kings (Ge 35:11), and one day He will judge the world in the Great Tribulation (Revelation 4:8).

God's power also goes beyond what He actually does. "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" asked the angel (Genesis 18:14). No. He can enable a ninety-year-old mother to conceive and bear a child, and He can do even more. John the Baptist said that God could turn stones into faithful Israelites—but He didn't (Matthew 3:9). Jesus said He could appeal to the Father to send seventy-two thousand angels to rescue Him—but He didn't (Mt 26:53).

There are things God cannot do. He can't associate with sin (Habakkuk 1:13), He can't go back on His word (2 Timothy 2:13), He can't lie (Hebrews 6:18).

The greatest expression of God's power was the bodily resurrection of Jesus (2 Corinthians 13:4). And the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is operative in believers (Ephesians 1:19)! Think of it! Are you living by faith in the all-powerful God? Or do you carry the weight of the world as if God were not powerful? Remember, "Nothing is too difficult for God!"

**LESSON:** God is all-powerful and able to do whatever He wills and whatever is consistent with His nature.

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#### **J R Miller -"I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be perfect." Genesis 17:1**

"Perfection is impossible!" we are in the habit of saying; and therefore we do not try to reach perfection. It is better for us always to keep our aim high, although we cannot hope to reach it. If we have low ideals and aims—our attainments will be low. We cannot look with approval upon anything lower than the perfect beauty of God Himself, and not have the beauty of our own life dimmed thereby. We should always keep perfection before us—as our aim. We should keep our eyes ever fixed upon the perfect model, Jesus Christ!

Jesus taught, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5:48. We are always to seek to model our life upon the divine pattern. Of course we cannot reach this lofty standard in a day—but the way to Christlikeness, is to strive toward it.

When a child begins to write, his scrawling lines fall far short of the beauty of the original at the top of the page. Book after book he fills with his scribbling—but if he is diligent, each new page shows a little improvement, and by and by his writing rivals the original. We can learn to live holy and sweetly, only in the same way. Begin where you can, no matter how imperfect or faulty your life—but strive always toward perfection, and at last you shall be like Christ! That is the hope which shines before us—when we shall see Him as He is—and shall be like Him!

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**John Newton** - The Lord's appearance to Abraham in the former chapter was some time before the birth of Ishmael; this was thirteen years after his birth. Abraham had some special visits of love but his ordinary walk was, I suppose, by faith and dependence—the Lord did not appear to him every day. The time was not yet at hand when Isaac should be born and now the covenant is again confirmed. This text is of general application. We have the Lord's character and his people's duty.

The Lord's character: God Almighty, or All-sufficient. O who can expound the fullness of this glorious name? Happy are his people who know him in Christ. This name is applicable to all their circumstances. In him they have an all-sufficiency:

- (i) of righteousness—so the songs in Isaiah 12 and Psalm 27. They are accepted and no charge shall be heard against them. Herein they may glory all the day long (Psalm 89:16).
- (ii) of strength—and that both in them and for them. In them: to enable them for suffering and for service (2 Corinthians 12:9), so that they shall not faint, but shall endure to the end. Their strength is not in themselves, but is renewed by waiting upon him. For them: to control and subdue all their enemies. Herein is their safety. Many fight against them, but cannot prevail, for if God be for us ... (Romans 8:31).
- (iii) of happiness. He is their portion, all-sufficient—in time—affording by his presence such a joy as the world cannot give—and he will be their portion for ever.

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#### **John Newton - His people's duty and aim, in consequence of his all-sufficiency, is:**

- (i) to walk before him; that is, as in his sight, importing acting from a principle of love and reverence, with a view to his glory, and in a spirit of dependence. O the honour, the comfort, the excellence of such a walk.

(ii) to be perfect. This means not a sinless perfection, but sincerity. This includes a single eye, in opposition to all mean and selfish views, and a universal respect to all his commandments.

The knowledge of God as all-sufficient will influence us to such a walk and it is impracticable upon any other principle. Whatever is short of this is but a poor pretence, a lifeless shadow of religion.

Robert Hawker - OUR old Bibles, in their margin, have retained the original El Shaddai, which we now read God Almighty, and marked it also God All-sufficient; meaning, that Jehovah in covenant with Jesus as the Head of his people, is all sufficient in himself, and all sufficient for all their need in time and to eternity. He is God All-sufficient, or of many paps, many breasts of consolation (as some derive the word), for his faithful ones to suck at and draw from, in an endless supply. Here then, my soul, take this sweet title of thy Covenant God and Father in Christ Jesus for thy daily meditation, both at the opening and through all the periods of the coming year. And as even at old age the Lord still opened to Abraham this precious source for his comfort, so look up in Jesus and behold it as thine. And oh, my soul! do thou walk before him in the perfect righteousness of God thy Saviour, and thus daily keep up fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

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#### **F B Meyer - Walk before me and be thou Perfect.**

God precedes his commands with such revelations of Himself, that obedience is rendered easily possible. Before calling Abram to perfection, He described himself as El Shaddai, the Almighty. What may we not do if we learn to avail ourselves of the all might of God? Oh to know the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe! Our lack is that we do not know our God, and therefore fail to perform exploits. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me." Lie on thy face, and let God talk with thee, and tell thee the conditions on which He will make thee exceeding fruitful.

First — Walk before Me:

Second — Be thou whole-hearted.

**There must be wholeness in our surrender.** — No part of our nature barred or curtained off from God. Every chamber must be freely placed at his disposal; every relationship placed under his direction; every power devoted to his service. All we have and are must be entirely his.

**There must be wholeness in our intention.** — The one aim of our Lord was to bring glory to his Father; and we should never be satisfied till we are so absolutely eager for the glory of Christ that we would seek it though at the cost of infamy to ourselves; and be as glad for another to bring it to Him, as we should be in bringing it ourselves.

**There must be wholeness in our obedience.** — It was clearly so with Abram. As soon as God left talking with his servant, he took Isaac and performed the rite which had just been enjoined.

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**Spurgeon - from sermon [The Life, Walk, and Triumph of Faith](#)** - You must have all the graces, if you are to be a perfect man. I think I have known some Christians who have had all the graces except patience, but they never could be patient. The Lord says, 'walk before me, and be thou perfect' in patience. I have known some others who seemed to have almost every grace except the grace of forgiveness; they could not very readily forget any injury that had been done to them. Dear brother, you must get that grace, the grace of forgiveness, and walk before the Lord with that, or you will remain a mutilated character. A Christian's character is spoilt by the omission of any one virtue. And you must labour in the presence of God to have all these things, that they 'be in you, and abound'. Be in this sense perfect. And as we have all the graces, so we should seek to have exhibited in our lives all the virtues in the fulfilment of all our duties. It is a very sad thing when you hear of a Christian man that he is a very excellent deacon, that he is a very admirable local-preacher or Sunday-school teacher, but that he is a very unkind father. That 'but' spoils it all. A saint abroad is no saint if he be a devil at home. We have known men of whom it has been said that out of doors they were all that could be desired, but they were bad husbands. That 'but' mars the tale. It is the dead fly which has got into a very good pot of ointment and made the whole of it stink. Keep the dead flies out, brethren. By God's grace may your character be full-orbed! May God grant you grace to be at home and abroad, in the shop and in the chamber, and in every department of life, just that which a man should be who walks before the all-sufficient God.

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#### **Spurgeon - [Consecration to God—illustrated by Abraham's circumcision](#) (full sermon)**

Immediately after God appeared to Abraham, his consecration was manifest, first, in his prayer for his family. 'O that Ishmael might live before thee!' Men of God, if you are indeed the Lord's and feel that you are his, begin now to intercede for all who belong to you. Never be satisfied unless they are saved too; and if you have a son, an Ishmael, concerning whom you have many fears and much anxiety, as you are saved yourself, never cease to groan out that cry, 'O that Ishmael might live before thee!' The next result of

Abraham's consecration was that he was most hospitable to his fellow men. Look at the next chapter. He sits at the tent door and three men come to him. The Christian is the best servant of humanity in a spiritual sense. I mean that for his Master's sake he endeavours to do good to the sons of men. He is of all men the first to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, and, as much as lies in him, to 'do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.' The third result was that Abraham entertained the Lord himself, for amongst those three angels who came to his house was the King of kings, the infinite One. Every believer who serves his God does, as it were, give refreshment to the divine mind. I mean this: God took an infinite delight in the work of his dear Son. He said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' He takes a delight also in the holiness of all his people. Jesus sees 'of the travail of his soul,' and is satisfied by the works of the faithful; and you, as Abraham entertained the Lord, also entertain the Lord Jesus with your patience, your faith, your love and your zeal, when you are thoroughly consecrated to him

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**G Campbell Morgan** - In this word Jehovah revealed Himself in a new way to Abram, and called him to a yet completer devotion. The name or title, El-Shaddai, is peculiarly suggestive, meaning quite literally, the mighty One of Resource or Sufficiency. We miss much of its beauty by our rendering God Almighty. The idea of Almighty is present, but it is fully expressed by the word El. The word Shaddai goes further, and suggests perfect supply, and perfect comfort. We should reach the idea better by rendering God All-bountiful, or even better still, God All-sufficient. This was the new revelation, and it was in connection with its making that Abram was called to walk before this God, and to be perfect. This is ever God's way with His own. He reveals the perfection of their resources in Himself, and then calls them to a walk which is made possible by these very resources. Who can walk before God and be perfect in his own wisdom or strength? Surely none! But, on the other hand, who need fail to do so, if depending upon Him for all He, in tender and mighty strength, is able and willing to supply. To gather sustenance and consolation from the bosom of God, is to be made strong for all the pilgrimage, however long the march, or difficult the route. For us, the revelation of this truth about God is perfected in our Lord, for "The only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He bath declared Him." And more: "Of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace."

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#### **James Smith - ABRAHAM WALKING BEFORE GOD Genesis 17:1-5**

Abram was ninety-and-nine years old when the Lord appeared unto him. Not too old to have fellowship with Him. Age may shut us out from the joys and companionships of youth, but through grace it may ripen our friendship with God.

##### **I. The Revelation.**

"I am the Almighty. I am God all-sufficient." This is a divine plaster large enough to cover any human sore. A son had been promised Abram; he was now old, and no son had yet been given to him; but in this promise he had enough to brighten faith and trim afresh the flickering lamp of hope. This revelation of God, as our all-sufficiency, is made known to us in Jesus Christ. There is enough in Him to meet all our need, both as sinners and as servants. Weary, downcast Christian toilers, hear. Him say, "Look unto Me; I am God all-sufficient." To brighten thy little dwelling there is plenty of light in this sun; to float thy little vessel there is plenty of water in this ocean.

##### **II. The Commission.**

"Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." Perhaps Abram had been walking too much before Sarah. Seeking to please her, guided by her counsel, he had already turned aside from the life of faith in God (Genesis 16:1-4). This was a call—

**1. THAT AFFECTED HIS LIFE.** "Walk before Me." In all things he was to act as one who lived in the immediate presence of God Almighty. This is not a life of dread and awkward restraint, but a holy, joyful, divinely-satisfied life. It is, in fact, the life of faith. This is the high privilege of every Heaven-born son of God.

**2. IT AFFECTED HIS CHARACTER.** "Be thou perfect." That is, be whole-hearted. Not having a double heart (Psa. 12:2), seeking to please both God and man. All perfection comes from Him who alone is perfect. The highest human perfection lies in a whole-hearted life before God.

##### **III. The Submission.**

"And Abram fell on his face" (Ge 17:3). The best answer to God's high calling is a humble and broken spirit. Abram did not say boastingly, like some of his descendants, "All that thou sayest will we do" (Ruth 3:5). He bowed his face to the dust, and "God talked with him." A deep, conscious sense of ignorance and weakness brings us into the right attitude to be taught of God. God always talks to the heart of the self-abased. When John fell at His feet he felt the touch of His gracious hand, and heard His comforting "Fear not" (Rev. 1:17). May He give us that humbleness of heart, that calmness of spirit that bears the faintest whisper from the lips of

the Holy Ghost.

#### IV. The Transformation.

"Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram; but thy name shall be called Abraham." Abram, the exalted, is changed into Abraham, the fruitful. He has bowed with his whole heart unto the will of God, and his character is transformed. It is not always so? Complete surrender brings a complete change of nature. Jacob became a prince, and prevailed when he yielded entirely to the heavenly wrestler. It is when we are crucified with Christ that Christ liveth in us (Gal. 2:20). It is by yielding to the Spirit of Christ that we are transformed into His holy and heavenly image.

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#### John Bennett - Genesis 17:1–14 AN EVERLASTING POSSESSION

Abram was ninety-nine years old. Thirteen years had elapsed since the birth of Ishmael, Ge 16:16, and those years of silence indicate Abram's folly in seeking his own solution to the problem of Sarai's barrenness. The cost of disobedience is great!

However, God now appears to Abram again and does so as 'the Almighty God', Ge 17:1. Abram had to learn the lesson of the all-sufficient, all-powerful God, One who was in control of every situation and was sufficient for every crisis. Was Sarai barren? Yet God says, 'Thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee', Ge 17:5; 'I will establish my covenant ... and ... be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee', Ge 17:7; 'I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee', Ge 17:8; 'thou, and thy seed after thee', Ge 17:9. It was for Abraham to appreciate the answer to the question, 'Is any thing too hard for the Lord?', Gen. 18:14.

But with this new revelation comes responsibility. The command is, 'Be thou perfect', Ge 17:1. A relationship with God necessitates our sanctification: 'But like as he which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living', 1 Pet. 1:15 RV. Linked with that command is the manifest token of Abraham's separation, 'Every man child among you shall be circumcised', Ge 17:10. Its application was extensive, 'every man child in your generations ... born in the house, or bought with money', Ge 17:12. For us, that circumcision is in Christ, 'the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh', Col. 2:11. No half-measures will do!

From those steps of obedience there comes the experience of God's blessings, 'I will make thee exceeding fruitful', Ge 17:6; 'I will make nations of thee', Ge 17:6; 'I will give unto thee, and to thy seed ... all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession', Ge 17:8. How extensive is the blessing. Yet, in contrast to the New Testament believer, it is, as Israel's blessings, material and earthly. Our blessings are on a higher plane, we have been 'blessed ... with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ', Eph. 1:3. What praise should emanate from our lips and what obedience should be manifest in our lives!

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**J Fletcher - Walk before me, and be thou perfect.** - In other words, Christian perfection is a spiritual constellation, made up of these gracious stars,—perfect repentance, perfect faith, perfect humility, perfect meekness, perfect self-denial, perfect resignation, perfect hope, perfect charity for our visible enemies as well as for our earthly relations, and, above all, perfect love for our invisible God through the explicit knowledge of our Mediator Jesus Christ. And as this last star is always accompanied by all the others, as Jupiter is by his satellites, we frequently use, as St. John, the phrase "perfect love," instead of the word "perfection"; understanding by it the pure love of God shed abroad in the hearts of established believers by the Holy Ghost, which is abundantly given them under the fullness of the Christian dispensation.

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#### J J Knap - Walk Before Me    Genesis 17:1

First the Lord said who He was Himself: "I am the Almighty God," and only then did He add what we should be: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." This order is encouraging. To walk before the Lord's countenance means to walk in His holy presence, or as we often say, to live under the eye of God. However, there is much that seeks to keep us from the Lord's communion. We meet with so many obstacles in our path and we have to do with so many insurmountable difficulties that we easily forget God. Our painful experiences of life not seldom intercept the light from His gracious countenance, and then we immediately walk in darkness, left to our own strength that in essence is weakness, yes, inability. This would not be the case if we were serious about the word of self-revelation of God: "I am the Almighty God." Whoever may know Him as the Almighty One, does not allow himself to be separated from Him by either height of sorrow or depth of care. To the Almighty One all things are possible. With a single wink He turns mountains of objections into the depth of the sea, strengthens our stumbling knees to jump with Him over a wall, and paves us a path through deep streams, yes, His almighty power was able to bear away the indescribable burden of our sins by Jesus Christ into a land of forgetfulness; "I am the Almighty God!"

When we know Him in this manner, the walking before Him with an upright and thorough heart becomes the pleasure of our soul. Then we are continually before His eye, forever in His holy presence, surrounded by His steadfast faithfulness. This walking

comforts us. Now we know already: when we sit down in sorrow and mourning, He will see it and know it and summon His almighty power to support and bear our weakness. This walking makes us brave. Now we know: no danger can harm us, no harm can touch us without the will of God, the hairs of our head are all counted, the Almighty Power watches and cares, guards and covers. Finally, this walking makes us also blessed. God is gracious. Whoever walks before Him, walks in a gracious light, he belongs to the blessed people upon whom God's mercy is poured out.

Let us thank our God that He has made this walking before Him possible in Jesus Christ by satisfying for our sin that had separated and estranged us from Him. He first walked with us in grace in that only begotten One. Only because of Him can sinners walk with Him without being consumed by the glow of His holiness. In this way they experience repeatedly in the solutions that He appoints, the truth of His promise: "I am the Almighty God!"

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### **Theodore Epp - God's Perfect Timing Genesis 17:1,2**

In Genesis 17:1 we are told, "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."

Thirteen years had gone by since Abraham had hearkened unto Sarah, and during this time there was no mention of God's appearing to Abraham.

In the Scriptures these 13 years are passed over as a period of spiritual barrenness. For Abraham it was what is known spiritually as a time of wood, hay and stubble.

But why all of this waiting? God had promised Abraham a son, and by this time only Ishmael had been born into his home--by a means that was not pleasing to the Lord. The reason for God's delay was so God could bring Abraham to the end of himself.

Later it was said of Abraham, "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Rom. 4:19).

Before divine power is put forth, man must learn his own impotency. Not until Abraham's body was as good as dead would God fulfill His word.

Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Though to Abraham this seemed like a long delay, God was right on time. God has a perfect time for everything.

"As for God, his way is perfect" (Ps. 18:30).

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### **Allen Ross - Genesis 17:1 "El Shadday"**

Throughout the oldest Old Testament records we have the name "El Shadday" used for God. For example, Genesis 17:1 records how the LORD identified Himself with this name when announcing the signs of the covenant to Abram and Sarai. But the name is used elsewhere as well, especially in the Book of Job.

Many modern translations use the English "God Almighty" for the meaning. This is based on the writings of the Fathers primarily. For example, Jerome, who lived and studied with the Jewish teachers in Bethlehem, rendered it "Almighty God" [omnipotens]. But the fact remains that we really do not know exactly what the name means, and have no reliable clues for its etymology. The early tradition of the Church and Synagogue is all that we have to fall back on, and it may very well be right.

This has not stopped modern writers from speculating--usually according to preconceived ideas. Some have connected shad- to the word for "hill," to come to the idea of a "mountain God," meaning the high God. But there is no external information to support this, and a similarity of words based on two Hebrew letters is not very compelling. More radical is the idea that it means the "God with breasts," like the goddess Diana, who is portrayed with what looks like scores of breasts (but there is debate whether they are or not). The evidence given for this is rather contrived. It reasons that words for hills and mountains are often used for breasts in cultures (like the Grand Tetons), and therefore that language was used to describe the female component of the deity. Furthermore, passages that then speak of the LORD blessing hills and mountains might come to mean blessing breasts. (I may not be doing justice to all the arguments given for these suggestions in this brief discussion, but all that I have read is not very convincing.) Moreover, the idea that the Hebrews had such a physical vision of the great "I AM," that they might have even had statues of the same, is without any support (which is not to say that some individuals had perverted ideas about God). God is a Spirit, neither male nor female; to identify God so fully with such an image would go beyond the metaphorical language (both masculine and feminine metaphors) to the world of pagan mythology. And there is just no evidence in Scripture that this was the meaning of the name. We are on better ground to work with the tradition and see if it fits the contexts.

In the contexts where El Shadday is used, the characteristics of God that can be derived are primarily His sovereignty and His power. When God says, "I am El Shadday . . . . Be perfect," there is a current of power and authority that demands

compliance. When God Almighty speaks, His word must be obeyed. In Genesis 17 God proceeds to change the names of Abram and Sarai in accordance with the covenant promises, and then institutes the sign of the covenant, circumcision. God Almighty makes and fulfills the promises of the covenant, but he also demands compliance with the sign of the covenant. And His sign that He will fulfill the covenant takes the form of a new name, a new identity given to the members of the covenant. This act of renaming would have indicated to Abram and Sarai that their God was sovereign; but the new names would also have called for greater faith to see the promises fulfilled. We may not be able to prove etymologically that "shadday" means "almighty," but we can see that where the name occurs there is clear evidence of His sovereign power and authority.

In the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ in the New Testament, we see just such power revealed in the Son--He alone can declare that all power was given to Him. And with that power lies the authority of the sovereignty of God. We are not surprised to see our Lord Jesus Christ also renaming Simon as Peter in anticipation of the promise to establish and build the church. In fact, the parallels between Abram and Peter are even stronger when we see how the Lord used the image of the rock upon which He would build His church (Matt. 16:18), an image that had been used for Abram, the father of the covenant people in the Old Testament (Isa. 51:1,2). At the beginning of the covenant program God renamed Abram; and at the beginning of the new covenant program in the church Jesus renamed Simon. It is the same LORD, the same authority and power, and the same faith. And what the LORD promised in symbolic ways, building nations from Abram, or building His church, He has been able to do because all power resides with Him.

