



Genesis – 17:1-17:27  
I Will!  
(Lesson #26)

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**“17:1 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, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, 4 ¶ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 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. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 7 ¶ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.**

**Vs 1-2** - So at our last check-in with **Abram he was 86**, that is when Ismael was born. As best we can tell, and we cannot be sure, but it appears God has been silent for the last 13 year.

How was life for Abram, Sarai, Hagar, and Ismael during those years? We do not know.

Did they feel like they were executing God’s plan? We do not know. But 13 years have passed at that is where we find ourselves in Vs 1.

Abram is now 99 and Yahweh **“appears”** to him. The Hebrew word means to **see**, to **perceive**, to **look upon** or to **observe**.

This is a very common Hebrew word which means to see. It is the same word that was used in Gen 12:7:

*“Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.” (Ge 12:7 ESV)*

**Yahweh, once again, in some form appears to and speaks with Abram.**

Listen to what Gd says, we will just walk through the parts:

**First** – God says ***I am God Almighty***. In Hebrew, God says I am **אל ('el) שדי (Shadday)**.

**אל ('el)** – A very common semetic name that means God. It is used nearly 250 times in the Old Testament.

**שדי (Shadday)** – A Hebrew word that means **almighty** or most **powerful**. It is used nearly 50 times in the Old Testament.

Here we find, God combining the word God, with a term that highlights some particular attribute or characteristic of his nature.

Here, Yahweh tells Abram that he is **“the mighty God”**, or the **“almighty God”**.

**Second** – ***Walk before me and be blameless.***

A distinctive Hebrew form is used that brings with it the idea of ongoing activity.

Continue to walk before me and be blameless. The Hebrew word translated blameless is **תמים (tamiym)**. It means **complete, whole, or sound**. It is sometimes used to describe the **need for the sacrifices** to be **“without blemish”** (Ex 12:5, Ex 29:1, Lev 1:3, 3:1, etc.).

But here is it talking about a walk **before God** that is **without reproach**.

If you remember, Noah was described to us in this same way:

*“These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless (same word) in his generation. Noah walked (same word) with God.” (Ge 6:9 ESV)*

This is very common language we find in the New Testament of Zechariah and Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptist it was said):

*“And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.” (Lu 1:6 ESV)*

**APPLICATION:** You and I are told something very similar:

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Ga 5:16 ESV)*

**Third – that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.**

Scholars disagree on if this is an additional covenant, that God is making with Abram or if this is just a reiteration of the covenant already made:

**The ESV Study Bible:** *“The manner in which God introduces this covenant distinguishes it from the formally unconditional covenant already made in chapter 15.”*

**Henry Morris:** *“God has already made his covenant with Abram; He is now ready to put it into force.”*

In context, **I would lean towards the latter.** But I see both sides.

So, I do not believe this is a new covenant, but rather **additional clarification.** So, he is establishing his covenant, he is reaffirming his covenant.

The covenant here as stated is that God **“may multiply Abram greatly.”**

This is part of the covenant in **chapter 15:**

*“4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” 5 And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” 6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” (Ge 15:4-6 ESV)*

If we are honest, this was **one of the promises that were made in Haran!**

*“1 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”” (Ge 12:1-3 ESV)*

**Vs 3-4 - Here Abram falls on his face** before God in what appears to be **humble worship and adoration.**

Before we read what God says. Keep in mind this promise was made in Haran, 24 years ago, and up until now, this man is childless.

God says: **“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.”**

This is what God has **been promising,** although nothing has happened to create this amazing line of descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, stars of the heavens, or the sands of the seas, or a “multitude” of nations.

By the way, Saria remains as **infertile here at 89** as she was at **65** when God first made these amazing promises to Abram.

**Vs 5 - God now quadruples down on his promises.**

To stretch this 99-year-old man's faith, he changes his name from אַבְרָם ('Abram) means "exalter father" to אַבְרָהָם ('Abraham) which means "father of a multitude."

