

Genesis 17

At this point, how long has it been since God last talked with Abram (16:16 and 17:1)? At least thirteen years.

Application: Have there ever been times in your life when God seemed to be silent—maybe regarding some issue you've been praying for? How do you handle those times? When the Lord is silent and apparently inactive, it is a real test of faith. It's easy to grow impatient and take matters into our own hands like Abram and Sarah did with Hagar. We see the problem, but we also see an obvious solution, so we force the issue and get ahead of God. The real challenge is how long to wait and when to step out in faith and go.

What was the new name God used to identify Himself (v. 1)? God Almighty or El-Shaddai. It was a special name He used to reveal Himself to the Patriarchs (Exodus 6:3).

What did God command Abraham to do (v. 1)? Walk before me and be blameless

What did God promise Abraham (v. 2)? To greatly increase the number of his descendants. **How did Abraham respond (v. 3)?** He fell face down in reverence and awe.

What did God do (vv. 4-8)? Established the second covenant with Abraham. He also confirmed His promise of the first covenant (15:18) to give Abram the land of Canaan (v. 8). He defined His role in the covenant (v. 4) when He said, "*as for Me.*" God's role in the covenant is summarized in v. 8 – "*I will be their God.*"

What is the significance of God changing Abram and Sarai's names (vv. 5, 15)? Abram means "exalted father" while Abraham means "father of a multitude" which implied a look ahead to his descendants; he was going to be the father of many nations – God was telling him that when he was 99 years old! His new name would serve as a reminder of this day. Every time someone addressed him by name, he would recall God's promise, until finally Isaac, the child of promise, would call him "abba" (father). Sarah's new name meant "Princess" – a fitting title for one whose seed would produce Kings (v. 16).

What kind of covenant was the first covenant? Unilateral and unconditional. God essentially made this covenant with Himself. He alone passed through the carcasses of the dead animals and no performance requirement was laid on Abram for fulfillment of the covenant (15:17-19).

What did God promise in the second covenant (vv. 4-8)? Countless descendants and a promise to be their God.

What kind of covenant was this? "*As for me*" (v. 4) and "*As for you*" (v. 9) define this as a bilateral, conditional covenant. Both participants have a role and responsibility.

What were the conditions God set for Abraham (v. 9)? He and his descendants must keep the covenant.

What did Abram have to do to keep the covenant (v. 1)? Walk before God and be blameless (v. 1)

What did it mean to walk before the Lord and be blameless? Walk not in perfection, but in purity -- total consecration, obedience, devotion. It was a condition of the heart. It was probably significant that God withheld giving specific duties to Abraham to perform (didn't give him a checklist of things to do in order to be blameless) until long after Abram's belief was evident, so that works would not appear to be the basis of the covenant but a by-product of it. The word blameless literally means "whole." God wanted *all* of Abram; He wanted a total commitment. Sold out. All in. In God's eyes, Abraham excelled at being blameless (18:19; 22:18; 26:3-5).

What were the other conditions that went along with the covenant God set for Abraham (vv. 9-10)? He and his descendants must be circumcised.

What purpose did circumcision serve? It was a sign of the covenant.

Had any other biblical covenants been marked by a sign? The sign of the rainbow given to Noah (Genesis 9:12-17).

How was circumcision a sign? It was a physical sign that the person belonged to God's chosen earthly people. Abraham, his descendants, and all who knew God through him were to carry the physical mark that announced

they were slaves of the Lord, owned by the Lord in a unique and significant way. Circumcision of infant sons did not save them but evidenced the faith of the father and mother in the God of Abraham.

It was a personal reminder. As that young child grew up, his circumcision was a sign to him that he was different from other boys—he belonged to God. It was not the circumcision that saved the boy, but the sign which would forever remind him of what God required in order to enjoy the benefits of His covenant, i.e. obedience.

What is the role of circumcision for Christians today? God has not commanded it of Christians. We do not live under the Mosaic Law (Romans 4:13; 6:14; 7:4). The New Testament talks about a different kind of circumcision. The circumcision of the heart.

- “No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly (not outwardly); 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.” Romans 2:29
- “For it is we who are the true circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.” Philippians 3:3
- “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ.” Colossians 2:11

How would you describe the meaning of heart circumcision? Not a physical act but a supernatural, spiritual act done by God. It is a cutting away or removal. Ezekiel 36:26: “*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*”

Why did the Creator choose the eight-day mark for circumcision (v. 12)? Vitamin K, a naturally occurring clotting element in blood, has been measured and determined to be at its highest level on the eighth day – 110% of normal for that day only.

Note: Abraham was saved before he was circumcised. “*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised*” (Romans 4:11). Believers today are not sealed with a physical mark. They are sealed by the Holy Spirit at the moment of their salvation (Ephesians 4:30).

God changed Sarai's name (v. 15). What did God promise (v. 16)? To bless her and give her a son. She would be the mother of nations. Kings of peoples would come from her. **How did Abraham react (v. 17)?** He laughed. God did not criticize Abraham for laughing, apparently in wonder, but He did rebuke Sarah. Her laugh seems to have arisen from a spirit of unbelief (18:15). God saw their different hearts.

What was Abraham's mindset about the heir (v. 18)? This would be a lot easier if Ishmael could be the heir.

What did God tell Abraham to do (v. 19)? I'm going to pick out his name. “*You will call him Isaac.*”

What would God do with Isaac (v. 19)? Establish His covenant with Isaac.

Why was the covenant established with Isaac (v. 19)? Wasn't the covenant established with Abraham (v. 7)? Isaac was the heir, the promised one. The statement is made to differentiate between the blessings of Isaac versus Ishmael and eliminate confusion. The covenant was made with Abraham as traced through Isaac.

What was the promise to Ishmael (v. 20)? To make him into a great nation. **Why did God bless this illegitimate son so richly?** He was a descendant of Abraham. God had promised to bless all of Abraham's offspring.

How would you describe Abraham's behavior (v. 23)? Immediate obedience. “*On that very day.....*”