We worship a Lord who is almighty. He has made promises to us that will be fulfilled because all power belongs to Him. And He has given us a new identity, a new name as it were, in Christ, as a pledge of the promises. And He also commands us to walk before Him and be perfect.

**Genesis 17:2 "I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly."**

- **I will establish My covenant:** Ge 17:4-6 9:9 Ge 15:18 Ps 105:8-11 Ga 3:17,18
- **multiply:** Ge 12:2 Ge 13:16 Ge 22:17
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Genesis 15:18+ On that day the LORD **made** ([karath](#) - cut) a **covenant** with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

### **YAHWEH ESTABLISHES THE "ABRAHAMIC COVENANT"**

**I will establish My covenant** ([beriyth](#); Lxx = [diatheke](#)) **between Me and you** - Note the two "I will's," the first of 15 uses of "I will" in Genesis 17. One might even call it the "I Will Chapter!" It is also notable that the Spirit in a sense "bookends" this section with God's promise of His covenant, here in Ge 17:2 making His promise to Abraham and then in Ge 17:21 adding "**My covenant I will establish with Isaac.**" God's trustworthy Word assures the continuity of the everlasting covenant to the next generation. Note also the repetition of the phrase "**My covenant,**" (9x/9v - Ge 17:2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 21 out of 55 uses of this phrase in the Bible, Genesis 17 being the #1 chapter) which emphasizes that Yahweh is the Sole Possessor of this covenant so that what He is graciously bestowing on Abram belongs to Him. This covenant is usually referred to as the **Abrahamic Covenant** and is simply a reaffirmation of the same covenant mentioned in Ge 12:1-3, Ge 13:14-17 and Ge 15:1-21 with the addition of the sign of circumcision (Ge 17:10,11).

**Covenant** ([beriyth](#)) is translated in the Septuagint with [diatheke](#) which was commonly used in the Greek and Roman world as a legal technical term in settling an inheritance. The emphasis of the Greek word [diatheke](#) is on its binding character. Indeed, covenant was the most solemn and binding agreement known in the ancient world and was often sealed with blood (symbolizing take my life if I break this covenant - [See illustration in pagan culture](#))! The word [diatheke](#) as commonly used in the Old (Septuagint) and New Testament refers to a declaration of the will of God concerning His self-commitment, promises, and conditions by which He entered into relationship with a man, in this case the man Abraham.

The phrase (or slight variation thereof) "**I will establish My covenant**" is found 9 times in the Old Testament, three times to Noah, three times to Abraham, once to Isaac and twice to Israel - Gen 6:18 Gen 9:9 Gen 9:11 Gen 17:2 Gen 17:7 Gen 17:19 Gen 17:21 Ezek 16:60 Ezek 16:62

[Bob Utley](#) on **establish** - nathan is a common VERB with many connotations. The same VERB is used of YHWH's promise of

"giving" Abram's descendants land in Ge 12:7; 13:15; 15:7,18 and of Abram's complaint that YHWH had not "given" him children in Gen. 15:3. Note how this term is translated in chapter 17. NASB = establish, Gen. 17:2, make, Gen. 17:5, make, Gen. 17:6, give, Gen. 17:8, give, Gen. 17:16, make, Gen. 17:20. The NIV translates it confirm, Gen. 17:2, make, Gen. 17:5, make, Gen. 17:6, give, Gen. 17:8, give, Gen. 17:16, make, Gen. 17:20.

**My covenant** refers to the same covenant established with Abraham earlier in Ge12:1-3 and Ge 15:1-21 and thus represents a reaffirmation with the addition of circumcision as the sign of the covenant. One other note is that the actual word "covenant" is used on one time in Abram's life in Genesis 15:18 prior to Genesis 17 where it appears 13 times!

**Reformation Study Bible** The covenant relationship between God and Abraham includes both promises obligating God to Abraham (Ge 17:4-8, 16), and commands obligating Abraham and Sarah to God ("As for you," Ge 17:9-15). This pattern of mutual obligation is not a relationship of equal parties (as in a human contract), however, for God sovereignly bestows the covenant, gives the grace of faith and obedience to man, and graciously provides the remedy for human disobedience (Ge 28:20 [note](#)). The history of the covenant in the Old Testament is largely one of human failure fully to obey the covenantal requirements. Nevertheless, the gracious covenant God remains faithful to His promises, even when human beings are faithless (Ge 17:7 [note](#); Lev. 26:44, 45; Dt. 4:30, 31; 2Ti 2:13).

*Man's extremity is God's opportunity!*

**And I will multiply you exceedingly** - The Hebrew literally says "I will multiply you exceedingly, exceedingly," the repetition placing emphasis on the multiplication! Put yourself in Abram's sandals - 99 yo, given a promise from God for a child, and all he has is a child of the flesh! Abraham has reached his extremity, but now God's "opportunity" arrives! God promised again to **multiply** Abraham's family, even though he and his wife did not have any children. Abraham's descendants were described with three metaphors - (1) "as the **dust** of the earth" (Ge 13:16+), (2) "as the **stars** of the heavens" (Ge 22:17+, cf Ge 15:5+) and (3) "as the **sand** which is on the seashore" (Ge 22:17+). This is supernatural multiplication because Abram has "zero" children (of promise) and normally [zero times any other number equals zero](#), unless El Shaddai is in charge of the multiplication!

The phrase **My covenant** is found 55 times in 52 verses (all but 2 in the Old Testament) and all referring to Yahweh expressing personal possession of the various covenants - Gen. 6:18; Gen. 9:9; Gen. 9:11; Gen. 9:15; Gen. 17:2; Gen. 17:4; Gen. 17:7; Gen. 17:9; Gen. 17:10; Gen. 17:13; Gen. 17:14; Gen. 17:19; Gen. 17:21; Exod. 6:4; Exod. 6:5; Exod. 19:5; Lev. 26:9; Lev. 26:15; Lev. 26:42; Lev. 26:44; Num. 25:12; Deut. 31:16; Deut. 31:20; Jos. 7:11; Jdg. 2:1; Jdg. 2:20; 1 Ki. 11:11; Ps. 50:16; Ps. 89:28; Ps. 89:34; Ps. 132:12; Isa. 54:10; Isa. 56:4; Isa. 56:6; Isa. 59:21; Jer. 11:10; Jer. 31:32; Jer. 33:20; Jer. 33:21; Jer. 33:25; Jer. 34:18; Ezek. 16:60; Ezek. 16:62; Ezek. 17:19; Ezek. 44:7; Hos. 8:1; Zech. 9:11; Zech. 11:10; Mal. 2:4; Mal. 2:5; Rom. 11:27; Heb. 8:9

**Henry Morris** - Three times (Genesis 17:7,13,19) God calls it an "everlasting" covenant, and He promised again the land to Abram's seed as an "everlasting" possession (Genesis 17:8). His name was changed from Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude"). Not only would he be the father of multitudes of physical descendants (Jews, Arabs, etc.), but the spiritual father of all them that believe in the true God. (Borrow [The Defender's Study Bible](#))

**Wenstrom** makes a good point writing that "The promises in this covenant serve as the foundation of Abram's faith since faith must have a foundation, which is the character and integrity of God."

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As you read Genesis 17 keep in mind that God is describing what we know today as the **Abrahamic Covenant**. For more in depth study on this great covenant see Dr S Lewis Johnson's series

- [Genesis 12:1-3, 15:7-21 The Abrahamic Covenant - Pt 1](#)
- [Romans 11:1-10 The Abrahamic Covenant - Pt 2](#)
- [Romans 11:11-27 The Abrahamic Covenant - Pt 3](#)
- [Genesis 9:1-17 The Universal Covenant](#)
- [Genesis 12:1-3 Abrahamic: Fundamental Covenant](#) Dr. Johnson introduces what he calls possibly the most important covenant in Scripture.
- [Genesis 15:7-21 Ratification of Abrahamic Covenant](#)
- [Genesis 17:9-27 Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant](#)
- [Genesis 17:1-8 The Sealing of the Covenant](#)

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**Covenant** (01285) [berit/berith/beriyth](#) means covenant, treaty, compact, agreement between two parties (first use in God's covenant with Noah - Ge 6:18+, Ge 9:9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17+). As discussed more below **beriyth** describes a compact made by passing

between pieces of flesh. Covenant is a solemn, binding arrangement between two parties and entails a variety of responsibilities, benefits and penalties depending on the specific covenant which is being studied. OT covenants were made between God and man (eg, God with Noah - Ge 6:18+, with Abram - Ge 15:18+) or between men (Abraham and Abimelech - Ge 21:27, Isaac and Abimelech - Ge 26:28, Jacob and Laban - Ge 31:44) (For summary of covenants see - [Covenant in the Bible](#)).

**W E Vine** notes that "The wholly gracious and effective character of God's "covenant" is confirmed in the Septuagint by the choice of [diatheke](#) to translate **berit/beriyth**. A [diatheke](#) is a will that distributes one's property after death according to the owner's wishes. It is completely unilateral." ([Vine's Expository Dictionary](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** adds that **beriyth** "has several meanings: (1) to eat with, which suggests fellowship and agreement; (2) to bind or fetter, which means commitment; and (3) to allot, which suggests sharing. When God makes a covenant, He enters into an agreement to commit Himself to give what He promises. **It is purely an act of grace.**" ([Be Obedient](#))

**ISBE** says that "In essence a **covenant** is an agreement, but an agreement of a solemn and binding force. The early Semitic idea of a covenant was doubtless that which prevailed among the Arabs. This was primarily blood-brotherhood, in which two men became brothers by drinking each other's blood. (**Ed:** Now that sounds serious to me!) ([See illustration in pagan culture](#))

**Covenant** can be summarized as follows...

(1) Between two parties (sometimes equal, other times superior to inferior) -- (a)**nations** -- (peace) treaty, alliance of friendship (b) **individuals** -- a pledge or agreement with mutual obligations to each other (c) **monarch and subjects** (2Sa 3:21, 5:3, 1Chr 11:3) -- a constitution (d) **God and man** -- Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New Covenants. [TWOT](#) adds that...

Apart from blood ties the covenant was the way people of the ancient world formed wider relationships with each other. The accounts of the relationship between David and Jonathan are the only unequivocal mention of a compact between two individuals in the Old Testament (1Sa 18:3; 20:8; 23:18). It is spoken of as "a covenant of the Lord" because the Lord witnessed the transaction and protected the legal order.

(2) Accompanied by (a) **signs** (also witnesses, memorials, shared meals) (b) **sacrifices**, (c) **solemn, binding oaths** -- sealing the relationship with promises of blessing for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking the covenant (d) Sometimes with written document on which the words of the covenant, its terms in the form of promises and stipulations were spelled out, witnessed to, signed and sealed. **Behm** ([TDNT](#)) notes that in ancient times "There is no firmer guarantee of legal security peace or personal loyalty than the covenant (e.g., Amos 1:9)."

(3) Is depicted in the idiomatic phrase "**make (cut) a covenant**" in which there was a blood sacrifice as part of the covenant ritual.

Almost 100 years ago, **Andrew Murray** motivated by a waning understanding regarding the truth and power inherent in the Biblical truth of **covenant** wrote that...

One of the words of Scripture, which is almost going out of fashion, is the word **Covenant**. There was a time when it was the keynote of the theology and the Christian life of strong and holy men. We know how deep in Scotland it entered into the national life and thought. It made mighty men, to whom God, and His promise and power were wonderfully real. It will be found still to bring strength and purpose to those who will take the trouble to bring all their life (**Ed:** and their marriages) under control of the inspiring assurance that they are living in **covenant** with a God who has sworn faithfully to fulfill in them every promise He has given. ([Two Covenants - Index - Andrew Murray](#))

#### Related Resources on Covenant:

- [Covenant: As It Relates to Marriage](#)
- [Covenant: Why Study It?](#)
- [Covenant: Introduction](#)
- [Lesson 1 Covenant: Summary Table](#)
- [Lesson 2 Covenant: The Exchange of Robes](#)
- [Lesson 3 Covenant: The Exchange of Armor and Belts](#)
- [Lesson 4 Covenant: Solemn and Binding](#)
- [Lesson 5 Covenant: A Walk Into Death](#)
- [Lesson 6 Covenant: The Oneness of Covenant](#)
- [Covenant: Oneness Notes](#)

- [Lesson 7 Covenant: Withholding Nothing from God](#)
- [Lesson 8 Covenant: Abrahamic versus Mosaic](#)
- [Lesson 9 Covenant: New Covenant in the Old Testament](#)
- [Lesson 10 Covenant: Why the New is Better](#)
- [Lesson 11 Covenant: Abrahamic vs Old vs New](#)

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## Puritan Daily Readings - Genesis 17:2

As Christ stands between the two parties, He is the great Lord Mediator of the new covenant. He is called "Lord, the Son of David." By condition of nature, He has something of God, as being true God, and something of man, as sharing with us. Hence is He mediator by office, and lays His hands on both parties, as a days-man does (Job 9:33). In which, He has a threefold relation: First, of a friend to both; He has God's heart for man, to be gracious, and satisfy mercy; and a man's heart for God to satisfy justice. Second, of a reconciler, to make two one; to bring down God to a treaty of peace; to take Him off law, and high demands of law, which sought personal satisfaction of us; and in His body, to bring us up to God by a ransom paid, and by giving us faith, to draw near to His Father. So He may say, Sister and spouse, come up now to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God; and Father; come down to my brethren, my kindred, and flesh. Third, He is a common servant to both: God's servant and our servant, "He came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Alas! both parties did smite Him: "It pleased the Lord to bruise him" (Isa. 53:10); "God spared not his own Son" (Rom. 8:32); and the other party, His own, smote Him: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and seize on the inheritance" (Matt. 21:38). This was cold encouragement to sweet Jesus. If it had been referred to us, for shame, we could not have asked God to be a suffering Mediator for us. There is more love in Christ than angels and men could fathom in their conceptions.

## Genesis 17:3 Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying,

- Ge 17:17 Ex 3:6 Lev 9:23,24 Nu 14:5 16:22,45 Jos 5:14 Judges 13:20 1Ki 18:39 Eze 1:28 3:23 9:8 Da 8:17,18 10:9 Mt 17:6 Rev 1:17
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## ABRAHAM HITS THE GROUND IN AWE

**Abram fell on his face** - NLT = "Abram fell face down in the dust." Abram "fell on his face," and there he stayed throughout the entire revelation. He assumes a posture humility, gratitude and reverence upon hearing the promises of the LORD to establish His covenant with him and multiple his descendants exceedingly. Abram knew God was treating him with grace which he did not deserve.

**THOUGHT** - Have you ever had a special time in the Word and prayer and you sensed His presence in such a unique and special way that all you could do was bow before Him?

**And God talked with him, saying** - A Holy God speaking with a sinful man (even one who is "blameless" Ge 17:1) is nothing short of absolutely amazing grace mixed with mercy and divine condescension!

**John Phillips** - The voice of God spoke on and on, and Abram lay prostrate in the dust listening as promise after promise was given. Every word spoken between verses 4 and 16 was spoken by God. Every word spoken between verses 4 and 16 was spoken by God. The paragraph is a majestic monologue by the God whose words, when spoken in creation, brought the worlds into being. His words were spoken not to create but to confirm, to spell out a one-sided contract in which all the benefits accrue to Abram. Count up the continuing use of the words "I will" and "ye shall," with the imperative "must" of verse 13—"I will make thee fruitful ... I will make nations of thee ... kings shall come out of thee." There are at least twenty-four such statements in the chapter. It is an absolute, unconditional, binding, irrevocable agreement, in which all the initiative, all the intent, and all the insistence are God's. No failure on Abram's part, no flaws, no forgetfulness on the part of his posterity, can annul the decree. God has pledged Himself to see that every single line, every jot and tittle will be fulfilled. All the factors and forces that might be harnessed to hinder or halt the agreement would be swept aside at last. As God is God, so the covenant must stand. (Borrow [Exploring Genesis - page 144](#))

The Scripture frequently records the response of godly men to a revelation from Jehovah...

- Genesis 17:3 - Abraham

- Genesis 17:17 - Abraham

**Rod Mattoon - Genesis Accounts of When God Spoke** How wonderful it must have been to hear God's voice! Abraham fell on his face in worship when the Lord spoke to him. We too should worship the Lord and let Him speak to us through His Word and the Holy Spirit. This occurs by spending time with the Lord and getting alone with Him in prayer and study of the Word of God. Genesis is full of examples of when God spoke to men and women.

1. After Disobedience—Adam heard the voice of the Lord after he had sinned. Ge 3:8
2. Directions concerning the ark—God tells Noah to go into the ark. Ge 8:15
3. Declarations of His covenant—God speaks of His covenant with Noah. Ge 9:8
4. Depart from the country—God tells Abram to leave the country. Ge 12:1
5. Destiny of Abram—God speaks to Abram after Lot departs to Sodom. Ge 13:14
6. After a Dearth of fellowship—After thirteen years, God speaks to Abram again. Ge 17:3
7. In a Dream—God speaks to Abimelech in a dream. Ge 20:3, 6
8. Concerning a Dependant—God speaks to Abraham and tells him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Ge 22:1
9. Departure is commanded—God tells Jacob to return home. Ge 31:3
10. Concerning a Dwelling place—God tells Jacob to dwell at Bethel. Ge 35:1
11. The Drive to Egypt—God speaks to Israel in a vision and tells him to make the journey to Egypt. Ge 46:2

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#### Theodore Epp - Abraham's God Is Our God Genesis 17:3-8

In Genesis 17, when God changed Abram's name to Abraham the reason is given: "For a father of many nations have I made thee" (v. 5). Notice the expression "have I made thee."

At this time no child has been born to Abraham and Sarah, yet God says He has made Abraham "a father of many nations." What God has promised, He is able to perform. What He has begun, He is able to finish. When God says it, it is as good as done.

This same principle is seen in Romans 8:30: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

We have not yet been glorified, but God speaks of it as a finished work. Why? Because what He begins, He finishes. When it is His undertaking, He sees it through. The time element is in His hands.

We need to realize that Abraham's God is our God.

The promises made to Abraham were promises that almighty grace alone could utter and that almighty power alone could fulfill. When the almighty, all-sufficient God displays Himself, man's self must be excluded.

Abraham is set aside in the account at this point. He only listens. Sarah is not mentioned. The bondwoman and her son are, for the moment, not in view. Nothing is seen but the Almighty God in the fullness of His grace and sovereign power.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

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#### Genesis 17:4 "As for Me, **behold**, My covenant is with you, And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.

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- **a father:** Ge 12:2 Ge 13:16 16:10 Ge 22:17 25:1-18 32:12 35:11 36:1-43 Nu 1:1-54 Nu 26:1-65 Ro 4:11-18 Ga 3:28,29
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Genesis 12:2 And I **will make you a great nation**, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

Genesis 13:16 "I **will make your descendants as the dust of the earth**, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.

Genesis 22:17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I**will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore**; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

Galatians 3:29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

## GOD'S COVENANT SPECIFICALLY WITH ABRAHAM

As for Me, **behold**, (*hinneh*; Lxx = *idou*) - God wants to make sure Abraham doesn't fall asleep on this next declaration! Spurgeon says that "**Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, **behold** is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

God repeats what He had just stated in Genesis 17:2.

**My covenant** (*beriyth*; Lxx = *diatheke*) **is with you** - First, God reaffirms this solemn, binding agreement is between the Creator and His creation, Abraham. This is a personal covenant for all who would enter it in the same way Abraham did, by grace through faith (Ge 15:6+). Don't miss the important point that salvation in the OT is the same as in the NT, by grace through faith.

**And you will be the father of a multitude of nations** (*plural "goyim"*) - Secondly, the **and** means there is more to this covenant. This promise of Yahweh's covenant is specifically for Abraham. He is the only direct beneficiary of this promise, for he alone would be the beginning of many **nations**. His descendants in those **nations** of course would be indirect beneficiaries of the promises made to Abraham.

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**Behold** ([02009](#)) *hinneh* is an interjection meaning behold, look, now; if. "It is used often and expresses strong feelings, surprise, hope, expectation, certainty, thus giving vividness depending on its surrounding context." (Baker) Hinneh generally directs our mind to the text, imploring the reader to give it special attention. In short, the Spirit is trying to arrest our attention! And so **hinneh** is used as an exclamation of vivid immediacy (e.g., read Ge 6:13)! **Hinneh** is a marker used to enliven a narrative, to express a change a scene, to emphasize an idea, to call attention to a detail or an important fact or action that follows (Isa 65:17, Ge 17:20, 41:17). The first use of **hinneh** in Ge 1:29 and second in Ge 1:31 - "And God saw all that He had made, and **behold**, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." **Hinneh** is often used in the idiom "**Here I am**" in Ge 22:1, 7,11 Ge 27:1,18, Ge 31:11, Ge 46:2 Ex 3:4 1Sa 3:4, 3:16, 12:3, 2Sa 1:7, Isa 52:6, Isa 58:9. Hinneh is used most often to point out people but also to point out things (Ge 31:41, 17:4). God uses **hinneh** to grab man's attention before He brings destruction (Ge 6:13, 17). God uses **hinneh** when He establishes covenants (Ge 9:9, 15:12, 17 [when Jehovah cut the Abrahamic covenant], Ge 17:4, cp Ge 28:13, 15), when He provided a sacrificial substitute for Isaac (foreshadowing His giving us His only Son!) (Ge 22:13). Hinneh marks the "chance ([The Providence of God](#))" arrival of Boaz at the field where Ruth was gleaning (Ru 2:4-[read about this "chance romance"](#) - [Indeed, "Behold!"](#)). Hinneh is used to announce the Lord's sending of a child as a sign and a prophecy of [Immanuel-Emmanuel](#), the Messiah (Isa. 7:14+). In fact [W E Vine](#) says that it is notable that when **behold** (*hinneh*) is used in Isaiah, it always introduces something relating to future circumstances.