When God changed Abram's name to Abraham, he did so by adding a single letter:

אַבְרָם - 'Abram - meaning exalted father

אַבְרָהָם - 'Abraham – meaning father of a multitude

The letter he added was the letter ה. This is the letter Hei, it is the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Now at some point, we keep expecting Abram to say are you joking? You must be kidding. I have one child from my wife's servant. Now my new name is "father of a multitude." Yet, my wife is barren (89 years old) and I am 99 years old.

**I want you to fully sense how audacious this promise is, and how impossible to fulfill. This looks like it is turning into a joke!**

By the way, so that you see it. God says: "*for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*"

"*have made*" is in the perfect tense and expresses a **completed action**.

God is telling Abraham, not I will make you a father of many nations, but **I have made you a father of many nations (Jew and Gentile)!**

**This is a future promise stated as an already completed action or fact.**

Vs 6-7 - Here the promises continue to take shape with additional clarity.

**I will make you exceedingly fruitful!** Abraham is 99, and the only "fruit" he has is from Hagar.

By the way, although you do not see this in the ESV, you see it in the Hebrew: In English it really should read as **I have made you exceedingly fruitful, I have made you into nations** and Kings shall one day come from you (imperfect) and **I have established my covenant** between me, you and your offspring.

This seems **impossible to believe**, unless Abraham (new name) does so by **faith**.

Now what is interesting is that indeed there would be a host of Judean and Israelite kings that would descend from this man.

**Here we seeing God call things that are not as though they were!** By the way this was **Paul's point in Romans 4:17-18:**

*"17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations" — in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." (Ro 4:17-18 ESV)*

Here Paul is talking about this very event. Notice, in the Greek, he too uses the **perfect tense** to highlight an event as if it had already happened, although in time (our time) it had not yet happened.

**APPLICATION:** This is **what faith is**. It is believing God even when with the human eye screams this is not possible. **It is trusting in a God who can call what is not into our reality!**

**Vs 7** – The promise takes a **further dimension**. I will establish my covenant with you and your offspring, throughout their generations.

**This is a transgenerational covenant!** I have established an everlasting covenant, to be your God and to be the God of your offspring!

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*8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." 9 And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, 13 both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."*

Vs 8 - God in terms that cannot be confused or misunderstood, says **plainly, clearly, and distinctly**: I give this land, (all the land of Canaan) to your offspring as an **everlasting possession**.

**I do not want to be political here**, but the land of Canaan includes what today we call **Gaza** or **Palestine** as well as what we call today the **"West Bank."** It has all been given to **Israel by Yahweh as an everlasting possession!**

We see **God reiterates**, like you Abraham, **I will be their God...**

Vs 9-10 - God tells Abram, a **few additional points**:

**First** – You shall **keep my covenant**. So the covenant is unconditional, but you are to **"keep" it**.

Abraham has already been justified by faith (Genesis 15), but here he is told that he is to keep the covenant. Because you have a **new identify** you are to **keep the covenant**.

The Hebrew word is very common and can be translated **keep, observe, give heed to**. You are to **keep or observe** my covenant, and not just you, but you offspring after you throughout all their generations.

**A transgenerational covenant includes a sign that is also to be transgenerational.**

Now at this point, you should be thinking, **how** is Abraham and his offspring to keep or observe the covenant? God tells him plainly: This is who you are to keep my covenant: *Every male among you shall be circumcised.*

**I know, you are thinking I came to Sunday School to hear about circumcision? YEP!** As you might imagine, this is the **first use** in the **Hebrew Bible** of this word that will be used in **36 verses**.

This is how they are to keep the covenant, by taking a mark to indicate that each male is a part of the covenant.

This **mark** is not the covenant, that happened in **chapter 15**, but here in chapter 17, Yahweh tells Abraham, that "every male among them is to be circumcised" as how **they keep the covenant**.

He is going to provide **further clarification**, but this is what they are to do to show that they are **part of the covenant**.

Now let's pause for a moment and ensure that we are properly oriented. Circumcision is not the covenant, but a mark they were to put on males showing they were **partaking in the covenant**. It was a **ritual**, but it was not **the reality**.

**Important Note!** Do not forget the order here. In Genesis 15, God made the covenant with Abraham, but it would not be until Genesis 17 that he would provide the **mark**, the **sign**, or the **ritual**.