**Hinneh** is translated in the Septuagint with the interjection *idou* (strictly speaking a command in the second person [aorist imperative, middle voice](#)) a demonstrative particle (used 1377 times in the Septuagint and NT) which is found especially in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke "and giving a peculiar vivacity to the style by bidding the reader or hearer to attend to what is said: "**Behold! See! Lo!**" (Thayer) The command is calling for urgent attention. Do this now! Don't delay! It could be loosely paraphrased "**Pay attention!**" or "**Listen up!**" to arouse attention and introduce a new and extraordinary fact of considerable importance.

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### [Too Old?](#)

My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. — Genesis 17:4

Today's Scripture : Genesis 17:15-22

When God promised Abraham and his wife Sarah that they would have a son, Abraham laughed in unbelief and replied, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Gen. 17:17).

Later, Sarah laughed for the same reason: "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Ge 18:12).

We too grow old and wonder if the Lord can fulfill His promises to us. We no longer have prominence or status. Our minds are not as nimble as they once were. We're hampered by physical problems that limit our mobility and keep us close to home. Every day we seem to lose more of the things we have spent a lifetime acquiring. Robert Frost underscores something that we sometimes ask ourselves: "The question . . . is what to make of a diminished thing."

Not much—if we are left to ourselves. But God is able to do more with us than we can imagine. He asks us, as He asked Sarah, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Ge 18:14). Of course not!

We’re never too old to be useful if we make ourselves available to God for His purposes. By: David H. Roper (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Growing old but not retiring,  
For the battle still is on;  
Going on without relenting  
Till the final victory's won.  
—Anon.

As God adds years to your life,  
ask Him to add life to your years.  
(Psalm 103:5)

**Genesis 17:5 “No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.**

- **name:** Ge 17:15 32:28 Nu 13:16 2Sa 12:25 Ne 9:7 Isa 62:2-4 65:15 Jer 20:3 Jer 23:6 Mt 1:21-23 Joh 1:42 Rev 2:17
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## EXALTED FATHER BECOMES FATHER OF A MULTITUDE

**No longer shall your name be called Abram** - "Exalted father" is a name that some commentators think actually refers to Abram's father Terah. In other words they propose that the name "Abram" looks to the past, while the new name looks to the future.

**Rod Mattoon** - In the East, it was a custom to change someone's name on the occurrence of some great event in their life.

**But your name shall be Abraham** - "Father of a multitude." In biblical times, God often changed a person's name to indicate what He was going to do through that person (See [Ross' explanation](#)). If we reason from the context of this Scripture, one reason Abram's name was changed to Abraham was because God had promised to make him a father of a multitude of nations through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Ge 12:3).

Another suggestion regarding the name change - In Ge17:5,15 we see that there were two changes - Abram ("Exalted Father") to Abraham ("Father of a multitude") and Sarai to Sarah. How might one explain God's giving His name to Abraham and Sarah? First notice that God's covenant name is YHWH. While not everyone agrees with this explanation, it is not unreasonable to consider that God took the letter H (Hebrew = Heth) sound from His name and He put it in their names, as another aspect or manifestation of the covenant relationship between God and man. (**Source:** Notes from Precept Ministries course on Covenant)

**William Barclay** says that "The custom of giving a new name to mark a new status was known in the heathen world as well. The name of the first of the Roman Emperors was Octavius; but when he became the first of the Emperors he was given the name Augustus. This very name marked his new status; he was now unique and superhuman and more than man (**Ed:** Or so the pagan's believed!).

**For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations** - **For** is a term of explanation explaining the significance of the name change. Notice the phrase "**I have made**," indicating this act is all from God, all of grace! Abraham did nothing to merit or earn this great honor, although his obedience (cf Ge 17:26, 27<sup>+</sup>) demonstrated that he believed God had bestowed this blessing on him. While some translations render it "I will make..." (FUTURE TENSE), several other translations (ESV, NIV, NASB, NRS, YLT) render it as spoken in the past tense ("I have made..."). In other words, if the past tense is the correct rendering, God is saying that His future promise is so certain that He is speaking it as if it has already been fulfilled (so called [prolepsis](#)). The Septuagint renders "I have made" with the perfect tense indicating completed action in the past with enduring or lasting effect. Note that **nations** would include those that come from his offspring in Ge 25:1-4.

**Believer's Study Bible** - The patriarchal narratives will show how this was realized when the descendants of Abraham become the progenitors of whole nations. The change to "Abraham" was further evidence of divine determination to fulfill the covenant.

**APPLICATION OF A NEW NAME** - Even as Abram and Sarai were given new names, every overcomer (not a special class but every believer - see explanation in 1Jn 5:4, 5+) will receive from the Lord Jesus Christ "a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it." (Rev 2:17+, cf the new name in Rev 3:12+).

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### **Allen Ross gives an excellent explanation of the names Abram and Abraham -**

Genesis 17 records the well-known change of Abram's name to Abraham. And while the text is clear as to the significance of this change of names, the actual meanings of the two names need some clarification.

**His name was Abram.** In Hebrew this name is spelled **'av-ram**, pronounced ahv-rahm. It is made up of two parts. The first is the word for "father," **'av** (the "b" is a soft sound). The second is from a verb **rum** (pronounced room), a word that means "high, exalted." Why would parents call a baby "exalted father"? Well, the name does not refer to Abram as exalted father, but to his father, Terah. It was the custom, and still is in many Eastern lands, to name the child in some way to reflect the father; and then when the child grew up and became a father, to change his name. For example, in an Arab culture one might have a son and name him "Ibrahim son of [ibn] X." But when that child grows up and has his own son, he will be known as "Ibrahim, father of [abu] XX." So the patriarch's name indicated that his father, Terah, was exalted. This probably means that Abram came from noble lineage.

Now in Genesis 17 God promised Abram that he would be the **father of a multitude of nations**, and so changed his name to "Abraham" ('av-ra-ham). The new name seems to be a dialectical variation of the other name. But its significance comes from the fact that it sounds like the promise. God promised he would be "**the father of a multitude of nations**"; in Hebrew this is **'av-hamon [goyim]**, which sounds like **'av-raham**. And this was the point. Every time the new name was used, it reminded the patriarch and his family of the promise, that he would be the **father of a multitude of nations**.

Here is where the name change reflected the change of the patriarch's status. Even though he was old, he was always "Abram," Terah's son. That name always looked back to his lineage. Now, however, because of the promise of God, his new name looked forward, to his son, to the nations, to the future.

**THOUGHT** And this is what happens when God steps into our lives and makes glorious and grand promises to us. They are a call to look away from the past, and to look to the future in faith. We never lose our family connections; but we have a new family, a new hope, a new life with a glorious future that completely overshadows the past.

This is the theme that God presented to Israel in Isaiah 43:18, 19. There he announced the restoration to the land with the new covenant by telling his people, "Forget the former things . . . I am doing a new thing." (ED: SEE [NEW COVENANT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT](#)) And likewise when people come to faith in the Savior today, they become new creations in Christ, and the old things are passing away. The task is for the believer to be so filled with the promise of the hope of glory that all the old things can be set aside.

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### **The Power of a Name**

Your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. Genesis 17:5

Today's Scripture & Insight : Genesis 17:1–8, 15–16

Seeking to affirm some children who live on the streets in Mumbai, India, Ranjit created a song of their names. Coming up with a unique melody for each name, he taught them the tune, hoping to give them a positive memory related to what they're called. For children who don't regularly hear their name spoken in love, he bestowed on them a gift of respect.

Names are important in the Bible, often reflecting a person's character traits or new role. For instance, God changed the names of Abram and Sarai when He made a covenant of love with them, promising that He would be their God and they would be His people. Abram, which means "exalted father," became Abraham, which means "father of many." And Sarai, which means "princess," became Sarah, which means "princess of many" (see Genesis 17:5, 15).

God's new names included the gracious promise that they would no longer be childless. When Sarah gave birth to their son, they were overjoyed and named him Isaac, which means "he laughs": "Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me'" (Genesis 21:6).

We show honor and respect to people when we call them by name and affirm who God has created them to be. A loving nickname that affirms someone's unique qualities as one created in the image of God can do the same. By: Amy Boucher Pye (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

How do you feel about your name? When have you been able to name something in a friend or family member that reflects who they are?

God of all names, You made me in Your image and love me. Shape me and mold me to be more like You.

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#### QUESTION - [Why is God going to give us a white stone with a new name?](#)

**ANSWER** - In the Bible, there is only one reference to God giving us a white stone with a new name: **To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it**" (Revelation 2:17).

The meaning of the white stone is a mystery to Bible scholars. However, several interpretations have been offered:

1. In ancient Greece, jury members would cast a **white stone** to signify an acquittal, whereas a black stone proclaimed the defendant guilty. The weakness of this interpretation is that the stones cast in the courts did not have names inscribed on them.
2. A small object called a "tessera," made of wood, stone, clay or bone, conveyed special privileges to its owner. The ancient Romans used tesserae as tokens of admittance to events in the arena. However, tesserae did not have to be white, and the durability of the materials used is questionable.
3. A **white stone** was often used as an amulet or charm. However, this custom was associated with sorcery, so it would be odd if the Bible used it as a symbol of salvation.
4. Another interpretation has to do with the building material used during the time John wrote Revelation. Important buildings were commonly made of white marble, including the temple of Asclepius in Pergamum (the city of the church Jesus is addressing in Revelation 2:17). In front of the temple were white marble pillars engraved with the names of people supposedly healed by the god. One problem with this interpretation is that the Greek word used in this verse, *psephon* properly means "pebble," not "stone."
5. One of the better-accepted explanations of the **white stone** has to do with the high priest's breastplate, which contained twelve stones. Each of these stones had the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on it (Exodus 28:21). As he ministered in the temple, the high priest bore the names of God's people into God's presence. In the same way, the "**white stone**" with the believer's name written on it could be a reference to our standing in God's presence.
6. Another widely held explanation suggests that the **white stone** may be a translucent precious stone such as a diamond. The word translated "**white**" in Revelation 2:17 is *leukos* and can also mean "brilliant, bright." This interpretation holds that on the stone is written the name of Christ, not the name of the believer. Revelation mentions that the name of Christ is written on the foreheads of the saints (Revelation 3:12; Revelation 14:1, and Revelation 14:20).

The best theory regarding the meaning of the white stone probably has to do with the ancient Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors of athletic games. The winner of a contest was awarded a **white stone** with his name inscribed on it. This served as his "ticket" to a special awards banquet. According to this view, Jesus promises the overcomers entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven. The "**new name**" most likely refers to the Holy Spirit's work of conforming believers to the holiness of Christ (see Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10). [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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#### QUESTION - [Why did God sometimes change a person's name in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - When God changed a person's name and gave him a new name, it was usually to establish a new identity.

God changed Abram's name, meaning "high father," to "Abraham," meaning "father of a multitude" (Genesis 17:5). At the same time, God changed Abraham's wife's name from "Sarai," meaning "my princess," to "Sarah," meaning "mother of nations" (Genesis 17:15). This name change took place when God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. God also reaffirmed His promise to give Abraham a son, specifically through Sarah, and told him to name his son Isaac, meaning "laughter." Abraham had another son, Ishmael, through Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar. But God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham was to be fulfilled through Isaac's line, from whom Jesus descended (Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38). Isaac was the father of Jacob, who became "Israel." His twelve sons formed the twelve tribes of Israel—the Jews. The physical descendants of Abraham and Sarah formed many nations. In a spiritual sense, their descendants are even more numerous. Galatians 3:29 says that all who belong to Jesus Christ—Jew, Gentile, male, or female—are "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

God changed Jacob's name, which meant "supplanter," to "Israel," meaning "having power with God" (Genesis 32:28). This

happened after Jacob had taken Esau's birthright (Genesis 25) and stolen Esau's blessing (Genesis 27), fled from his brother to his uncle Laban (Genesis 28), married Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29), fled from Laban (Genesis 31), and then wrestled with God as he prepared to meet Esau. Jacob had tricked his brother, been tricked by his uncle, tricked his uncle (Genesis 30), and was now going through his brother's territory to escape his angry uncle. He'd heard that Esau was going to come out and meet him and feared for his life. That night, Jacob wrestled with a man, who later identified Himself as God and is considered a theophany or perhaps a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Jacob held on to the man until he obtained a blessing. It was at this point that God changed his name. No longer would Jacob be a supplanter and trickster. Rather, he would be identified as having "struggled with God and with humans and . . . overcome" (Genesis 32:28).

In the New Testament, Jesus changed Simon's name, meaning "God has heard," to "Peter," meaning "rock" when He first called him as a disciple (John 1:42). It was Peter who declared that Jesus was "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus replied to him as "Simon son of Jonah," saying that he was blessed because God revealed Jesus' identity as Messiah to him. He then referred to him as "Peter" and said that Peter's declaration was the basis, or "rock," on which He would build His church (Matthew 16:17-18). Peter is also often seen as the leader of the apostles. Jesus occasionally called Peter "Simon" at other times. Why? Probably because Simon sometimes acted like his old self instead of the rock God called him to be. The same is true for Jacob. God continued to call him "Jacob" to remind him of his past and to remind him to depend on God's strength.

Why did God choose new names for some people? The Bible doesn't give us His reasons, but perhaps it was to let them know they were destined for a new mission in life. The new name was a way to reveal the divine plan and also to assure them that God's plan would be fulfilled in them. [GotQuestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)

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**F B Meyer** writes...In olden days, **names** were given not for euphony, or by caprice, but for character.

**A man's character was in his name.**

Now, when Jacob came into the attitude of blessing--an attitude which has two parts: viz., absolute abandonment of self, and a trust which clings to Christ--then immediately the Angel said, "**What is thy name?**" And he said, "**Jacob. By nature I am a supplanter, a rogue, and a cheat.**" Never shrink from declaring your true character: "My name is Sinner." "**And he said, thy name shall be no more Jacob; but Israel: a prince with God.**"

**The changed name indicated a changed character.** Jacob was swallowed up of light. He was clothed upon with the name and nature of a prince. There is only one way to princeliness--it is the thorn-set path of self-surrender and of faith. Why should you not now yield yourself entirely to God, and give Him your whole being? It is only a reasonable service: and out of it will spring a tenacity of faith; and power for service; and a royalty of character--enough to make you willing to bear the limp, which proves that your own strength has passed away forever. ([Israel, a prince with God the story of Jacob](#))

**Reformation Study Bible** - The name changes of the patriarch and matriarch show they are under God's rule (Ge 1:5[note](#)) and are called to a new destiny and mission.

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**Genesis 17:6 "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you.**

- **nations:** Ge 17:4,20 35:11
- **kings:** Ge 17:16 36:31-43 Ezr 4:20 Mt 1:6-17
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **NATIONS AND KINGS WILL COME FROM ABRAHAM**

**I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you** - Contrast God's commands to Adam and Noah to be fruitful with God's promise to make Abraham fruitful. The Hebrew places great emphasis on the fruitfulness as it reads literally "exceedingly, exceedingly." There are three "I will" promises in this passage! He would have to be exceedingly fruitful to have entire nations come forth from him. Of course the most significant nations would be the nation of Israel (via Isaac) and the Arab nations (via Ishmael), for they would continually experience enmity toward one another until the Prince of Peace returns to bring peace and to set up his "nation" (so to speak), the Messianic or Millennial Kingdom.

The promises in this passage recall the words of Jesus in John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do (ABSOLUTELY) nothing (OF ETERNAL VALUE)." Abraham and Sarah could do absolutely nothing apart from the supernatural power of God. When they relied on their fleshly power, they failed miserably!

**THOUGHT** - What are you attempting to do for the glory of God and His Kingdom? The vital question to ask is this -- "Is God in it, initiating it and energizing it?" If not, the result is "wood, hay and stubble!" (1Co 3:12KJV+) **Vance Havner** once quipped "We say that we depend on the Holy Spirit, but actually we are so wired up with our own devices that if the fire does not fall from heaven, we can turn on a switch and produce false fire of our own." Amen or oh my!

**and kings will come forth from you** - Men like King David and King Solomon would come forth from Abraham. Of course the greatest fulfillment is in the Lord Jesus Christ Who is none other than the King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen! (Rev 19:16+).

**Skip Heitzig** We often think Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation. He is, but he's the father of many more. There are 13.3 million Jewish people on the earth; there are 22 Arab nations with 300+ million people. All of them trace their lineage back to Abraham. That means that today, 5% of the earth's population can trace their genealogy directly to Abraham. Now you know why God says, 'I'm changing your name to father of a multitude'. God has made good on His promise.

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**ILLUSTRATION OF RELYING ON YOUR OWN POWER** - I read about a young Scottish minister who walked proudly into the pulpit to preach his first sermon. He had a brilliant mind and a good education and was confident of himself as he faced his first congregation. But the longer he preached, the more conscious everyone was that "the Lord was not in the wind." He finished his message quickly and came down from the pulpit with his head bowed, his pride now gone. Afterward, one of the members said to him, *"If you had gone into the pulpit the way you came down, you might have come down from the pulpit the way you went up"* (Warren Wiersbe)

**Genesis 17:7 "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.**

- **I will establish My covenant** : Ge 15:18 26:24 Ex 6:4 Ps 105:8-11 Mic 7:20 Lu 1:54,55,72-75 Ro 9:4,8,9 Ga 3:17 Eph 2:2
- **God**: Ge 26:24 28:13 Ex 3:6,15 Lev 26:12 Ps 81:10 Eze 28:26 Mt 22:32 Heb 8:10 11:16
- **and to**: Ex 19:5,6 Mk 10:14 Ac 2:39 Ro 9:7-9
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Exodus 6:7 (THE UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP OF GOD WITH ISRAEL) Then I will take you for**My people, and I will be your God**; and you shall know that **I am the LORD your God**, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Leviticus 26:12 (THE UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP OF GOD WITH ISRAEL) '**I will also walk among you and be your God**, and **you shall be My people**.

## COVENANT PROMISES EXTEND TO ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS

**I will establish My covenant** ([beriyth](#); Lxx = [diatheke](#)) **between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting** ([olam](#); Lxx = [aionios](#)) **covenant** ([beriyth](#); Lxx = [diatheke](#)) - This promise for the first time is an extension of the declaration in Ge 17:4 that **My covenant is with you**. Now God makes it clear that the promises of this covenant will extend to his offspring and that this covenant is everlasting or eternal.

**To be God to you and to your descendants after you** - (see same idea of personal relationship in Ex 6:7; Ex 29:45; Lev 26:12,45; Nu 15:41; Jer 7:23; Jer 11:4; Jer 24:7; Jer 30:22; Jer 31:1,33) This promise of the covenant would be easy to gloss over, but to me it is one of the most incredible promises of all, for here God is saying He will be their personal God. The Holy One of Israel will commune and fellowship with unholy men, once again reflecting the incredible outpouring of grace in this covenant.

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**Everlasting, Eternal, Forever** ([05769](#)) [olam](#) is a masculine noun which according to some authorities is derived from 'alam (05956) which means to conceal, hide, be hidden, be concealed, be secret (2Ki 4:27, Ps 10:1). (others say the origin is uncertain) Gesenius feels olam refers to that which is hidden, especially "hidden time" the beginning or end of which is either uncertain or undefined = eternity, perpetuity. The most common associations of "everlasting" (olam) (Complete list below) (Based on the NAS). Everlasting covenant = 15x, Everlasting lovingkindness = 44x Olam is translated twice as everlasting in the beautiful

English phrase "Everlasting to Everlasting" which is found in Ps 41:13 , Ps 90:2, Ps 103:17.

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**Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook - Genesis 17:7** - O LORD, thou hast made a covenant with me, thy servant, in Christ Jesus my Lord; and now, I beseech thee, let my children be included in its gracious provisions. Permit me to believe this promise as made to me as well as to Abraham. I know that my children are born in sin, and shapen in iniquity, even as those of other men; therefore, I ask nothing on the ground of their birth, for well I know that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," and nothing more. Lord, make them to be born under thy covenant of grace by thy Holy Spirit!

I pray for my descendants throughout all generations. Be thou their God as thou wert mine. My highest honour is that thou hast permitted me to serve thee; may my offspring serve thee in all years to come. O God of Abraham, be the God of his Isaac! O God of Hannah, accept her Samuel!

If, Lord, thou hast favoured me in my family, I pray thee remember other households of thy people which remain unblest. Be the God of all the families of Israel. Let not one of those who fear thy name be tried with a godless and wicked household, for thy Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

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### "They"

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants . . . to be God to you. — Genesis 17:7

Today's Scripture : Genesis 17:4-7,15-19

A self-employed inventor from Branson, Missouri, decided to change his name to **They**." He said he did it for fun to address the common reference that people make to "they." He remarked, "People say, 'They do this,' or 'They're to blame for that.' 'They' accomplish such great things. Somebody had to be responsible." When his friends call his home, they ask, "Is They there?" His new name must drive grammarians crazy.

Abram's name was changed, but not on a whim. The Lord changed it. In biblical times, God often changed a person's name to indicate what He was going to do through that person.

Abram's name ("exalted father") was changed to Abraham ("father of many") because God had promised to make him a father of many nations (Gen. 17:5) through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Ge 12:3).

In fulfillment of God's promise, Jesus came from the line of Abraham and blessed the nations by giving His life for our sins. When we believe in Him, we are blessed and are promised eternal life with Him. God now calls us by new names: "My people" and "sons of the living God" (Rom. 9:25-26). As His people, we can be used by Him to bless others. By: Anne Cetas (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Bless me, Lord, and make me a blessing;  
I'll gladly your message convey;  
Use me to help some poor needy soul,  
And make me a blessing today.  
—Anon.

God gives blessings to us so that we can give blessings to others.

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**Genesis 17:8 "I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."**

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- **I will give to you:** Ge 12:7 Ge 13:15,17 Ge 15:7-21 Ps 105:9,11
- **the land of your sojournings,** Ge 23:4 Ge 28:4
- **everlasting:** Ge 48:4 Ex 21:6 31:16,17 40:15 Lev 16:34 Nu 25:13 De 32:8 2Sa 23:5 Ps 103:17 Heb 9:15
- **I will be their God:** Ex 6:7 Lev 26:12 De 4:37 14:2 26:18 29:13
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **THE PROMISE OF THE LAND OF CANAAN**

**I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting (olam; Lxx = *aionios*) possession (ahuzzah)** - Previously God had referred to **land** (Ge 12:7, Ge 13:15, Ge 15:18) but now specifically identifies it as **Canaan**. In this promise God focuses on possession of the land of Canaan a promise that was fulfilled in Joshua 21:43+ where the writer says that "the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it." However even Joshua did not take possession of the total territory promised in Genesis 15:18 but this will be fulfilled when the "Greater Joshua" Jesus returns to set up His Millennial Kingdom. In Genesis 48:4 Jacob relates that Yahweh declared to him "**Behold**, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples (THE JEWS), and **will give this land to your descendants** (THE JEWS WHO ARE PART OF THE BELIEVING REMNANT) **after you for an everlasting possession.**" Passages such as this would support the premise that the land grant is specifically for Israel (another name of Jacob) and not the church. To be sure Gal 3:29+ states that "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." The church is never referred to as an heir of Jacob to whom the land was promised as an everlasting promise.

**Possession (ahuzzah)** in the Septuagint is the word kataschesis which means taking or holding in possession and is used by Stephen in Acts 7:5 of Abraham and in the Septuagint of Psalm 2:8 "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession (ahuzzah; Lxx - kataschesis)" which of course refers to the Messiah Who receives all the nations, a promise that will be fulfilled in the Millennial reign of Christ.

**John Phillips** - The land of Israel does not belong to the Arabs, for all their clamor. It was not deeded to Ishmael, but to Isaac. The Arabs are investing vast sums in petrodollars to launch sophisticated, Madison-Avenue promotion campaigns to erode world support for the reborn State of Israel. The image is being created of a ravished Palestinian state and of a Palestinian nation that has been displaced by the Jews. The audience is the Arab American community, pro-Arab organizations in the United States, the oil companies, liberal church people, intellectuals, the entire radical left, segments of the political far right, and the traditional anti-Jewish hate fringe. But there never was an Arab state. The last time an independent state existed in that area, it was a Jewish state, destroyed by the Romans in a.d. 70 and renamed "Palestine" after the Jews' inveterate enemy the Philistines as added gall to the bitter cup of defeat. The last people to lord it over the land were the British, and they deeded it to the Jews under the terms of the Balfour Declaration, a document later ratified by the League of Nations.

**Reformation Study Bible** - God's covenant endures forever because He does not change and Jesus Christ fulfills every condition (2 Cor. 1:20; Eph. 2:12, 13).

**NIV Study Bible (BORROW - see page 36)** - The land, though an everlasting possession given by God, could be temporarily lost because of disobedience (see Dt 28:62-63+; Dt 30:1-10+).

**Warren Wiersbe** - God's everlasting covenant also included an everlasting possession: the land of Canaan. This land is a battleground today and always will be until the Lord returns to reign. But as far as God's covenant is concerned, the land belongs to Israel. The Jews' ownership of the land depends solely on God's gracious covenant with Abraham: God gave them the land. But their possession and enjoyment of the land depends on their faithfulness to obey the Lord. This was the theme of Moses' messages in Deuteronomy. More than sixty times in that book, Moses told the people they would inherit or possess the land, and at least twenty-five times, Moses reminded them that the land was a gift from the Lord. God's name was there (Deut. 12:5, 11, 21), and He would watch over the land to bless it, if His people walked in His ways. The only piece of ground all the patriarchs possessed was the cave Abraham purchased from Ephron, the son of Zohar, to become a family burial place (Gen. 23; 49:29-31). Jacob and his family had to leave the land and go to Egypt (Ge 46), but God had promised that they would return to Canaan at the appointed time (Ge 15:13-17). Joshua led them into their land where they conquered the inhabitants and claimed their inheritance. But the people did not stay true to the covenant, so God had to discipline them **in the land** (Jdg. 2:10-23). He raised up enemy nations to defeat Israel and put her in bondage. Israel was in the land, but she did not **control** it or **enjoy** it (Dt. 28:15ff.). During the reigns of David and Solomon, the people enjoyed their inheritance and served the Lord faithfully. But after the kingdom divided, Israel and Judah both decayed spiritually (except for occasional interludes of revival) and ended up in bondage: Assyria defeated Israel, and Babylon conquered Judah. It was then that God disciplined His people **outside their land**. It was as though He were saying, "You have polluted My land with your idols, so I will put you in a land that is addicted to idols. Get your fill of it! After you have been away from your land for seventy years, maybe you will learn to appreciate what I gave you." (2Ch 36:21, Jer 25:11, 12, Jer 29:10, Da 9:2) God permitted a remnant to return to the land, rebuild the city and the temple, and restore the nation, but it never became a great power again. However, whether Israel is faithful or faithless, the land belongs to her, and one day she will inherit it and enjoy it to the glory of God. Israel's title deed to the land is a vital part of God's everlasting covenant with Abraham. ([Bible Commentary](#))

**And I will be their God** - This reiterates Ge 17:7 (**to be God to you and to your descendants**) and speaks of God's will to be in communion and fellowship with Abraham's offspring. Amazing grace! See the same thought in Ex. 6:7+ and Dt. 29:13+.

**Possession** (property, site) ([0272](#)) **ahuzzah/achuzzah** from **achaz** = to grasp, to take hold, take possession) is a feminine noun meaning something seized or grasped a picture of the root verb achaz we see when Jacob "took hold" of Esau's heel (Ge 25:26); Samson "took hold" of the city gate (Judges 16:3) and Ruth "held" the cloak as Boaz poured six measures of barley into it (Ruth 3:15). Given this meaning of the root (achaz to seize) it is a somewhat ironic wordplay that the land of Canaan (Israel's inalienable possession) was conquered by Israel "seizing" the promised land as ordained by God. In Psalm 2 the Father makes a promise to His Son declaring "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the [very] ends of the earth as Your **possession**." (Ps 2:8). **Ahuzzah** is usually translated **possession** (slaves only in Lev 25:45, 46) or **property** and has the nuances of either "personal property" or more frequently, "landed property." Jehovah rather than giving the Levites land (although they did own houses in the Levitical cities) would be their possession (Nu 18:20; Ezek. 44:28). In regard to property, **ahuzzah** refers primarily to the **possession** of Promised Land in Canaan by Israel. While the Promised Land is said to be the possession of Israel, the true Landlord is the Lord Himself ("for the land is Mine" Lev 25:23) Who Alone is strong and sovereign enough to give Abraham and his seed the land as an everlasting possession. (Ge 17:8), this being the first use of ahuzzah. Ahuzzah refers to a **burial site** in Ge 23:4,9,20, these burial plots serving the patriarchs as a foretaste of the eventual possession of Canaan by their descendants. Most occurrences of 'achuzzah are in the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Ezekiel 44-48, where this topic is in the forefront. The word is often associated with another noun translated as "inheritance" (nachalah), since the Israelites' land was God's gracious gift to be handed down from generation to generation (Nu 32:32).

**Ahuzzah - 66x in 58v - possession(40), possessions(2), property(19), site(5).** Gen. 17:8; Gen. 23:4; Gen. 23:9; Gen. 23:20; Gen. 36:43; Gen. 47:11; Gen. 48:4; Gen. 49:30; Gen. 50:13; Lev. 14:34; Lev. 25:10; Lev. 25:13; Lev. 25:24; Lev. 25:25; Lev. 25:27; Lev. 25:28; Lev. 25:32; Lev. 25:33; Lev. 25:34; Lev. 25:41; Lev. 25:45; Lev. 25:46; Lev. 27:16; Lev. 27:21; Lev. 27:22; Lev. 27:24; Lev. 27:28; Num. 27:4; Num. 27:7; Num. 32:5; Num. 32:22; Num. 32:29; Num. 32:32; Num. 35:2; Num. 35:8; Num. 35:28; Deut. 32:49; Jos. 21:12; Jos. 21:41; Jos. 22:4; Jos. 22:9; Jos. 22:19; 1 Chr. 7:28; 1 Chr. 9:2; 2 Chr. 11:14; 2 Chr. 31:1; Neh. 11:3; Ps. 2:8; Ezek. 44:28; Ezek. 45:5; Ezek. 45:6; Ezek. 45:7; Ezek. 45:8; Ezek. 46:16; Ezek. 46:18; Ezek. 48:20; Ezek. 48:21; Ezek. 48:22

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**[Skip Heitzig](#) has a lengthy discussion on the promise of land to Abraham's descendants -**

300,000 square miles God promised them. Now they have never, ever occupied all that God gave to them. They have only, at the peak of the kingdom under Solomon, occupied 30,000 square miles. They wouldn't have much luck going to all these neighboring countries now, like Egypt and Jordan and Syria and Saudi Arabia and Iraq and Iran, and saying, 'This is our land. God promised it to us. Kindly move out of here.' But I want you to see is this, what God said they would have, they only took one fraction, one tenth, of all that God said He would give to them. And what God told them is this, 'Every place that your foot walks is yours.' They obviously, evidently, didn't believe God for all of it. So even at the peak of their kingdom, under King Solomon, when he expanded the borders, one-tenth of all that God promised they enjoyed. Does that at all sound familiar to you? Think of all the promises that God has made you. How many of them are you enjoying? All of them? Half of them? A small fraction of them? What kind of victory are you living in? What kind of cache of God's promises are you enjoying? I tend to believe we're just living on a small fraction of all that God has for us. Now God, one day, will allow them to enjoy all of that border that He promised them. And that will be in the earthly kingdom outlined so often the Old Testament called the millennium in the New Testament. A thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth. It will be then that their borders will be expanded to all that God gave to them.....**The covenant that God promises to Abraham for the land that is today the land of Israel, and for the people, what kind of a covenant is it? Unconditional.** 'I will bless you, I will make your name great, I will do this, I will do that'. Five times God says, 'I will' and He repeats that same kind of terminology. It's unilateral. It's unconditional. Now we have a problem because God promises them the land through this covenant with Abraham, but later on, in the covenant of Moses, which is a conditional covenant, there are conditions for them in the land. Do you follow me? In Deuteronomy 28-30, God says, 'If you obey Me and you keep My laws, I will bless you in this land. You'll get a lot of rain and crops in this land. You'll subdue all your enemies. If you disobey Me, your enemies will subdue you. In fact, you won't have good crops, you won't have good rain, your enemies will come and take you from this land and you'll be in captivity.' That's chapters 28 and 29 of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 30, the Lord says, 'When you are in captivity, in another land, and there you pray to Me because you realize you've been disobedient and you sort of come to and wake up, and when you're in captivity and you pray to Me and repent and turn back in your heart, then I will take you out of the land to which you were taken captive and bring you back into this good land that I promised to you and to Abraham.' So here's how it works, here's the solution to the problem. **The land given to Abraham unconditionally would be theirs unconditionally, perpetually, forever. But their tenure in the land, their occupation of the land, was conditional.** How does that work? Doesn't one negate the other? No. God says, 'Here you are. I'll put you in the land. You will disobey me. I will take you out of the land.' That's called the Babylonian captivity. 'You will get spiritually spanked in that land. You will cry out and ask forgiveness in that land. I will bring you back into this land. Now you'll be good girls and boys in that land.' But that wasn't the only time they got expelled. The Romans came in (70 AD), subjugated them, and when the Romans came in and destroyed the temple and destroyed Jerusalem, there were 2,000 years of the Diaspora. Ever heard of the term [Diaspora](#)?

**(ED: SEE Dt 28:64+)** The dispersion of the Jews around the world in hundreds of different countries. So they were dispersed and did not have a homeland and people were looking at that and saying, 'You know what? There's not going to be a literal regathering of a literal people in a literal land. All of that is spiritual and figurative and it doesn't matter anymore.' Until May 14, 1948 when Palestine was now called Israel and Jews from all over the world were allowed to go back to their homeland, fulfilling many promises, including Isaiah 11:11, where God says, "I will bring you back the second time into the land."

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#### **QUESTION - What is the land that God promised to Israel?**

**ANSWER** - There is probably no more disputed real estate on earth than the land of Israel. Even calling it "Israel" will raise objections from some quarters. The Jewish people lay claim to the land because they first held possession of it millennia ago and because God directly gave them the land, as recorded in the Bible.

In Genesis 12:7, God promises Abram, who had just arrived in Canaan, "To your offspring I will give this land." Later, in Genesis 15:18, God expands on that unconditional promise: "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates" (NASB). Then, in Genesis 17:8, God reiterates the promise to Abraham, adding that the land gift is irrevocable: "The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you." God later repeats the promise to Abraham's son Isaac (Genesis 26:3–4) and Isaac's son Jacob (Genesis 28:13), whose name God later changed to Israel.

In the Abrahamic Covenant, then, God laid out the extent of the land that would belong to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a territory including all of Canaan and stretching from Egypt to modern-day Iraq. Several centuries later, when it came time for the Israelites actually take possession of the Promised Land, God again spoke of a vast area "from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, including all the land of the Hittites" (Joshua 1:4, NLT).

The promise of land belonging to the children of Israel is permanent. Even when Israel was expelled from their land, which has happened twice in history, God promised they would return: "Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it" (Deuteronomy 30:4–5). This promise is part of what is today sometimes called the Palestinian Covenant or the Land Covenant (Deuteronomy 29:1—30:10).

In foretelling the removal of Israel from their land, the Palestinian Covenant anticipated the Babylonian Captivity (586 BC) and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). In both cases, the promise of the covenant held true: the Jews regained their land and their nation in 537 BC and again in AD 1948. Israel is still in their land, despite the fact that their conquerors, Babylon and Rome, are long gone. All of this reinforces the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that God would establish Israel in their land as His chosen people (Deuteronomy 29:13). The Land Covenant also contains some special promises to Israel that many believe will not be completely fulfilled until the millennial reign of Christ.

According to Genesis 15:18 and Joshua 1:4, the land God gave to Israel included everything from the Nile River in Egypt to Lebanon (south to north) and everything from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River (west to east). On today's map, the land God has stated belongs to Israel includes everything modern-day Israel possesses, plus all of the territory occupied by the Palestinians (the West Bank and Gaza), plus some of Egypt and Syria, plus all of Jordan, plus some of Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Thus, Israel currently possesses only a fraction of the land God has promised; the rest of their inheritance likely awaits the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. God has given His word that the nation of Israel will never cease as long as the sun still shines by day and the moon and stars still shine by night (Jeremiah 31:35–37). [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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#### **QUESTION - Did God give Israel the Promised Land for all time (Deuteronomy 4:40)?**

**ANSWER** - In Deuteronomy 4:40 the Lord gave the Israelites this command: "Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time." Does this mean God gave Israel the Promised Land in perpetuity?

This passage contains a conditional offer. Israel would have the Promised Land as they kept God's "decrees and commands." The Israelites had to obey God's statutes in order to remain in the land. History reveals that the Israelites often disobeyed, resulting in temporary times of exile from their land.

However, the end of this passage notes that God is giving Israel the Promised Land "for all time." The Hebrew phrase translated "for all time" is a general statement, likely in reference to God's original promise of a land to Abraham in Genesis 12.

**There are both a conditional and unconditional aspect to God's promise. God offered blessings within**

the Promised Land *conditionally*, related to the Israelites' obedience. Yet God also made an *unconditional* vow that Israel would have the Promised Land "for all time." (ED: THIS PROMISE IS NOT FOR THE CHURCH WHICH IS NOT THE NATION OF ISRAEL!)

How long is "for all time"? In the book of Revelation, we see Israel as a central focus. In the end times, Israel faces many difficulties, yet that tribulation concludes with the Messiah reigning from His throne in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. The book concludes with a new heaven, new earth, and [new Jerusalem](#). The promise of Deuteronomy 4:40 is a far-seeing promise, extending to the end of this world's existence and even into the time of the new earth.

Many other passages of Scripture support the fact that Israel will possess the Promised Land forever. For example, God spoke to Isaac in Genesis 26:3, saying, "Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham." The Lord also spoke to Jacob in Genesis 28:13–14 with similar words: "There above it stood the Lord, and he said: 'I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.'" See also Psalm 132:14; Isaiah 14:1; and Zechariah 2:3–5, 10–13.

Some have suggested that, because of God's promises to Israel concerning the Promised Land, Christians should support the modern nation of Israel without reservation. Christians have many reasons to support the people of Israel, but this does not mean Christians must agree with every political decision made by the modern Israeli government. Instead, the focus is on God's spiritual restoration of Israel (Romans 11:26) and the enduring promise to His chosen people. [GotQuestions.org](#)

#### Related Resources:

- [What is the Promised Land? | GotQuestions.org](#)

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**QUESTION - What is the Palestinian Covenant?** (ED NOTE: Some of the provisions under the Palestinian covenant, for example, imposed conditions whereby Israel could continue occupancy of the promised land, but those provisions did not alter the provisions of the Abrahamic agreement. All such additions were of a temporary nature and could not annul the awesome pledge of God to ultimately make good on every single phase of His everlasting promise to Abram. Moreover, the agreement focused on a nation, not a church. The day will assuredly come when Israel will be established before all men in full covenant relationship before God as promised to Abraham here.)

**ANSWER** - The so-called Palestinian Covenant is recorded in Deuteronomy 29:1–29 and Deuteronomy 30:1–10 and was made between God and Israel right before Moses died and Israel entered the Promised Land. The Bible never uses the term "Palestinian Covenant," and Moses certainly never would have called the land "Palestine," but the term has become common usage. This covenant is also called the Land Covenant because many of the promises relate to Israel's possession of the land. God made this covenant with Israel after the Mosaic Covenant and after Israel had wandered in the wilderness for forty years. God made this covenant with Israel while they were in Moab waiting to go into the Promised Land, and the covenant would serve this new generation of Israelites as a reminder of their special covenant relationship with God.

The Palestinian Covenant has many similarities to the Mosaic Covenant made at Mount Sinai but is a separate and distinct covenant as clearly seen in Deuteronomy 29:1. "These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb." Before making this covenant with Israel, God reminded them that if they obeyed the Mosaic Law, He would bless the nation abundantly and warned them that disobedience to the Law would result in His cursing the nation (Deuteronomy 28:1–68).

Besides the promises that God would bless them if they obeyed His commandments and curse them if they disobeyed, the Palestinian Covenant also contains some special promises to Israel that many believe will not be completely fulfilled until the millennial reign of Christ. First, God promised to gather the scattered Israelites from all over the world and to bring them back into the land He had promised to their ancestors (Deuteronomy 30:3–5). Second, God promised to regenerate the Israelites of that time and their descendants by circumcising their hearts so that they would love Him totally (Deuteronomy 30:6). Third, God promised to judge Israel's enemies (Deuteronomy 30:7), and, fourth, He promised that the Israelites would obey God and that God would prosper them in their obedience (Deuteronomy 30:8–9). While some might see these promises being fulfilled when Israel was returned from captivity in Babylon at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, there seem to be some aspects of this that have not been fully realized yet.

For example, the promised restoration of Israel to the land would not happen until all the blessings and curses promised them were fulfilled (Deuteronomy 30:1), and we know that Israel as a nation rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah and was once again cursed and cut off from the land when the Romans conquered Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Second, we see that one of the promises in this

covenant was that God would circumcise their hearts (Deuteronomy 30:6) so that they and their descendants would obey Him (Deuteronomy 30:8). These same promises are repeated in Jeremiah 32:36-44 and Ezekiel 36:22-38 and are part of the blessings and promises of the New Covenant. Also, it seems that the final or ultimate restoration of Israel to the land and to an everlasting relationship with God is what Paul is looking forward to in Romans 11:25-26 when he says that "a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and thus all Israel will be saved."