Remember what we read in Genesis 15:

*“And he (Abram) believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” (Ge 15:6 ESV)*

Genesis 15 was at least 13, probably more than 15 years before Genesis 17. The covenant existed, and Abram was justified by faith, long before God initiated the symbol of the covenant.

If you are wondering why I am taking time to make this point. **Two reasons:**

- 1) **False religion** reverses the point, and makes what we do central, instead of what God has done.
  - a. **Judaizers, and many peddlers of false gospels today.**
- 2) Paul makes a big deal about this point.

Let’s quickly look at it:

*“9b For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. 10 How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. 11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, 12 and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.” (Ro 4:9b-12 ESV)*

The world of false religions have one thing in common. They reverse the order and make God a debtor to men who complete some imagined series of steps.

We are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves it is a gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast! Here Abraham is given the sign of circumcision, it serves as a “seal” a mark of the righteousness he already possesses by faith.

**Vs 11** - Here God is crystal clear where this circumcision is to occur. It is to be in the **flesh of the foreskin**.

**God restates** it to make sure there is no confusion **the location**, and the **reason** (sign). This **circumcision** is to be the “**sign**” of the **covenant**.

We are immediately reminded of another covenant that had a sign:

*“11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” 12 ¶ And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” (Ge 9:11-13 ESV)*

The **rainbow** is the sign of God’s **unconditional covenant** to never again flood the earth.

**Circumcision** is the sign that men are participating in God’s unconditional covenant made through Abraham.

**A Thought Exercise: Thing about this sign:**

- 1) This is a **VERY PERSONAL** sign.
- 2) This sign it to be placed upon the **male reproductive organ**.
- 3) There will be the **spilling of blood**.
- 4) This sign involved a **cutting away and a removal**.

**This is a ritual**, but the **realities** that underly the ritual **are profound**.

**Vs 12** - Not only the sign (circumcision), the location (on the male’s penis), the purpose (sign of covenant participation), and even (when) the sign is to be placed on a male.

When a child is **8 days old** that child is to be circumcised.

**Who:** Every male, born in your house, a slave that you purchased with money from a foreigner, who is not your offspring. Even male children in your home from other nations. **If they are yours, (natural seed or those how join your extended family) they are to be circumcised.**

**Vs 13** - God Reiterates and restates so that there can be no confusion.

All **males**, children, purchased slaves, any males who have along the way, joined your entourage, they are to be circumcised. **All males** shall have the mark placed upon their bodies.

**\*\*\* Keep in mind, this covenant was meant to bless all the families of the earth! \*\*\***

Outsiders joining Abraham's entourage are to take on the mark of the covenant!

This is an everlasting covenant. Both in duration of the covenant and in the duration of Israel's responsibility to take the mark of the eternal covenant.

**Vs 14** - OK, the **covenant is unconditional**, but to be a participant of the covenant the male **must be circumcised** in the foreskin.

To be aware of the covenant and not be circumcised in the flesh is to **"break the covenant."**

If a person is **not circumcised**, that person is to be **"cut off"** from the people.

**Here we have a wordplay.** The person who will not be **"cut"** in the flesh of his foreskin, shall be **"cut off"** from his people.

Here is the summary. But cut or be cut off!

This word translated **"cut off"** can mean, **cut off** as in the sense of **removed from the community** or it can mean **cut off** as in the **sense of killed or cut down.**

It seems likely here that the person shall be cut off from the community, because this person has rejected the covenant, this person has, to use God's words, **"broken my covenant."**

The word translated broken means to **break, make void, frustrate, or disannul.** **This person has "made void" Yahweh's covenant.**

**To reject taking the mark of the covenant was to reject the God of the covenant.**

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*15 ¶ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" 19 God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. 20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. 21 But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."*

**Vs 15** - God continued to speak to Abraham. This is simply breathtaking the amount of revelation and contact that God has with Abraham.

God speaks about Sarai. She will **no longer be called Sarai, but instead Sarah:**

שָׂרַי - **Sarai** – meaning my princess

שָׂרָה - **Sarah** – meaning noble woman or the princess

Yes, once again it is the addition of the letter ה (Hei), in this case it replaces י (Yod).