*The Palestinian Covenant also serves to reinforce the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*

**The Palestinian Covenant also serves to reinforce the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that God would establish Israel as His chosen people** (Deuteronomy 29:13). **Even though God set before Israel the promise of His blessings for obedience and His curses for disobedience, He knew full well they would turn from Him and His covenant and turn to idols. This is why He also promised to one day restore them to the land and have compassion on them** (Deuteronomy 30:1-3). Therefore, the ultimate outcome of this covenant does not depend on Israel and its obedience, but instead it depends on God and His faithfulness. The Palestinian Covenant focuses on what God is going to do more than what Israel is supposed to do.

While Israel's prosperity is closely tied to her obedience to God's commands, and they will still be punished for their disobedience to God, there is coming a day **when God will return them to the land** (the full extent of the land as outlined in Genesis 15:18-21), and they will possess it, and God will bless them forever.

At that time God will circumcise their hearts so they will obey Him (Deuteronomy 30:6). This covenant is again reaffirming the Abrahamic Covenant in that someday the seed of Abraham will possess the Promised Land forever. Unlike the Mosaic Covenant whose promises are conditional upon Israel's obedience to the Law, ultimate fulfillment of the promises of the Palestinian Covenant are not dependent upon Israel's obedience. Instead, the Palestinian Covenant is an unconditional, eternal covenant (Ezekiel 16:60) because it is a part of the Abrahamic Covenant and an amplification of it.[GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

**Genesis 17:9 God said further to Abraham, "Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.**

- Ps 25:10 103:18 Isa 56:4,5
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## ABRAHAM'S RESPONSIBILITY IN THE COVENANT

**God said further to Abraham, "Now as for you, you shall keep (shamar; Lxx - diatereo) My covenant (beriyth; Lxx = diateke), you and your descendants after you throughout their generations - Keep (shamar) means to observe conscientiously and is translated in the Septuagint with the verb diatereo which means to keep something mentally (Mary in Lk 2:51 where it is rendered "treasured,"; Jacob in Ge 37:11) with the implication of duration and so to keep carefully (as in use in Acts 15:29 - "keep yourself..." or continually (Thayer)).**

Note that in Ge 17:4, God said, "**As for Me**" but here He says, "**As for you!**" While the Abrahamic covenant is considered to be an unconditional covenant, Abraham still had a part to play in the covenant by obeying God and circumcising the males in his house with this sign of the covenant. This is another example of the relationship between faith and works. He could have said "I believe your promises in the covenant," but then refuse to circumcise the males which would have been tantamount to disbelieving (disobeying). In other words, his faith (belief) was demonstrated to be authentic by his obedience ("works"). Faith without works is dead! Note that circumcision was not a new rite in the ancient world, but God gave it new significance. For the descendants of Abraham, circumcision was not an option; it was an obligation.

The blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were conditioned on obedience as indicated by the following passages:

Genesis 18:19 "For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to **keep the way of the LORD** by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

Genesis 22:18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, **because you have obeyed My voice.**"

Genesis 26:4-5 "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all

these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 5 because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."

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**Keep** (careful, guard, kept, observe, watch) ([08104 shamar](#)) means to keep, watch, preserve, to guard, to be careful, to watch over, to watch carefully over, to be on one's guard. The basic idea of the root is "to exercise great care over." In combination with other verbs the meaning is "do carefully or diligently". Thus Pr 19:8, "Give heed to understanding"; Dt. 11:32, "**Be careful** (shamar; Lxx = [phulasso](#)) to do (asah) (i.e. perform carefully) all the statutes and ordinances) and in Numbers 23:12, speak carefully or faithfully. The first use of **shamar** in Ge 2:15 is instructive as Adam was placed in the garden (a perfect environment) and was commanded to "keep" it which in the [Septuagint](#) is translated with [phulasso](#) (which is used to translate many of the OT uses of **shamar**) which means to guard like a military sentinel would at his post. Clearly Adam did not do a good job at "keeping" the garden safe from intruders! And because of this failure he was cast out of the garden and angels stationed to "**guard** (Lxx = [phulasso](#)) the way to the tree of life" so that he would not eat of it (Ge 3:24±). After Cain murdered Abel he answered God "Am I my brother's **keeper**?" (Ge 4:9+)

**Shamar in Genesis** - Gen. 2:15; Gen. 3:24; Gen. 4:9; Gen. 17:9; Gen. 17:10; Gen. 18:19; Gen. 24:6; Gen. 26:5; Gen. 28:15; Gen. 28:20; Gen. 30:31; Gen. 31:24; Gen. 31:29; Gen. 37:11; Gen. 41:35

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**Theodore Epp** - Flesh and Spirit in Conflict Genesis 17:9-21

God did not refuse to bless Ishmael, but He caused Abraham to clearly understand that the covenant would be established with Isaac, who was not yet born. Ishmael was not to be an heir with Isaac. The Scriptures build on this principle in showing that the flesh (Ishmael) cannot be heir with the Spirit (Isaac).

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul referred to Ishmael and Isaac and drew a parallel to Christians. Paul was emphasizing that the Christian is made mature through the freedom of the Spirit and not through the bondage of the Law.

He wrote: "Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" (Gal. 4:30,31).

Paul continued the parallel in Galatians 5 when he said, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal 5:16,17).

In this same chapter Paul also wrote: "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:24,25).

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18).

**Genesis 17:10 "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.**

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- **Every:** Ge 17:11 34:15 Ex 4:25 12:48 De 10:16 30:6 Jos 5:2,4 Jer 4:4 9:25,26 Ac 7:8 Ro 2:28,29 3:1,25,28,30 4:9-11 1Co 7:18,19 Ga 3:28 Ga 5:3-6 6:12 Eph 2:11 Php 3:3 Col 2:11,12
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## GOD REQUIRES CIRCUMCISION

**This is My covenant ([beriyth](#); Lxx = [diatheke](#)), which you shall keep ([shamar](#); Lxx - [diatereo](#)), between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised ([mul](#); Lxx = [peritemno](#) = "cut around").** Thus, the Abrahamic covenant, although conveying unconditional promises to Abraham, also included obligations by which individual descendants would express their faith and enjoy the blessings. Circumcision was an act of obedience and faith, but in no way was the Abrahamic promise obtained by fleshly means. It is interesting to note that circumcision was the only surgery mentioned in the Bible outside of God's surgery on Adam. Note that in this context "**Your descendants**" refers to Abraham's "biological" or physical descendants, specifically the nation of Israel. In other words, this obligation does not apply to the spiritual descendants of Abraham as described in Gal 3:29.

Wenstrom on **My covenant you shall keep** - "You shall keep" is the verb shamar (Lxx - diatereo), which means, "to observe conscientiously" in the sense that Abraham and his descendants were to be careful, thoughtful, heedful, attentive, and meticulous in conforming their actions in compliance with the practice of circumcision. (ED: AKA "TO OBEY"!)

**John MacArthur** comments that "The cutting away of the foreskin on the male procreative organ signified the need to cut away sin from the heart-sin that was inherent, passed from one generation to the next (Dt 10:16 Jer 4:4 Col 2:11 Ro 2:28,29 - ED: SEE DISCUSSION BELOW)."

**Steven Cole** has a slightly different interpretation - By submitting to God's command for circumcision, Abraham was yielding his procreative powers totally to God. He was acknowledging his total dependence on God to produce the promised heir. It meant Abraham's putting no confidence in his flesh, but rather trusting God totally to do what He promised to do so that all the glory goes to Him.

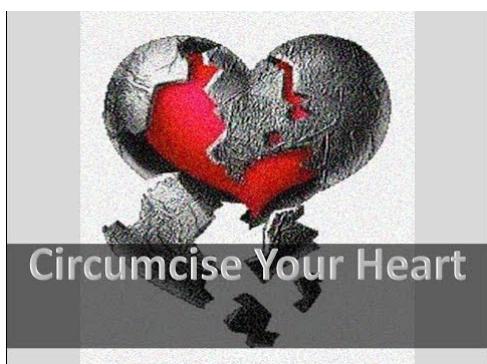
**Reformation Study Bible** - By this ritual the organ of procreation was consecrated to God (cf. Lev. 19:23). More importantly, God wanted the heart and ear consecrated to Him (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 6:10; Ezek. 44:7, 9). Mere circumcision in the flesh is inadequate to please God (17:11–14 notes; Jer. 9:25, 26). (ED: SEE CIRCUMCISION OF HEART BELOW)

**THOUGHT** - Abram's "salvation" occurred at least 14 years prior to his circumcision at age 99 (Ge 17:24). The point is that circumcision was never meant to save anyone! This is a great Scriptural point to remind your Jewish friends that no man is saved by works [keeping mitzvah] of any kind, be it circumcision, etc! Abraham was saved by grace through faith in Genesis 15:6+. (see additional comments on salvation in the Old Testament),

**W H Griffith-Thomas** - The ordinance of circumcision, already known widely in the East, is given a special meaning and deep sacredness. The truths connected with it seem to include at least four ideas: (a) designation, as belonging to God; (b) separation unto Him; (c) purity in Him; (d) possession by Him.

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**Circumcised** ([04135](#)) **mul** to cut short, to cut off, to circumcise with most uses in the Torah (Pentateuch) with 17 uses in Genesis but 8 uses are found in Joshua (see below). Its usage is continued in rabbinic and modern Hebrew. However, the verb "to cut off" is not found in other Semitic languages. The only derivative of **mul** is **mûlôt** found in Ex. 4:26 "So He let him alone. At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood"—because of the **circumcision**.' The physical act of circumcision was introduced by God as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Ge 17:10ff) **W E Vine** - The special act of circumcision was a sign of God's gracious promise. With the promise and covenantal relations, God expected that His people would joyously and willingly live up to His expectations, and thus demonstrate His rule on earth. To describe the "heart" attitude, several writers of Scripture use the verb "to circumcise." The "circumcision" of the flesh is a physical sign of commitment to God. Deuteronomy particularly is fond of the spiritual usage of the verb "to circumcise": "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer" (Deut. 10:16, niv; cf. Deut. 30:6). Jeremiah took over this usage: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah...., because of the evil of your doings" (Jer. 4:4). Few occurrences of the verb differ from the physical and the spiritual usage of "to circumcise." **Mûl** in the Book of Psalms has the meaning of "to cut off, destroy": "All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off" (Psa. 118:10, niv; cf. vv. Psa. 118:11-12). The verb is translated as *peritemnō* in the Septuagint. The verb and the noun *peritomē* are used in both the physical and the spiritual sense. In addition to this, it also is a figure for baptism: "In him you were also circumcised,... not with a circumcision alone by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:11-12, niv). In the English versions, the verb is rendered "to circumcise," "to destroy" (kjv), as well as "to cut off" and "to wither" (rsv, nasb, niv). (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words)



In Deuteronomy, **mul** refers more to what circumcision came to symbolize, a "spiritual circumcision." Moses records "Deuteronomy 10:16 "So **circumcise your heart**, and stiffen your neck no longer." and Deuteronomy 30:6 "Moreover the LORD your **God** will

**circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live." Jeremiah 4:4 **"Circumcise yourselves** to the LORD And **remove the foreskins of your heart**, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds." Paul amplifies the meaning in Romans explaining that "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is **circumcision that which is outward in the flesh**. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit**, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God." (Ro 2:28-29+) Again in Colossians 2 Paul explains "in Him (CHRIST) **you were also circumcised** with a **circumcision made without hands**, in the removal of the body of the flesh**by the circumcision of Christ**; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and **the uncircumcision of your flesh**, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." (Col 2:11-14+).

- See in depth discussion of **Circumcision of the Heart**

**Mul** - 35x in 32v - **circumcise(4)**, **circumcised(25)**, **circumcising(1)**, **cut off(3)**, **shafts(1)**, **surely be circumcised(1)**. Gen. 17:10; Gen. 17:11; Gen. 17:12; Gen. 17:13; Gen. 17:14; Gen. 17:23; Gen. 17:24; Gen. 17:25; Gen. 17:26; Gen. 17:27; Gen. 21:4; Gen. 34:15; Gen. 34:17; Gen. 34:22; Gen. 34:24; Exod. 12:44; Exod. 12:48; Lev. 12:3; Deut. 10:16; Deut. 30:6; Jos. 5:2; Jos. 5:3; Jos. 5:4; Jos. 5:5; Jos. 5:7; Jos. 5:8; Ps. 58:7; Ps. 118:10; Ps. 118:11; Ps. 118:12; Jer. 4:4; Jer. 9:25

**Genesis 17:11** "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

- the flesh: Ex 4:25 Jos 5:3 1Sa 18:25-27 2Sa 3:14
- a token: Ac 7:8 Ro 4:11
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

A mohel performing circumcision

## CIRCUMCISION A SIGN OF COVENANT

**And you shall be circumcised (mul)**; Lxx = peritemno = "cut around") **in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign(oth; Lxx = semeion) of the covenant (beriyth; Lxx = diatheke)** between Me and you - Circumcision was like a seal (KJV - token) affixed to a modern legal contract and thus served as a visual reminder that the terms of the contract were in force.

[Wenstrom](#) on **circumcised (mul)**; Lxx = peritemno = "cut around") **in the flesh of your foreskin** - Circumcision was not exclusive to Israel but was also performed by several Asian Oriental groups such as the Muslims (at age 13 like Ishmael) as well as the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and was also practiced by Egyptian priests and those who wanted to be initiated into their sacred mysteries. Circumcision among these nations was a rite of passage but was not performed on infants, thus the sign of circumcision given to Abraham to be performed on infants eight days old was unique in the ancient world. The ceremony of circumcision consisted in cutting away the foreskin, the hood or fold of skin covering the head of the male organ, which was generally done by means of a sharp knife, but in more primitive times sharp stones were used (Ex. 4:25; Josh. 5:2, flint knives). As a rule this act was performed by the father (Gen. 17:23), although it might be done by any Israelite, and, if necessary, women as well (Ex. 4:25), but never by a Gentile. In later times, in the case of adults, a doctor performed circumcision and the Jews of the present day entrust it to a person called a mohel appointed especially for the purpose.....Therefore, the organ of the male body that was used for procreation is consecrated to God (cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4) and failure to submit to circumcision demonstrated one's overt unwillingness to obey the Lord. The penalty for failing to submit to circumcision meant exile from Israel and from any inheritance in it and in fact resulted in capital punishment. In Exodus 4, Moses failed to circumcise his sons because of his Egyptian wife Zipporah, and was as a result almost killed by the Lord for failing to do so but Zipporah grudgingly gave in. Circumcision has hygienic value since cancer of the penis has a much higher incidence in uncircumcised males.....The ordinance of circumcision could not save man but was to be the distinguishing sign of the Jewish nation from the other nations. God has not commanded **circumcision of the flesh** for Christians. Circumcision of the flesh is useless unless there is a [circumcision of the heart](#). Your faith in Christ is what is important to God and not whether you are circumcised or not. Abraham was first justified by his faith and then he was given circumcision as a badge or a mark that he was saved and set apart by God. The Jews in Paul's day believed that because they were physical descendants of

Abraham that they could ride into heaven on the coattails of Abraham. They believed that they were sons of Abraham by right of circumcision, when in reality those who believe God are the true sons of Abraham.

**Henry Morris** - As the rainbow encircling the whole earth was a token of God's covenant with all men (Genesis 9:17), so circumcision, encircling the channel by which the human seed is preserved and transmitted, especially the promised Seed in the line of Abraham, is the token of God's covenant with His chosen nation. It was not a sign to be seen of all men, as was the rainbow, but a sign to be seen only by a man's parents and his wife, reminding them of their faith commitment to the God of Abraham, and His promise to them. (Borrow [The Defender's Study Bible](#))

**R Kent Hughes** - As a sign, circumcision functioned much as a wedding ring symbolizes commitment. The external sign signified a whole life commitment. But unlike a wedding ring, circumcision could not be cast aside. It was a permanent, ineradicable sign. It would bear terrible, unremitting witness against a sinful, unconsecrated heart. (Borrow [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#) page 248)

**John MacArthur** - Circumcision (cutting away the male foreskin) was not entirely new in this period of history, but the special religious and theocratic significance then applied to it was entirely new, thus identifying the circumcised as belonging to the physical and ethnical lineage of Abraham (cf. Ac 7:8; Ro 4:11). Without divine revelation, the rite would not have had this distinctive significance, thus it remained a theocratic distinctive of Israel (cf. Ge 17:13). There was a health benefit, since disease could be kept in the folds of the foreskin, so that removing it prevented that. Historically, Jewish women have had the lowest rate of cervical cancer. But the symbolism had to do with the need to cut away sin and be cleansed. It was the male organ which most clearly demonstrated the depth of depravity because it carried the seed that produced depraved sinners (Ro 5:12+). Thus, circumcision symbolized the need for a profoundly deep cleansing to reverse the effects of depravity. (BORROW [The MacArthur Study Bible](#) page 38)

**Warren Wiersbe** on **circumcision** - Unfortunately, the Jewish people eventually made this ritual a means of salvation. Circumcision was a guarantee that you were accepted by God. (Some people today place the same false confidence in baptism, Communion, and other religious rites that can be very meaningful if rightly used.) They did not realize that circumcision stood for something much deeper: the person's relationship to God. God wants us to "circumcise our hearts" (SEE [NOTE ABOVE](#)) and be totally devoted to Him in love and obedience (Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Ro 2:28–29). Romans 4:9–12 makes it clear that the physical operation had nothing to do with Abraham's eternal salvation. Abraham had believed God and received God's righteousness before he ever was circumcised (Gen. 15:6). Circumcision was not the means of his salvation but the mark of his separation as a man in covenant relationship with God. The legalistic element in the early church tried to make circumcision and obedience to the law a requirement for salvation for the Gentiles, but this heresy was refuted (Acts 15:1–35). In his Galatian epistle, Paul argues convincingly for salvation by grace alone

**John Phillips** has an interesting comment - It was circumcision—the sentence of death in his flesh. It was a symbol of the cross of Christ cutting right across all that he was by natural birth. It was a sharp, unforgettable, painful admission that he was unable to produce, by carnal means, the kind of life that God expects. It was an agonizing realization that only through Christ can a person bear real fruit for God. (Borrow [Exploring Genesis page 146](#))

**NIV Study Bible** (borrow see page 37) **Circumcision** was God's appointed "sign of the covenant" (Ge 17:11), which signified Abraham's covenanted commitment to the Lord—that the Lord alone would be his God, Whom he would trust and serve. It symbolized a self-maledictory oath (analogous to the oath to which God had submitted himself; see Ge 15:17): "If I am not loyal in faith and obedience to the Lord, may the sword of the Lord cut off me and my offspring (Ge 17:14) as I have cut off my foreskin." Thus Abraham was to place himself under the rule of the Lord as his King, consecrating himself, his offspring and all he possessed to the service of the Lord.

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**Sign** (0226) **'oth** means a signal, a mark a miracle and is used to describe amazing events such as God bringing Israel out of Egypt (Ex 4:8, 9, Nu 14:22) or a sign serving to authenticate the message as from God (1Sa 2:34, 10:7, 9) in contrast to the signs from false prophets (Dt 13:1, 2). King Hezekiah received a **sign** from Jehovah that he would add fifteen years to his life (Isa 38:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; Gideon - Jdg 6:17-note) As an aside, while the Bible does record individuals asking for signs of divine approval or affirmation, this process is not to be the norm. In other words, it is usually not best to test God by asking Him for signs! Perhaps better is the prayer of the sick boy's father in Mark (Mk 9:24)!

**R Alden** - This is the general word for "sign," and it covers the entire range of the English term and the Greek word *sēmeion*. On the pedestrian end of the scale it includes what amounts to a "signboard" or "standard" (Numbers 2:2). It also includes such important concepts as the rainbow "sign" to Noah (Genesis 9:12-13, 17).

1. 'ōt first occurs in Genesis 1:14, where it refers to the luminaries serving as "signs" to distinguish the seasons. In Jeremiah 10:2 it has a similar meaning.

2. According to Genesis 4:15, the Lord set a "mark" on Cain. The meaning of this word is uncertain.
3. A third use of the word is illustrated by Genesis 9:12-13, 17, according to which the rainbow is a "sign" of the covenant. Circumcision is the "sign" in Genesis 17:11. Also, the Sabbath is to be a "sign," according to Exodus 31:13, 17 and Ezekiel 20:12. It is this use of "sign" that is meant when Christians refer to the ordinances as outward "signs" of inward grace.
4. Most of the eighty occurrences of 'ôt refer to "miraculous signs." All the plagues on the Egyptians are called "signs." In these contexts the complementary word mopes (q.v.) meaning "wonders" often occurs (Exodus 7:3; Deut. 4:34; Deut. 6:22; Deut. 7:19; Deut. 26:8; Neh. 9:10; Isaiah 20:3; et al.). This word 'ôt is used in Isaiah's famous prophecy to Ahaz (Isaiah 7:11, 14). The shadow's advance on the palace steps was a "sign" for the ailing king Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:9, Isaiah 38:7). Likewise God showed Gideon a "sign" by igniting the offered food (Judges 6:17).
5. The word 'ôt sometimes means "token." For example, Aaron's rod was to be a "warning to the rebellious" (Numbers 17:25 NAB and Heb, Numbers 17:10 in other English versions). In the same category are the stones in the Jordan (Joshua 4:6), the hammered plates on the altar (Numbers 16:38 [H 17:3]), and the witness pillar in Egypt (Isaiah 19:20).
6. A dreamer or a prophet, true or false, could produce "signs" according to Deut. 13:1ff. The fulfillment of Jeremiah's threat of punishment was a true "sign" (Jeremiah 44:29), while Isaiah speaks of "signs" of liars (Isaiah 44:25).

Naturally, these categories are artificial and overlap. The simple fact that one Hebrew word covers them all is proof of that. The word "sign" either signifies the unusual event itself or in some way points to that unusual event. Or it may point backward to a historical event such as the stones in the Jordan (Joshua 4:6), or even forward to such a promise as a thornless future world (Isaiah 55:13). (See the [Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament](#))

#### **Gleason Archer - Why did God command circumcision in Genesis 17? [New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties](#)**

Genesis 17 does not furnish any clear rationale for the establishment of this rite as mandatory for the family and descendants of Abraham. God simply says, "You shall be circumcised ... and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you" (Gen 17:11). Any of Abraham's people who refuse or willfully neglect circumcision are to be cut off from the covenant of grace altogether (Gen 17:14). Consequently circumcision mattered a great deal to Yahweh, so far as the Hebrew nation was concerned. Romans 4:9–10 explains that salvation was not dependent on circumcision but rather on the grace of God mediated to the guilty sinner through his acceptance and faith in the promises of God. God's righteousness was reckoned to Abraham before he was circumcised (cf. Gen. 15:6; 17:23–24). But then the apostle goes on to explain the purposes of circumcision in Romans 4:11: "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them" (NASB).

The rite of circumcision (i.e., the surgical removal of the prepuce) was intended as a sign and a seal of the covenant relationship between God and the believer. Even as a wedding ring is a sign and a seal of the total and exclusive commitment of the bride and the groom to each other so long as they both shall live, so the sacramental removal of this portion of the male organ was a blood-sealed testimonial that the believer had turned his life over to the Lord, with the commitment to live for Him and in dependence on His grace for the rest of his earthly life. As a seal the act of circumcision amounted to a stamp of ownership on the Old Testament; it testified that he belonged not to the world, Satan, or self, but to the Lord Yahweh who provided for his redemption.

Further explanation of the function of circumcision is found in Colossians 2:11–13: "And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions" (NASB). Three important insights concerning circumcision are included in these verses.

1. Circumcision involved the symbolic removal of "the body of the flesh" as an instrument of unholiness; apart from circumcision, the body of the sinner remained in a state of "uncircumcision of his flesh."
2. Circumcision entailed a commitment to holiness. Moses urged his congregation in Deuteronomy 10:16 (NIV): "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer." This indicates that circumcision involved a commitment of heart to be holy unto the Lord and obedient to His word. (The opposite idea was stiffness or stubborn willfulness on the part of the professing believer.) Leviticus 26:41 speaks of a future generation of Israelites taken off into captivity and promises them forgiveness and

restoration to their land “if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity” (NASB). Shortly before the Babylonian captivity, the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 4:4) exhorted his countrymen—all of whom had doubtless been circumcised physically as infants—“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD and remove the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my wrath go out like fire … because of the evil of your deeds. (NASB). Circumcision, then, involved a commitment to a holy life, a life of faith in God and of obedience to His commands.

3. Circumcision represented to the Old Testament believer what baptism represents to the New Testament believer: an acceptance or adoption into the family of the redeemed. The benefits of Christ’s future atonement on Calvary were by God’s grace imparted to the circumcised believer prior to the Cross, even as the merit of Christ’s atonement and the saving benefits of His resurrection victory are applied to the New Testament believer. In both dispensations the sacramental sign and seal was imposed on the believer (and also on the infant children of believers for whom the covenant promises were claimed by faith). The same God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ commanded circumcision for the Old Testament believer and water baptism for the believer under the new covenant—which baptism constitutes spiritual circumcision, according to v.11.

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**Significance of Circumcision for Believers** - The seal of our salvation is not an external rite but the presence of an internal witness in the person of the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 1:13; 4:30; Rom. 8:9, 16). We have experienced a “spiritual circumcision” (Col. 2:9–12) that makes us part of the “true circumcision” (Phil. 3:1–3). When we trusted Christ to save us, the Spirit of God performed “spiritual surgery” that enables us to have victory over the desires of the old nature and the old life. Circumcision removes only a part of the body, but the true “spiritual circumcision” puts off “the body of the sins of the flesh” (Col. 2:11) and deals radically with the sin nature. This “spiritual circumcision” is accomplished at conversion when the sinner believes in Christ and is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). This baptism identifies the believer with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, and also in His circumcision (Col. 2:11–12; Luke 2:21). It is not “the circumcision of Moses” but “the circumcision of Christ” that is important to the Christian believer. Donald Grey Barnhouse has said, “We have a nature of sin that must be dealt with by the knife … The thing must be dealt with as a whole, and not piecemeal.” In Christ, we can “walk in the Spirit and … not fulfill the lusts of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). ([Warren Wiersbe](#))

**Genesis 17:12 “And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants.**

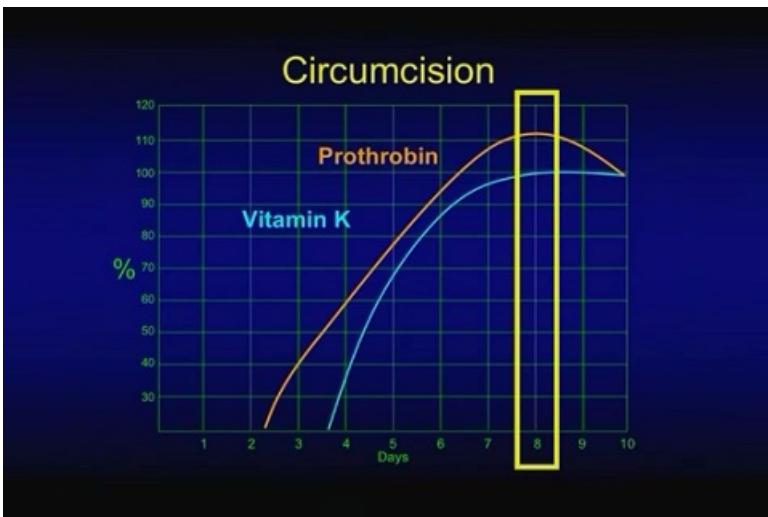
- he that is eight days old: Heb. a son of eight days, Ge 21:4 Lev 12:3 Lu 1:59 2:21 Joh 7:22,23 Ac 7:8 Ro 2:28 Php 3:5
- is born: Ge 17:23 Ex 12:48,49
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Luke 1:59 And it happened that on the **eighth day** they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.

Luke 2:21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

Philippians 3:5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;



**And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants.** The phrase “every male” indicates that there were to be no exceptions. The phrase “every male” also exempts females for circumcision of females in ancient times was a regular custom among some races or tribes. The initiation rite into the covenant community today is baptism.

**Eight days old shall be circumcised** - Circumcision on the eighth day is not just random. God, the Creator, knew that the infant's coagulation factors (especially [prothrombin](#)) would be low in the first 7 days of life (see diagram above) and that circumcision in that time could potentially result in uncontrollable bleeding and loss of the infant's life. The diagram demonstrates the progressive rise in prothrombin levels which are produced in the liver and are dependent on Vitamin K. Notice that the prothrombin levels reach 100% range on day **eight**. This is just another piece of the puzzle to support that the Bible is fully inspired, word for word and that God is sovereign over every detail of His creation!

**Holt** -“At birth, a baby has nutrients, antibodies, and other substances from his mother’s blood, including her blood-clotting factors, one of them being prothrombin. Prothrombin is dependent on vitamin K for its production. Vitamin K is produced by intestinal bacteria, which are not present in a newborn baby. After birth prothrombin decreases so that by the third day it is only 30 percent of normal. Circumcision on the third day could result in a devastating hemorrhage. The intestinal bacteria finally start their task of manufacturing vitamin K, and the prothrombin subsequently begins to climb. On day eight, it actually overshoots to 110 percent of normal, leveling off to 100 percent on day nine and remaining there for the rest of a person’s healthy life. Therefore the eighth day was the safest of all days for circumcision to be performed. On that one day, a person’s clotting factor is at 110 percent, the highest ever, and that is the day God prescribed for the surgical process of circumcision. Today vitamin K (Aqua Mephyton) is routinely administered to newborns shortly after their delivery, and this eliminates the clotting problem. **However, before the days of vitamin K injections, a 1953 pediatrics textbook recommended that the best day to circumcise a newborn was the eighth day of life.** (L. Holt Jr. and R. McIntosh, Holt Pediatrics)

**Genesis 17:13 “A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.**

- born: Ge 14:14 15:3 Ex 12:44 21:4
- bought: Ge 37:27,36 39:1 Ex 21:2,16 Ne 5:5,8 Mt 18:25
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## SERVANTS ALSO TO BE CIRCUMCISED

**A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised**(mul; Lxx = [peritemno](#) = “cut around”); **thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting**(olam; Lxx = [aionios](#)) **covenant**(beriyth; Lxx = [diatheke](#)) - This instruction again emphasizes there are to be no exceptions among all the males in Abraham’s household. The servants and slaves were also brought into covenant relation with God and became part of His people.

**Genesis 17:14 “But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”**

- cut: Ex 4:24-26 12:15,19 30:33,38 Lev 7:20,21,25,27 18:29 19:8 Nu 15:30,31 Jos 5:2-12
- broken: Ps 55:20 Isa 24:5 33:8 Jer 11:10 31:32 1Co 11:27,29
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **A PUN - NO CUT IS CUT OFF**

**But** - This contrast serves to emphasize that there are to be no exceptions.

**An uncircumcised male who is not circumcised** ([mul](#); Lxx = [peritemno](#) = "cut around") **in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant** ([beriyth](#); Lxx = [diatheke](#)) - If their foreskin was not cut off, they would be **cut off!** It is interesting that the Hebrew verb cut off is [karath](#) which is the same verb used in "make ([karath](#)) a covenant" in Genesis 15:18+ describing the Abrahamic Covenant. The meaning of "cut off" has been discussed at great length with the idea ranging from being ostracized to being put to death.

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**Ray Pritchard - You may rightly wonder what all this means for us today. Let me suggest several lines of application.**

1. Because his name is El Shaddai he is still able to move mountains for his people. That's why Jesus said to his disciples that through faith in God they could move mountains (Mark 11:22-24). This week I ran across this definition of faith: "Faith is telling the mountain to move and then being surprised only when it doesn't." Don't despair if you are facing a mountain today. Remember the words of J. Hudson Taylor: "There are three phrases in any great work for God: Impossible, difficult, done." You may be in the impossible stage this morning. If so, don't give up because his name is El Shaddai and nothing is impossible with him.
2. God's call to you will sometimes require acts of obedience that may seem strange to you at the time. I'm sure Abraham may have wondered about circumcision because God didn't explain himself at all. Let me give you a sentence to chew on: If God is in charge, we can do the difficult because he can do the impossible.
3. We all need to be circumcised today. But the circumcision God requires is the circumcision of the heart. That's what Romans 2:28-29 clearly teaches. "A man is not a Jew if he is only one 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." Note this carefully: Circumcision—although it was a physical mark on the body—was never meant to be an end in itself. The physical mark was meant to be accompanied by a deep spiritual commitment to God. Where commitment was absent, circumcision soon degenerated into ritualism. That's roughly what had happened over the centuries. By the first century many rabbis spoke of circumcision as if it were an automatic ticket to heaven. One writer said, "Circumcision saves from hell." Another said, "All the circumcised have part in the world to come." Circumcision had become the supreme symbol of Jewish superiority! A man need only to be circumcised to insure his place in heaven.

### **A Modern Application**

Although some may find this entire discussion academic, it has an incredibly relevant application to modern American church members. Many of us regard our baptism in much the same way the Jews regarded circumcision. Some churches even teach that baptism saves from sin and guarantees entrance into heaven. To put a sharp point on it, this is one place where the practice of infant baptism may be rightly criticized. Multiplied millions of people are today putting their hope of heaven in the fact that a priest sprinkled some water on their forehead when they were a few days old. Whatever may be said in favor of infant baptism, this is the most damning indictment against it. It tends to become a religious ritual that leads many people away from saving faith in Jesus Christ. Let us be clear on this point. All religious ritual is worthless unless something has already happened in the heart!

- Baptism cannot save you or help save you!
- The Lord's Supper cannot save you or help save you!
- Church membership cannot save you or help save you!
- Tithing cannot save you or help save you!
- Praying twice a day cannot save you or help save you!
- Lighting candles cannot save you or help save you!

—The sacraments cannot save you or help save you!

—Religious ritual cannot save you or help save you!

Those things are not altogether bad. But to whatever extent you base your hope of eternal life upon any of those things, you are making the same mistake the Jews made 2000 years ago.

Let me say it one more way just in case you have missed the point. I can personally baptize you myself but unless you have Christ in your heart, your baptism will do you no good. In fact, I can hold you under water so long that you'll come up singing "Amazing Grace," but even that won't do you any good unless Christ is in your heart.

To return to the larger point, circumcision originally was supposed to mean, "I am dedicated to God." Where a person was truly dedicated, it had legitimate meaning. Where they weren't, it became a ritual without reality. In the same way, baptism is supposed to mean, "I have given my heart to Jesus Christ and he is my Savior." When that is true, baptism is a wonderfully appropriate step of faith. When that is not true, baptism has become meaningless—and even dangerous because it may lead you to think you are a Christian when you really aren't.

Unfortunately, millions of people have a religion based on superstition. They put their trust in some outward factor as their hope for heaven. Such people will someday be sadly disappointed. Others trust in inherited religion: "Daddy was a deacon. Momma was a Sunday School teacher." They act as if salvation is inherited like you inherit the color of your eyes. It doesn't work that way when it comes to salvation. No one else can believe for you. You have to believe for yourself if you want to go to heaven.

**ILLUSTRATION** - In one of his sermons George Whitefield tells of a strange and terrifying dream in which an angel transported him to the gates of hell. When he arrived, he cried out to the gatekeeper, "Have you any Methodists in hell?" "Oh yes, we have plenty of Methodists down here." "Have you any Lutherans in hell?" "Plenty of Lutherans, too." "What about Catholics?" "Hell is filled with Catholics." "Have you any Baptists in hell?" "More than we can count." "Have you any Presbyterians?" "By the hundreds." With that, Whitefield sadly took his leave of hell.

Suddenly he found himself transported to the gates of heaven where he met St. Peter. "St. Peter, have you any Methodists in heaven?" "No Methodists up here." "Have you any Catholics in heaven?" "I'm sorry to say, no Catholics have ever come this way." "What about Presbyterians?" "No Presbyterians either." "What about Baptists?" "Not a one in all the years I've been here." "Any Lutherans?" "We have no one that answers to that name." Finally in desperation Whitefield cried out, "Who have you in heaven then?" And the answer came back, "Christians, only Christians."

"Are You a Believer?"

Suppose I were to ask you this question: "Are you a believer?" What would your answer be? "I'm a member of Calvary Memorial Church." But that's not what I asked.

Suppose I asked, "Are you born again?" What would you say? "I was baptized by Pastor Gray." But that's not what I asked you.

Suppose I asked, "Are you saved?" What would you say? "I was born a Catholic and I'm going to die a Catholic." But that's not what I asked you.

Suppose I asked, "Are you a Christian?" What would you say? "Of course I'm a Christian. After all, I was born in America." But that's not what I asked you.

It all boils down to this: In what are you trusting for your eternal salvation? Or to put it more accurately: In whom are you trusting to take you to heaven? After all, salvation is not a what; it's a who. The issue is your relationship to Jesus Christ.

Let me give you five simple words that can take you all the way from earth to heaven. Here they are:**Only Jesus and Jesus only.**

Only Jesus can save you so put your trust in Jesus only. ([God of the Impossible](#))

**Genesis 17:15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.**

- As: Ge 17:5 32:28 2Sa 12:25
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## CHANGED TO SARAH

**Then God (Elohim) said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name** - Both **Sarai** and **Sarah** are feminine forms of the noun **sar** which means "ruler," "leader," "prince."

**Wenstrom** points out that "In Genesis 17:3, 7, 8, 9, 15, 18, 19, 22, 23, Moses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit employs the noun Elohim, "God" in order to emphasize God's sovereignty and omnipotence indicating that God has sovereignly determined to give Abraham and Sarah the capacity to have a child in their old age. The noun Elohim, "God" emphasizes to the reader that God is omnipotent or all-powerful and is able to bring to pass that which He has determined to take place.

**Gilbrant** - The act of naming was a significant act in the ancient Near East. **Sarai** assumed a new identity with the name **Sarah**, the identity of a woman who would bear a child from her own body (rather than simply being the legal mother of her slave's child, Ishmael). The name **Sarah** suggests that rulers would come from her lineage. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Ryrie** feels that "Sarah's name change was less important than Abraham's. Sarai means "my princess" and Sarah means "princess." Perhaps the significance lay only in marking the occasion. ([BORROW Ryrie Study Bible](#))

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### TODAY IN THE WORD Hebrews 11:11-12; Genesis 17:15-18:15 Is anything too hard for the Lord? - Genesis 18:14

Children born in biblical days were often given names that reflected their parents' circumstances before that child's birth. Isaac (meaning "laughter") certainly fit into that category, because both of his parents laughed at the idea that Isaac would ever be born.

The two laughers were Abraham and Sarah. They considered themselves far too old to become parents after so many years of being childless. But Isaac was born when his parents were age 100 and 90, respectively, and it's a story of doubt and faith that we can learn from today.

The problem with Abraham and Sarah is that they laughed in doubt. It had been twenty-five years since God first promised Abraham that he would become a great nation, and yet nothing seemed to be happening. Fourteen years earlier (Gen. 16:16), Sarah had tried to help the promise along by giving her servant Hagar to Abraham, resulting in the birth of Ishmael.

But God had other plans. Abraham wavered for a moment when God announced that Sarah would have a son and become "the mother of nations" (Gen. 17:16). That struck Abraham as so unlikely that he laughed and asked God to make Ishmael his heir. God did not directly rebuke Abraham, but restated His plan to establish His covenant through Isaac.

Abraham's full confidence in God was restored by the time God Himself and two angels appeared to the patriarch in the form of three men. This time, Sarah laughed inwardly in disbelief as she heard the promise of a son being made one more time (Gen. 18:12).

Despite these displays of humanness, God kept His promise to send Isaac. Abraham was commended for believing that God could bring life from two people who were as good as dead when it came to having children (Heb. 11:12).

**TODAY ALONG THE WAY** Have you ever laughed at the idea that God could do something that seems impossible to you

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### John Bennett - Genesis 17:15–27 SARAH THY WIFE SHALL BEAR THEE A SON

As, again, we find Abraham on his face before God, Ge 17:3, 17, two little phrases are remarkable; 'and God talked with him', Ge 17:3; and 'he left off talking with him', Ge 17:22. It indicates to us what it meant for Abraham to be known as 'the Friend of God', Jas. 2:23. There is no familiarity or lack of reverence as Abraham is upon his face, but there is a reality and openness about their exchange. Conscious of Sarah's age, there is a sense of incredulity when Abraham makes his request, 'O that Ishmael might live before thee!', Ge 17:18. What wondrous grace, then, when God's reply is, 'As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him', Ge 17:20. How precious is such intimate communion with God! How precious too that God hears and answers prayer!

But as there could be no communion without obedience it is important to see Abraham's response to God's command. The extent of his obedience was that he 'took Ishmael ... and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money ... and circumcised (them)', Ge 17:23. This was a ready response for we read that it was 'in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him', Ge 17:23. Yet, in the name that Abraham was to give his son, 'Isaac' means 'to laugh', there is a reminder to Abraham that he doubted how the purposes of God could be accomplished in the way that He said.

It is interesting that the promise that God gave to Abraham in chapter 12, 'I will make of thee a great nation', Ge 12:2, was expanded in chapter 15 when God stated that Abraham's heir would 'come forth out of thine own bowels', Ge 15:4. Here in chapter 17, the timescale is revealed, 'Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year', Ge 17:21. But all of this progressive revelation

took place over what could have been more than twenty years. Each revelation confirmed what had been said before and unfolded a little more of the purposes of God. Yet, all of it was to be accomplished through 'one, and him as good as dead', Heb. 11:12. 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!', Rom. 11:33.

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#### QUESTION - Who was Sarah in the Bible?

**ANSWER** - Sarai began her life in the pagan world of Ur, in the land of the Chaldees, which was located in the area now known as Iraq. She was the half-sister, as well as the wife, of Abram, who would be called Abraham. Sarai and Abram had the same father but different mothers, according to Genesis 20:12. In those days, genetics were purer than they are today, and intermarriage was not detrimental to the offspring of unions between relatives. Also, since people tended to spend their lives clustered together in family units, it was the natural course to choose mates from within their own tribes and families.

When Abram encountered the living God for the first time, he believed Him (Genesis 12:1–4; 15:6) and followed after Him, obeying His command to leave his home to go to a place he had never heard about, much less seen. Sarai went with him.