You and I are new creatures in Christ and God has given us a new name! We now have a new identity in Christ; thus we have a new name.

**Vs 16** - The promises are extended to Sarah. **Yahweh says:**

**First** - “**I will bless her**”

**Second** – **I will give you a son by her.** She shall bring forth your promised son! God clearly says, she is the one, this is the first time.

**Reiterates** – **I will bless her.**

The blessings that are articulated to Abraham are equally and clearly articulated to Sarah.

Women are not second-class citizens in any way in God’s Kingdom.

**Third** - She shall become **nations**, and **kings** of people shall come from her.

These **like Abraham’s** are all **perfect tense!** We have been working with an old man, now we are working with a barren woman!

**Vs 17** - OK, here we see three responses:

- 1) Physical – He falls on his face
- 2) Emotional – He laughs
- 3) Thought – He says to Himself

Now theologians take **two different approaches to this text:**

- 1) That Abraham laughed in unbelief.
- 2) That Abraham laughed out of joy.

I would **tend towards the second**, but we cannot be sure.

When Sarah laughs (later on) she does so in unbelief and God will call her out: Gen 18:12-15. It does not seem likely that God would call out Sarah for laughing in unbelief and not call out Abraham if he had done the same thing.

You see what Abram thinks, for we see what he says to himself:

*“Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”*

**Vs 18-19** - **Abraham immediately thinks about the other son**, the elder son, the son born of Hagar. His mind goes to his current son. **We see where his heart is.**

Again, it seems (Rich’s opinion) that he accepts with joy what God says about a coming son, and his concern shifts to his current living son by Hagar.

**Vs 19** - **God speaks: NO... NO...** Sarah is going to bear you a son, you are going to call him Isaac (by the way his name means “**he laughs**”), to (possibly) forever remind Abraham of the joy and amazement that **struct him** when at 99 and Sarah at 89 God said, **she shall bring forth a son!**

**First** - Sarah will bring forth a **son**

**Second** - You shall call his name יִצְחָק (**Yitschaq**) Isaac “**he laughs**”

**Third** - **I will establish** (to cause to stand) **my covenant with him**, as an everlasting covenant, and his **offspring.**

**In Hebrews 15 God cut the covenant:**

*“On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,” (Ge 15:18 ESV)*

The **offspring of the promised covenant** will **trace**, not through Ishmael, but **through Isaac**. Here we see God picking up **the scarlet thread**, the **Messiah** will come from **the line of Issac**!

**Vs 20** - Then God picks up the discussion about Ishmael. As for Ishmael. **I have heard you**.

**First** – I have **blessed him**.

**Second** – I will make him fruitful and **multiply him** greatly.

**Third** – He will **father 12 princes**.

We will send them in Genesis 25:

**Forth** – I will make of him a **great nation**!

**Vs 21** – But, God reiterates, **I will establish my covenant with Isaac**, who Sarah shall **bear you, this time next year**.

**Here is another predictive prophecy... That would come true!** God now gives the time that this amazing miracle will take place. Abraham is 99, Isaac will be born this time **next year**.

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*22 When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. 23 ¶ Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. 24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. 27 And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.*

**Vs 22** - After Yahweh had finished talking to Abraham, God “went up” from him. The word means to **go up**, to **ascend**, or to **depart**.

**Vs 23** - Then as commanded, Abraham took Ishmael and all those in his house, every male and had them circumcised. On that very day, as God had commanded.

**Vs 24** - Here we are simply told the fact that Abraham was 99 when he was circumcised.

**Vs 25-26** - Here we are told that Ishmael was 13 when he was circumcised. That very day both Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised.

**Vs 27** - Everyone was circumcised. **Instant obedience, across the board**.

**Good lesson for you and I!**

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Now at this point, we can imagine, with only a year to go, the next thing we read will be about the birth of Isaac. **Surprisingly, we have three major stories to experience** (Sarah’s Unbelief which then feathers into the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abimelech) **before we get to the birth of Isaac**.