Their journey brought them to the area called Harran (Genesis 11:31). Abram's father, Terah, passed away in this city, and Abram, Sarai, and their nephew Lot and their retinue continued their journey, allowing God to lead and guide them. With no housing and no modern conveniences, the journey must have been very difficult for all, especially for the women. During their journey, there was a famine in the land, prompting Abram and Sarai to go to Egypt (Genesis 12:10). When they did, Abram feared that the Egyptians would kill him because Sarai was beautiful and they would want her as a wife. So he asked Sarai to tell everyone that she was Abram's sister—which was technically true but also meant to deceive. Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's house, and Abram was treated well because of her. But God afflicted Pharaoh's house, and the couple's lie was revealed. Pharaoh returned Sarai to Abram and sent them on their way (Genesis 12). Sarai and Abram came back to the land now known as Israel. They had acquired many possessions and a great deal of wealth in their travels, so Lot and Abram agreed to split up in order that the massive herds of cattle would have adequate ground for grazing (Genesis 13:9).

Sarai was barren, an issue of personal distress as well as cultural shame. Abram was worried that he would have no heir. But God gave Abram a vision in which He promised him a son and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15). God also promised Abraham's offspring the land of Canaan. The problem was that Sarai remained childless. Ten years after God had made His promise to Abram, Sarai, following cultural norms, suggested that Abram have a child with her servant, Hagar. The child born of that union would be counted as Sarai's. Abram agreed, and Hagar conceived a son—Ishmael. But Hagar began to look at Sarai with contempt, and Sarai began to treat Hagar harshly, so much so that Hagar ran away. God met Hagar in the desert and encouraged her to return to Abram and Sarai, which she did (Genesis 16).

Thirteen years after Ishmael was born, God reaffirmed His covenant with Abram, this time giving him the sign of circumcision as well as changing his name (Ge 17:10,11) . Abram, meaning "high father," became Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." God also changed Sarai's name, meaning "my princess," to Sarah, meaning "mother of nations." God told Abraham that He would give him a son through Sarah. This son—Isaac—would be the one with whom God would establish His covenant. God would bless Ishmael as well, but Isaac was the son of promise through whom the nations would be blessed (Genesis 17). Isaac means "he laughs." Abraham laughed that, at 100 years old, he could have a son with Sarah, who was 90 years old and had been barren her entire life. Sarah, too, laughed at the prospect (Genesis 18:9–15).

Shortly after God promised Abraham and Sarah a son, He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, but He rescued Abraham's nephew Lot (Genesis 19). Abraham and Sarah journeyed toward the Negeb and sojourned in Gerar (Genesis 20:1). Abraham again asked Sarah to lie about her identity, and the king of Gerar took Sarah to be his wife. But God protected Sarah, through whom Isaac would be born. King Abimelech had no relations with her. God warned Abimelech in a dream, and the king not only sacrificed to God in repentance, but he gave gifts to Abraham and Sarah and allowed them to dwell in the land (Genesis 20).

God remained faithful to His promise to give Abraham and Sarah a son. They named him Isaac, and "Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.' And she added, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age'" (Genesis 21:6–7). Though she may have previously laughed in disbelief and secrecy, now Sarah laughed with joy and wanted her situation to be known. God had been faithful to His promise and blessed her.

Unfortunately, the tension between Sarah and Hagar remained. When Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a feast. But Ishmael, Hagar's son, was mocking Isaac. Sarah told Abraham to get rid of Hagar and Ishmael and that Ishmael should never share the inheritance with Isaac. Abraham was distressed at this, but God told him to do what Sarah said and that his descendants would be numbered through Isaac. Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away, and God provided for their needs (Genesis 21:8–21). It was after this that God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham was willing to give up his son, trusting that God would

somehow still remain true to His promise (Genesis 22; Hebrews 11:17–19).

Sarah was a simple, beautiful (Genesis 12:11), and very human woman; she made mistakes, just like we all do. She stepped ahead of God and tried to handle His business on her own by foolishly sending her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham to bring forth the child God had promised. In so doing, she ignited a feud (ED: ISRAEL-ARAB) that has lasted for 4,000 years (Genesis 16:3). She laughed in disbelief when, at 90 years old, she heard an angel tell Abraham that she would become pregnant (Genesis 18:12), but she gave birth to the promised child and lived another 30 years, dying at the age of 127 (Genesis 23:1).

Hebrews 11:11 uses Sarah as an example of faith:

"And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise."

1 Peter 3:5–6 uses Sarah as an example of a holy woman who hoped in God and who adorned herself by submitting to her husband.

For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

Sarah willingly left her home and stepped out into the unknown to follow Abraham, as he followed the directions of a God with whom she was unfamiliar at the time. She endured much to try to provide an heir for her husband and to keep her husband safe in dangerous lands. In the end, she had faith enough to believe that she and her husband, at the ages of 90 and 100, would produce the promised heir, Isaac. Although she lived in a world of danger and confusion, Sarah stood firm in her commitment to her husband and to God, and her commitment was rewarded with blessing. [GotQuestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)

**Genesis 17:16 “I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”**

- And I: Ge 1:28 12:2 24:60 Ro 9:9
- give: Ge 18:10-14
- be a mother of nations: Heb. become nations, Ge 35:11 Ga 4:26-31 1Pe 3:6
- kings: Ge 17:6 Isa 49:23
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## GOD'S BLESSINGS ON SARAH

**I will bless (barak; Lxx = eulogeo) her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless (barak; Lxx = eulogeo) her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her -** Bless meant that the Lord would endue Sarah with power to not only have a child with Abraham but that she would be endued with power to be the mother of nations and kings. This is the first time that the Lord had informed Abraham that he would have a son through Sarah. Note that the “nations” in view here are not the Arab nations or the Ishmaelites since they are not descendants of Sarah but rather of Keturah (Abraham's wife Ge 25:1-4, 1Ch 1:32,33) and Hagar. The promise that Sarah would become the mother of **kings** refers to the kings of Israel, both saved and unsaved and ultimately the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Henry Morris** - Sarah (with a new name meaning "princess") was blessed first by a miracle (probably at the time of Genesis 18:14) that rejuvenated her body, enabling her to have a son long after it seemed biologically possible. As Isaac became a type of Christ, so she became a type of Mary, and is considered to be a spiritual mother of believers as Abraham was their spiritual father (1 Peter 3:6; Hebrews 11:11,12). (Borrow [The Defender's Study Bible](#))

**Parunak:** The error of ch. 16, at root, was a failure to understand that God's covenant with Abraham included his wife. She is not just an accessory. The promise that Abraham will have a seed necessarily includes her. The two of them haven't fully grasped this up to this point, so here God makes it explicit. ([Notes on Gen 17](#))

Summary of the features of the Abrahamic Covenant as revealed in Genesis 17:

- Part of God's blessing would depend on Abraham's maintaining the Covenant of Circumcision, though the Abrahamic Covenant as a whole did not depend on this (Ge 17:1–2).

- Many nations would come from Abraham (Ge 17:4–6).
- The Abrahamic Covenant would be “everlasting” (Ge 17:7–8).
- God would be the God of Abraham’s descendants in a special relationship (Ge 17: 7–8).
- Sarah herself would give birth to the promised heir (Ge 17:16).
- This is also the first time God identified the Promised Land as “Canaan” by name (Ge 17:8).

**Genesis 17:17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”**

- fell: Ge 17:3 Lev 9:24 Nu 14:5 16:22,45 De 9:18,25 Jos 5:14 7:6 Judges 13:20 1Ch 21:16 Job 1:20 Eze 1:28 Da 8:17 Mt 2:11 Rev 5:8 11:16
- laughed: Ge 18:12 21:6 Joh 8:56 Ro 4:19,20
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Related Passage:**

Romans 4:17-21+ - (as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. 18 In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” 19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was **about a hundred years old**, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, **he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith**, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

## **ABRAHAM FELL DOWN AND LAUGHED**

**Then Abraham fell on his face** The more honours and favours God confers upon us the lower we should be in our own eyes, and the more reverent and submissive before God. At age 86 Abe went into Hagar producing Ishmael, the product of the flesh not of the promise--and the flesh can never please God!!! So God appears to Abram whose body was as good as dead and He tells Abram that He is His El Shaddai and "I will establish My covenant. I am your all sufficient One. Quit seeking other ways. Rest in Me. Trust Me." Where do you run when you need help? You run to the rock that is higher than you and you find your strength in El Shaddai.

**And laughed (*tsachaq*), and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”** This was the first time God specifically had told Abraham that his barren, aged wife would be the mother of the promised seed. Three different occasions of laughter are associated with Isaac’s birth: Abraham laughed when he heard his wife would give birth to the promised son (Ge 17:17). Sarah laughed in apparent unbelief when she heard the news (Ge 18:9-15). Then again Sarah laughed for joy when the boy was born (Ge 21:6,7). As we have seen the name **Isaac** means “he laughs.”

There is an interesting play on the Hebrew word **laughed (*tsachaq*)** in Genesis 17-19 for it is used of 3 different individuals - first of Abraham laughing (I think in joy) (Ge 17:17), next of Sarah laughing in disbelief (Ge 18:12, 13, 15) and finally of Lot’s potential Sodomite son-in-laws “laughing” in mockery (Ge 19:14). And in light of all this laughing we see the name Isaac (Yitschaq - “he laughs”) derives from ([tsachaq](#)) (Ge 17:19)!

Note that God does not rebuke Abraham when he laughs but does “rebuke” Sarah when she laughs in Ge 18:13 which would support that Abraham’s laugh was not necessarily one of disbelief (See also Ro 4:17-21 [above](#)). However, there are a number of writers who see Abraham’s laughter as a sign of disbelief.

For example **John MacArthur** feels that “A proper reaction of adoration over God’s promises was marred by the incredulity of Abraham. He knew he was to be a father (Ge 12:2; Ge 15:4), but this was the first mention that his barren, old wife was to be the mother.” (BORROW [MacArthur Study Bible page 38](#))

**Charles Ryrie** agrees with MacArthur writing “Some feel that Abraham laughed for joy, but Ge 17:18 indicates that it was an expression of doubt as he struggled to match his faith to his circumstances.”

**NET NOTE** comments that “It is important to note that even though Abraham staggers at the announcement of the birth of a son,

finding it almost too incredible, he nonetheless calls his wife Sarah, the new name given to remind him of the promise of God."

**William MacDonald** on the other hand feels "The patriarch laughed, but in joyful wonder, not in disbelief. His faith did not waver (Ro 4:18-21)."

**C H Spurgeon** favors Abraham's laughter as a laugh of belief not disbelief ([see his quote](#)).

**Jon Courson** - Abraham's is not the laugh of mockery or disbelief, but of ecstasy and elation.

**Skip Heitzig** He believed that promise. This is laughter of sheer joy. How do I know that? Because God doesn't rebuke him. And in chapter eighteen, Sarah laughs when she hears this and it was the laughter of disbelief, because the Lord said, 'You don't believe what I'm saying, do you?' But here's an old guy just going, 'I can't believe it! I'm an old dude and she's an old chick and we're gonna have a kid!' It was something along those lines.

**Wenstrom** - Warren Wiersbe defines worship, "Worship is the believer's response of all that they are –mind, emotions, will and body-to what God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience and its practical side in objective obedience to God's revealed will. Worship is a loving response that's balanced by the fear of the Lord, and it is a deepening response as the believer comes to know God better" (Borrow [Real Worship, page 26](#)). If we paraphrase Wiersbe's definition, we could say the following: Abraham is worshipping the Lord in that he is responding in his mind ("said in his heart"), emotions (laughter), and body (falling on his face) to what God is (omnipotent) and His promise to give him and Sarah a child in their old age and he is responding to God's ability to bring it to pass. Abraham was so overcome with joy at the Lord's promise to give him and Sarah a baby boy that he fell on his face in worship of the Lord and laughed. He did not laugh out of doubt but out of joy since the Lord did not rebuke him for his lack of faith as the Lord did with Sarah when she laughed after hearing the Lord promise Abraham again that he would get Sarah pregnant as recorded in Genesis 18:13.

**John Phillips** calls this the **laughter of faith** - Abraham laughed out of sheer joy. The glorious impossibility of it! Why, when God had first spoken to him about a son twenty-five years earlier, then it was bordering on the impossible, but now! Now he was an old, old man and Sarah (in faith he immediately employed her new name), was an old, old woman. And he laughed the laughter of faith as Romans 4 makes perfectly clear. (read Ro 4:19-20+) (Borrow [Exploring Genesis page 146](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** - Three different occasions of laughter are associated with Isaac's birth: Abraham laughed for joy when he heard his wife would give birth to the promised son (Gen. 17:17); Sarah laughed in disbelief when she heard the news (18:9–15); and Sarah laughed for joy when the boy was born (21:6–7). The name Isaac means "he laughs."

**Matthew Henry**: "It was a laughter of delight, not of distrust. Note, Even the promises of a holy God, as well as his performances, are the joys of holy souls; there is the joy of faith as well as the joy of fruition. Now it was that Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day. Now he saw it and was glad (Jn. 8:56); for, as he saw heaven in the promise of Canaan, so he saw Christ in the promise of Isaac. "

**KJV Commentary** strikes somewhat of a balance: "Worship and incredulity seem intermixed here. We are under no necessity of making Abraham flawless as the Jewish commentators try to do. He found the promise difficult to believe at first. This is borne out by what he said in his heart and by his request to God that the promises might center in Ishmael. "

This is a difficult question (the meaning of Abraham laughing) to resolve but certainly Paul does seem to give us the "last word" on Abraham's spiritual assessment of this impossibility stating Abraham did not become "weak in faith" (Ro 4:19) even in the face of that fact that he was "about 100 yo and the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Ro 4:19). In fact in regard to the promise of God he did not waver in disbelief but grew strong in faith giving glory to God (Ro 4:20). Paul's description would tend to support that his laughter was not out of disbelief.

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**Laughed** ([06711](#))**(tsachaq)** means to laugh, toy with, make sport (Ge 39:14,17). To laugh outright in merriment or scorn, mockery or derision (Ge 21:9). Tsacaq conveys the idea of laughter, whether in joy or incredulity. The stronger Piel stem connotes positively, play and sport, or negatively, mockery and derision. **Tsachaq** expresses an attitude toward something promised (a son in their old age) that seemed impossible - Abraham laughed in faith (Ge 17:17), but Sarah laughed in disbelief (Ge 18:12, 13, 17). In Ex 32:6 **tsachaq** may have sexual or immoral overtones (cf Ge 26:8).

**Gilbrant** -A primary root, the verb **tsāchaq**, which means "to laugh," is used thirteen times in the Qal or Piel stems. All uses are in Genesis and Exodus, except for one use in Judges. An alternate form with similar meanings, **sāchaq**, occurs thirty-six times in later portions of Scripture. The Qal stem of **tsāchaq** denotes the action of laughter, and all six occurrences are in the account of events surrounding the birth of Isaac. When God announced to Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son, the ninety-nine-year-old fell to his face and laughed, thinking that it was impossible (Gen. 17:17). Sarah had the same reaction some weeks later when she overheard the Lord (in human form) announcing the same incredible promise (Gen. 18:12). Her laugh, like

her husband's, was one of disbelief, and God pointed out her lack of faith (Gen. 18:13ff). A year later, however, the promised son was born, and Sarah's incredulous laugh turned to a laugh of joy (Gen. 21:6). Even the name of her newborn son Isaac meant "laughter."

In the Piel stem, *tsāchaq* can mean "to play," "to make sport," "to mock." The word often has a negative connotation. When Lot tried to warn his sons-in-law of the impending destruction of Sodom, they refused to take him seriously, assuming that he was simply jesting with them (Gen. 19:14). On the day Isaac was weaned, Ishmael was observed mocking him—an offense which ultimately led to the expulsion of him and his mother from Abraham's household (Gen. 21:9). The same spirit of mockery can be seen in the episode where the blind Samson was brought to the Philistine festival so that he could entertain and amuse the crowd, giving them an opportunity to taunt their old enemy (Judg. 16:25).

The Piel usage sometimes has strong sexual overtones. By claiming Joseph tried to seduce her, Potiphar's wife accused him of toying with the whole household and with her (Gen. 39:14, 17). When Isaac had claimed that Rebekah was merely his sister, the deception was uncovered when the Philistine king observed him "sporting" with her, obviously in the manner of a marriage relationship (Gen. 26:8). This gives a broad hint at the activities of Israel in the account of the golden calf, where Exo. 32:6 says that the people "rose up to play." ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Tsachaq - 13x/12v - caressing(1), entertained\*(1), jesting(1), laugh(4), laughed(2), make sport(2), mocking(1), play(1).** Gen. 17:17; Gen. 18:12; Gen. 18:13; Gen. 18:15; Gen. 19:14; Gen. 21:6; Gen. 21:9; Gen. 26:8; Gen. 39:14; Gen. 39:17; Exod. 32:6; Jdg. 16:25

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#### **Walter Kaiser - Ge 17:17; 18:12–15 Discriminatory Treatment of Abraham and Sarah? [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)**

It is clear that both Abraham and Sarah laughed at the news that they would have a son so late in life. The question, then, is this: Why was Sarah the only one who was rebuked? Is this a case where male chauvinism shines through the text of the older testament?

Some have tried to explain the difference between the two laughters as arising from two different states of mind: Abraham's from a state of surprise and ecstasy; Sarah's from a state of disbelief. But the text will not let Abraham off that easily. There is no reason to connect Abraham's laughter with that of Psalm 126:2 (when the Lord brought back the captives from Babylon, "our mouths were filled with laughter") or even that of Job 8:21 ("he will yet fill your mouth with laughter"). Both the Jerusalem Targum and Calvin were too hasty in getting Abraham off the hook here by equating his laughter with joyous amazement.

The fact that Abraham immediately posed the issue of Ishmael and how he would fit into the promised seed if another son were born shows that he too spoke out of disbelief, just as much as did Sarah. The issue was not just Ishmael's person, but his posterity as well. The promise of another son, Abraham feared, would destroy all hope that he had placed in the one already given. So Abraham was equally guilty of disbelief. So why the rebuke on Sarah?

It is true that Sarah only laughed to herself; but so did Abraham. Nevertheless, the Lord saw what transpired in her inner being and openly spoke of his displeasure of the same. And since the principle from which both of their inward laughing sprang was the same (that is, disbelief, and not that one was a laugh of admiration and joy whereas the other was a laugh of disbelief and distrust), the disbelief of both of them was the main basis for the rebuke.

The question "Why did Sarah laugh?" was not addressed to her, but to Abraham. But Sarah felt the sting of inquiry most pointedly, for she felt that she had been trapped in her disbelief. Thus it was that she blurted out, "I did not laugh." This foolish and untruthful reaction was also rebuked when the Lord said, "Yes, you did laugh."

Does this mean that Abraham's disbelief was without blame, but Sarah's was? No, for the condemnation of one was equally a condemnation of the other. The text focuses on Sarah's disbelief because she went on to deny it (thereby making the issue memorable and newsworthy) and because when the whole matter was ended, it also became the basis for the naming of Isaac, which is associated with the word "he laughs" or "laughter" (Gen 21:3, 6).

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#### **QUESTION - [How long did Abraham and Sarah have to wait for Isaac?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Genesis 12 begins the story of [Abraham](#) (then called Abram) and his barren wife [Sarah](#). Verses 1 through 4 record God's first words to him about a homeland for his offspring. Even though the gift of a son is not directly mentioned in this first communication, God hinted at His plan for Abram. Abraham was 75 years old when he first received the promise, and Genesis 21:5 tells us he was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Sarah was 90. So Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years for the fulfillment of God's promise.

In that 25 years between the time that Abram was promised a son and the birth of [Isaac](#), Abram and Sarah had certain ideas of how they might facilitate the keeping of the promise. One was that Abraham's steward, Eliezer, would become the heir of Abraham's household (Genesis 15:2-3). Another idea was that Abraham could have an heir through a son conceived by Sarah's slave, Hagar (Genesis 16:1-2). In both cases, God rejected those men as Abraham's heirs, pointing Abraham and Sarah to a literal, miraculous fulfillment of the promise.

Abraham is called the father of faith (Romans 4:11-12) because of his response to God both in leaving his homeland and receiving a son in his old age. Genesis 15:4-5 again describes God's promise to Abraham that his offspring would be as "the sands of the sea." Even though Abraham was old and had no sons, he never doubted that God would do as He promised. He did not understand how such a thing could be possible, but he humbly accepted God's word as truth. Mary had the same response when the angel Gabriel told her she would be the mother of the Messiah (Luke 1:26-38). She did not understand how such a thing could be possible since she was a virgin. But she never doubted that God would do as He said. That response is the kind of faith that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6).

Genesis 15:6 lays out the truth that salvation is by faith, apart from works: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Romans 4:3-5 and Galatians 3:5-7 elaborate on this truth. Just as Abraham was counted as righteous before he did anything worthy of praise, so we are counted as righteous by simply believing that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is sufficient payment for our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).

However, that faith produces actions that validate it. James 2:14-18 helps us understand the kind of faith Abraham had. It was a faith that acted. He moved because God said to move. He trusted because God said to trust. He prepared to welcome a son because God promised him a son. By acting on his faith, Abraham proved that he trusted God, and that trust was credited to his account. His faith in the promises of God saw him through years of waiting. He never doubted God's goodness or His word, and, for that, God considered him righteous.[GotQuestions.org](#)

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### Vance Havner - The Crises Of Abraham

As one studies the life of Abraham, the man of faith, he is impressed with several crises in his spiritual experience each of which brought him to a closer walk with God. Each required a surrender and each surrender brought a blessing.

The first (Gen. 12:1-3) called him to leave his country, kindred and father's house to journey by faith in a strange land. In Heb. 11:8 we read: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." God often calls us to forsake close ties to walk by faith in strange places, but if we obey we shall afterward receive those places, as did Abraham, for an inheritance. Jesus Christ issued such a challenge (Matt. 10:34-37, Luke 14:26).

Again, Abraham reached a crisis when it became necessary for him to separate from Lot. He loved Lot and probably had thought of him as an heir. But Lot, though a believer, was not a consecrated man, and God in His wisdom brings about a separation (Gen. 13:5-11). It must have been a disappointment to Abraham. In Genesis 15:1-3 we find him reduced to the prospect of his steward Eliezer becoming his heir. Sometimes God reduces us until our only prospect is an Eliezer, but He has blessings in store when we obey, as He revealed to Abraham (Gen. 13:14-18 and 15:4-21). All" he saw was his, with the promise of progeny as numerous as the stars!

Then Abraham had to give up his own preferences and plans about Ishmael. Ishmael was born out of the will of God for Abraham, who had taken the way of flesh instead of the way of faith to provide himself an heir (Gen. 16:1-6). As always, this brought on trouble. Abraham wished that Ishmael might live before God (Gen. 17:18, 19), but God had other plans. Often we want our Ishmaels, our own selfish arrangements and projects, to succeed, but God wants us to fail in ourselves, that we might find the blessing not in the deeds of the flesh, but through faith. Our Ishmaels must fail that our Isaacs may succeed.

Finally God called for the sacrifice of Isaac, the son of faith. Ishmael represented the worst thing in Abraham's life, and God took him away and he never came back. Isaac was the best thing in Abraham's life, so God took him but gave him back. It is so in His dealings with you and me. God wants the Ishmaels that He may utterly remove them; the Isaacs that He may restore them to us like Moses' rod, a double blessing. After this great surrender of Abraham's God came to him with great assurance (Gen. 22:15-18). Real victory in things spiritual always follows genuine surrender.

Abraham's progress was gradual. He did not learn it all at once. For instance, twice he was involved in lying about Sarah (Gen. 12 and 20). A peculiarity about this lie was, it was a half-truth: Sarah was his half-sister (Gen. 20:12). But God dealt with it as a lie because it was told with the intention to deceive.

The development of Abraham required time and testing. While the Christian experience is not, primarily, a matter of giving up things,

such crises do bring us to the end of self and cut off all outside interests that our faith might be utterly in God.

## Holy Laughter

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed (Genesis 17:17).

Who wouldn't laugh—a century-old man being told he will become a father, and that his ninety-year-old wife will bear a child? The whole idea must have seemed ridiculous to Abraham. Yet he received the news with great delight. Bowing before God, he expressed his surprise, wonder, and gladness—with no hint of disbelief. In Genesis 18, how-ever, Sarah laughed and God rebuked her. Sarah laughed in disbelief. Abraham laughed in faith.

In a lecture, C. H. Spurgeon said that many Scriptures remain clouded until some trying experience interprets them for us. He told of riding home after a heavy day's work feeling weary and down-hearted. Suddenly 2 Corinthians 12:9 came to his mind, "My grace is sufficient for you." Spurgeon said, "I reached home and looked it up in the original, and at last it came to me in this way. 'My grace is sufficient for YOU.' Said I, 'I should think it is,' and I burst out laughing. I never understood what the holy laughter of Abraham was until then. It seemed to make disbelief so absurd. . . . O brethren, be great believers! Little faith will bring your souls to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your souls."

Our faith grows as we grow in our awareness of God's faithfulness.

Old promises become joyful surprises with fresh meaning. We see that the all-powerful, all-sufficient God keeps His Word. Then we, too, can laugh the holy laughter of a faith that considers disbelief absurd. —D.J.D. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Faith expects from God what is beyond all human expectation.

### Genesis 17:18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!"

- **O that:** Jer 32:39 Ac 2:39
- **before:** Ge 4:12,14 Ps 4:6 41:12 Isa 59:2
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## ABRAHAM'S APPEAL TO GOD TO BLESS ISHMAEL

**And Abraham said to God (Elohim), "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!"** - He is asking for Ishmael to be the recipient of God's blessing.

**Wenstrom** - Abraham mentions Ishmael not because he does not believe that God can give him and Sarah a child but rather he fears that this promise would cut off Ishmael from the Lord's favor but as we will see this is not the case.

**Jon Courson** - The Hebrew text makes it clear that this is the passionate cry of a father who says, "I already have a son who I love deeply. Let him be the one through whom the covenant and blessings come." In other words, Abraham is saying, "I know I got ahead of You when Ishmael was conceived. I know that was not Your plan. I know I made a mess, but, Lord, bless my mess." Have you ever done that? Maybe your motives were sincere, your intentions were right. But you didn't wait on God or talk things over with Him. Instead, you just plunged into that relationship, that job opportunity, that ministry. And when it turned out to be a mess, you asked God to bless it anyway....I have found that God gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him. Thus, prayer is not giving God orders. Prayer is simply reporting for duty. Prayer is not "Bless my mess." It's, "Lord, have Your way." (See [Jon Courson's Application Commentary](#))

**Skip Heitzig** - Let him (ISHMAEL) be the one that You fulfill Your promise. Let him live before You.' God says no. God is going to bless Ishmael, many nations will come from him, God's hand will be upon him. But the covenant that God wants is through a son of promise, not a son of the flesh. It's going to be through Isaac. How many times have you said that? You've had your dream, your agenda, and you just say, 'God, here. This is what I really want. This is what I produced. Would you just bless my thing? No, just bless this. I don't want to do anything else.' And sometimes God may require the death of your vision. And maybe your prayer should be, 'Oh, that Ishmael might die within me!' That my little episode, my little agenda of the flesh, would die and I would be open to whatever He wants from me.

**Genesis 17:19 But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.**

- Sarah: Ge 17:21 18:10-14 21:2,3,6 2Ki 4:16,17 Lu 1:13-20 Ro 9:6-9 Ga 4:28-31
- Isaac: Joh 8:56.
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISAAC NOT ISHMAEL**

**But God (Elohim)** - Here is another one of those great "but God's" in Scripture! They always signify a "change of direction," an "about face," so to speak, and in this case speaking of the passing of the covenant not to Ishmael but to Isaac. God rejects Abraham's plea that Ishmael inherit the covenant promises.

**But God (Elohim) said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac** - This is the second baby in the Bible to be named before birth (Ishmael was the first - Ge 16:11+) In Ge 17:17 **Abraham fell on his face and laughed**," and thus the name "Isaac" would be a constant reminder that he had laughed at God's promise (if his laughing was a laugh of unbelief as some contend which I do not agree with). As noted above a few commentators think Abraham's laughter was an expression of unbelief because of his statement in Ge 17:18 about his desire that Ishmael receive God's special blessing. The majority believe that Abraham was laughing out of joy at the prospect of the fulfillment of God's promise! Jesus' declaration in Jn 8:56+ would seem to favor the latter interpretation, for Jesus declared "Your father Abraham**rejoiced** to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."

**Charles Ryrie** comments that "Some feel that Abraham laughed for joy, but Ge 17:18 indicates that it was an expression of doubt as he struggled to match his faith to his circumstances." (BORROW [Ryrie Study Bible](#))

**Bob Utley** - **"you shall call his name Isaac"** All of the other Patriarch's names are changed when they come into a relationship with YHWH except for Isaac. This is because his name was given by God from the very beginning. "Isaac" (BDB 850) is a wordplay on the word "laughter" (BDB 850). This is explained in Gen. 21:6. Sarah's unbelief will be changed to "laughter" and joy!

**And I will establish My covenant (beriyth; Lxx = diatheke) with him for an everlasting ((olam; Lxx = aionios) covenant (beriyth; Lxx = diatheke) for his descendants after him** - Now the covenant with Abraham is clearly passed on to his son Isaac and it is again (third time in chapter 17 - Ge 17:7, 13, 19) referred to as an **everlasting** covenant. Again Isaac did not have to do anything but be born for Yahweh to establish this covenant with him.

**Believer's Study Bible** - "Isaac" (yishaq, Heb.), meaning "laughter" or, literally, "he laughs," is the name of the son whose birth would produce laughter. This laughter would stem either from the unexpected joy of the fulfilled promise or from skepticism over the unlikely, if not impossible, birth for this aged couple. The play on "laughter" appears graphically in Ge 18:12-15.

**Genesis 17:20 "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.**

- **I will bless him:** Ge 16:10-12
- **twelve:** Ge 25:12-18
- **I will make him a great nation:** Ge 21:13,18
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **YAHWEH ANSWERS FATHER'S PRAYER FOR SON**

**As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation** - The responds to Abraham's plea in Ge 17:18 bestowing blessing on Ishmael, but not passing on the covenant to him. Genesis 25:12-16 records the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael and his descendants.

**Wiersbe** writes that "God had already promised to bless Ishmael (Ge 16:11), and He kept His promise (Ge 25:12-16), but the covenant blessings were not a part of Ishmael's heritage. Isaac alone was to be the heir of all things (Ge 25:5-6; Rom. 9:6-13).

**THOUGHT** - There is a practical lesson here for all who seek to live by faith: When God is preparing a bright future for you, don't cling to the things of the past. Ishmael represented the past, Isaac the future. Ishmael symbolized man's fleshly way of accomplishing something for God, but Isaac was a miracle baby, born by the power of God. Ishmael brought dissension into the home, but Isaac brought laughter. If you have an "Ishmael" in your life, yield it up to God. God has a perfect plan, and what He plans is the best. It may pain you to give up your cherished dreams, but God's way is always the right way. Amy Carmichael, missionary to India, wrote to a friend who was perplexed about a painful experience, "I will say what our Heavenly Father said to me long ago, and says to me still very often: 'See in it a chance to die.'" (ED: If you want a challenge, borrow Elisabeth Elliot's biography of Amy Carmichael "[A Chance to Die.](#)") Perhaps we all need to pray, "Oh, that Ishmael might die within me!" (Wiersbe)

**John Phillips** - God has kept His word. The Arab world stretches from the seaboard of the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf, and embraces some seventeen of the most strategically placed and economically wealthy countries of the world. But, as God foresaw, they do not know Him. They are gripped fast in one of the most deadly, tenacious, and militant errors the world has ever known. (Borrow [Exploring Genesis page 147](#)).

**Wiersbe** adds an interesting note - Ishmael did not get a new name, because he represents the flesh, and the flesh cannot be changed. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6) and always will be flesh. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Ro 7:18). "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63 nkjv). The old nature can be disciplined, subdued, and even to some extent controlled, but it cannot be changed. Until we receive our glorified bodies in the presence of the Lord, the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit will continue (Gal. 5:16–26).

**Genesis 17:21 "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year."**

- my: Ge 21:10-12 26:2-5 46:1 48:15 Ex 2:24 3:6 Lu 1:55,72 Ro 9:5,6,9 Ga 3:29 Heb 11:9
- at: Ge 18:10 21:2,3 Job 14:13 Ac 1:7
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Romans 9:6-13+ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; 7 nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "**THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.**" 8 That is, **it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.** 9 For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."

## **GOD PREDICTS BIRTH OF ISAAC NEXT YEAR**

**But** - Term of contrast. In this case a "change of direction" from Ishmael to Isaac.

**My covenant** (*beriyth*; Lxx = *diatheke*) **I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.**" God emphasizes a third time that He was establishing His covenant with Isaac and not Ishmael. This is the 9th mention of the phrase "My Covenant" in this chapter alone and the second time God states that the recipient of the covenant would be **Isaac!** Apparently God wants to make it absolutely clear who is to be the recipient of His covenant promises. Legally, the natural son became the heir, even though born after the son of a slave-wife, but God sovereignly states not so in this case, but with the second born son who was from Sarah not Hagar. To state it another way, in this passage we see God's choice of Isaac is a clear illustration of His [doctrine of election](#), that uncomfortable topic that describes God's choice of who will be saved.

**NIV Study Bible** (BORROW - [see page 38](#)) - Paul cites the choice of Isaac (and not Ishmael) as one proof of God's sovereign right to choose to save by grace alone (see Ro 9:6-13 - ED: [SEE ABOVE](#)).

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#### QUESTION - [What is the doctrine of election?](#)

**ANSWER** - An election is a time when people choose who they want to fill certain positions from President on down. An election is a choice. The biblical doctrine of election teaches that God chooses to save some, and, by necessity, if He does not choose everyone, then there are some who are passed over. Those whom He has chosen to save are referred to as "[the elect](#)" (see, e.g., Mark 13:20).

The Bible teaches that God chooses people based on His own purposes and His desire to show grace to undeserving sinners. Ephesians 1:4–6 says, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” He chose in love, in accordance with His pleasure and will, so that He would be glorified. God’s election has nothing to do with what the elect would or would not do.

God did not choose everyone. If He had, then everyone would come to faith in Christ. He chose some, and He left others to their own desires. Left to ourselves, all of us would continue in our rebellion and reject Christ. God chose to pursue some, convict them of their need, and lead them to faith. It is because of God’s choice that anyone comes to faith in Christ. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day” (John 6:44).

This is a tough truth to get our minds around. We are tempted to think that we are more just and gracious than God and that He should have chosen everyone. We need to reject that temptation. We are in no place to judge God! It is not as though some are desperately crying out to Him for salvation and He rejects them because He has not chosen them. Those whom God does not choose continue doing exactly what they want—they rebel against God and try to stay as far away from Him as possible. He simply allows them to continue on the path they have freely and willfully chosen. He has, however, chosen to intervene in the lives of some and win them over. He does this so that He might show His love and kindness to people who are undeserving.

Some people think that God “chooses” based on the choices that He knows that the elect will make: [He knows](#) who will and who will not receive Christ, and He makes His choice based on that. But that would make people the ultimate choosers, with God simply following our choice. Biblically, it is the other way around. God chooses some based on His own purposes, and then, in response to His work in their lives, they choose Him. His choice is first and foundational. Without God’s election, no one would ever turn to Him.

Many Christians recoil at the doctrine of election the first time they hear it. But, upon further reflection, most believers will admit that God was at work in their lives, drawing them to Himself long before they were even aware of it. They will recognize that, if He had not intervened, they would have continued in unbelief. The hand of God, working in big ways and little ways, becomes more evident in hindsight.

Some object to the doctrine of election on the grounds that it stifles missionary and evangelistic activity. After all, if God has chosen to save some, then they will be saved whether or not anyone takes them the gospel—so why bother? This objection overlooks the truth that hearing and believing the gospel is the means that God uses to save those He has chosen to save. Paul believed and taught election (it is a New Testament doctrine), yet he was zealous like no other in his missionary endeavors. Because he knew that God had chosen to save people through the gospel, Paul proclaimed it boldly and was persecuted for it. He explains, “I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:10). Paul endured persecution so that *the elect* will be saved, because the elect cannot be saved without hearing and believing the gospel. Through evangelism, God allows people to participate in His great plan of drawing a people unto Himself from every nation and language on earth. The doctrine of election frees us to share the gospel without pressure or fear of failure. When we share the gospel clearly, we have been obedient, and that is a success. The results are left to God. [GotQuestions.org](#)

#### Related Resources from Gotquestions.org

- [Is it possible for a person to be saved but not predestined?](#)
- [What is predestination? Is predestination biblical?](#)
- [What does it mean for something to be foreordained?](#)
- [How are predestination and election connected with foreknowledge?](#)
- [How can I know if I am one of the elect?](#)
- [Who are the elect of God? | GotQuestions.org](#)
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- [Unconditional election - is it biblical? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is corporate election? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What does Peter mean when he tells us to make our calling and election sure in 2 Peter 1:10? | GotQuestions.org](#)

**Genesis 17:22 When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.**

- Ge 17:3 18:33 35:9-15 Ex 20:22 Nu 12:6-8 De 5:4 Judges 6:21 13:20 Joh 1:18 10:30
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## GOD MAKES A DRAMATIC EXIT

When He finished talking with him, God ([Elohim](#)) went up from Abraham - God's counsel concerning the covenant and circumcision is complete. Went up means basically movement from lower to higher place. The Septuagint uses the verb [anabaino](#) which speaks of upward movement as when the two witnesses in Revelation went up into heaven in the cloud (Rev 11:12+).

**Genesis 17:23 Then Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all the servants who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's household, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the very same day, as God had said to him.**

- **circumcised:** Ge 17:10-14,26,27 18:19 34:24 Jos 5:2-9 Ps 119:60 Pr 27:1 Ec 9:10 Ac 16:3 Ro 2:25-29 4:9-12 1Co 7:18,19 Ga 5:6 6:15
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### Related Passages:

Romans 4:9-12+ Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." 10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 11 and he received the **sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith** which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

## ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENCE IS IMMEDIATE

**Then** - This marks progression in the narrative. God leaves. Abraham obeys. I like the NIV which has "On that very day" which emphasizes that his obedience was immediate. Remember beloved, delayed obedience is disobedience.

**Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all the servants who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's household, and circumcised ([mul](#); Lxx = [peritemno](#) = "cut around") the flesh of their foreskin in the very same day, as God ([Elohim](#)) had said to him.** Abraham's obedience was immediate, for he circumcised himself and his household that same day. Genuine faith obeys. Or stated another way faith that is real, that really saves one's soul, is faith that has works. Faith alone saves, but true faith that saves is never alone! We see this relationship in Hebrews 3:18-19+ which says "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were **disobedient** ([apeitheo](#))? So we see that they were not able to enter because of **unbelief** ([apistia](#)). Note that **disobedient** parallels **unbelief**, as the result is the same for both - they are not allowed to enter God's (salvation) rest!

James also uses Abraham as a prime example of faith and works writing "Was not Abraham our father justified (DECLARED RIGHTEOUS) by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," (Ge 15:6) and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." (James 2:21-24+) The phrase that causes folks difficulty is "justified by works," but in this context the sense of the verb is shown to be righteous, which is the same way *dikaioo* is used in Ro 3:4+ which describes God as "justified." Clearly God does not need to be declared righteous but in context is shown to be righteous, the same sense as in James 2:24.

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### Streams in the Desert - "In the selfsame day, as God had said unto him." (Gen. 17:23)

INSTANT obedience is the only kind of obedience there is; delayed obedience is disobedience. Every time God call us to any duty, He is offering to make a covenant with us; doing the duty is our part, and He will do His part in special blessing.

The only way we can obey is to obey "in the selfsame day," as Abraham did. To be sure, we often postpone a duty and then later on do it as fully as we can. It is better to do this than not to do it at all. But it is then, at the best, only a crippled, disfigured, half-way sort of duty-doing; and a postponed duty never can bring the full blessing that God intended, and that it would have brought if done

at the earliest possible moment.

It is a pity to rob ourselves, along with robbing God and others, by procrastination. "In the selfsame day" is the Genesis way of saying, "Do it now."—Messages for the Morning Watch.

Luther says that "a true believer will crucify the question, Why? He will obey without questioning." I will not be one of those who, except they see signs and wonders, will in no wise believe. I will obey without questioning.

"Ours not to make reply,  
Ours not to reason why,  
Ours but to do and die."

Obedience is the fruit of faith; patience, the bloom on the fruit.—Christina Rossetti.

#### Genesis 17:24 Now Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

- Ge 17:1,17 12:4 Ro 4:11,19,20
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### ABRAHAM'S CIRCUMCISION AT AGE NINETY-NINE

**Now Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised**(mul; Lxx = *peritemno* = "cut around") **in the flesh of his foreskin** - This is quite old to be circumcised for the first time. Apparently men prior to Abraham, like Noah, Enoch, Adam, etc were not circumcised. In Abraham's case, there would seem to be something symbolic about his circumcision at this age for he would soon father a son at age 100.

#### Genesis 17:25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### ISHMAEL CIRCUMCISED AT AGE THIRTEEN

**And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised**(mul; Lxx = *peritemno* = "cut around") **in the flesh of his foreskin**. Not only the Jews, but the Arabs, who are the descendants of Ishmael, retain the rite of circumcision to this day and follow this Biblical pattern performing circumcision at the age thirteen.

#### Genesis 17:26 In the very same day Abraham was circumcised, and Ishmael his son.

- Ge 12:4 22:3,4 Ps 119:60
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### ABRAHAM AND ISHMAEL CIRCUMCISED SAME DAY

**In the very same day Abraham was circumcised**(mul; Lxx = *peritemno* = "cut around"), **and Ishmael his son** - This fact again emphasizes Abraham's immediate obedience. In John 14:15 Jesus said "If you love Me, you will observe conscientiously My commandments." Abraham's obedience demonstrated his love for God in the sense that he honored, respected, revered God and was dedicated and devoted to Him to the point of self-sacrifice. Abraham's obedience was also confirmation that he indeed was obeying the command to "walk before Me, and be blameless" in Genesis 17:1 and experiencing fellowship with the Lord.

#### Genesis 17:27 All the men of his household, who were born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were

circumcised with him.

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- **circumcised:** Ge 18:19
- [Genesis 17 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## ALL MALES WITH ABRAHAM CIRCUMCISED

**All the men of his household, who were born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him** - Presumably they were also circumcised on the same day.

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