

# Genesis

## Chapter 17



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**Theme:** God gives Abraham a new name; God's covenant; Ishmael's inheritance

A great many people feel that the seventeenth chapter is the most outstanding chapter of the Book of Genesis. Here God makes a covenant with Abram and confirms His promise to him about a son. He lets Abram know that Ishmael is not the one He promised to him. In one sense this chapter is the key to the Book of Genesis, and it may be a key to the entire Bible. God's covenant with Abram concerns two important items: a seed and a land. He reveals Himself to Abram by a new name—*El Shaddai*, the Almighty God—and He also gives Abram a new name. Up to this point his name was Abram; now it is changed to Abraham. *Abram* means “high father,” and *Abraham* means “father of a multitude.” That Ishmael was not the son God promised to Abraham is the thing this chapter makes very clear.<sup>1</sup>

### **Genesis 17:1**

**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.**

**[ninety years old and nine]** The twenty-fourth year in Canaan (Genesis 12:4). Avraham is 99 years old when this appearance of God to Abraham occurs. So, 13 years has passed between the final words of chapter 16, and these first words of chapter 17. Anything that went on in that 13-year period, we are kept apart from. But, there are few things we can know: **1)** Hagar had her son, Ishmael, and he is now about 13 years old. **2)** Sarai is still without child. She is not just barren of a male child, but of any children whatsoever. **3)** The clan is still living in Canaan. **4)** Very likely, there has been no contact between God and Abraham during that 13-year period. **5)** The first covenant Yahweh made with Abraham remains intact.

**[appeared to Abram]** Fifth appearance to Abraham (note, \*Genesis 12:7). God's appearance to Abram is an example of a “theophany,” a visible manifestation of the invisible God. Though God told Moses that “no one may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20), he has occasionally allowed believers to catch a glimpse of him in various forms (Genesis 18:2; Exodus 24:9-18; Exodus 33:18-23; Judges 13:17-23; Ezekiel 1:26-28). Sometimes these theophanies are referred to as the “angel of the LORD”. God's ultimate self-revelation would be in the person of Jesus Christ.

**[Almighty God]** First OT occurrence of the title “**God Almighty**” [*'el shaddai*], which is used several times in Gen (17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; cf. 49:25), 48 times in the OT. Some scholars suggest that *shaddai* is related to the Assyrian word *sadu* that means breast or mountain or both. Early Jewish scholars claimed that it was derived from *sh-da*, meaning, “He who is sufficient.” The LXX gives us *hikanos*, “sufficient.” Some words describing parts of the body were also used for geographical descriptions; e.g., “mouth” of a river, “foot” of a mountain. So *shaddai*, when used of God, refers either to His ability to supply abundantly [“the Abundant One”] or to His majestic strength [“the Almighty One”].

**Hebrew:** *El* (H410) *Shaddai* (H7706), Almighty God. It is found 218 times. *El* (H410) signifies "Strong One" and *Shaddai* (H7706), "the Breasted One." This pictures God as the Strong-Nourisher, Strength-Giver, Satisfier, and All-Bountiful, the Supplier of the needs of His people. Its first occurrence here reveals God as the Fruitful-One who was to multiply Abraham abundantly; the Life-Giver who was to restore life to Abraham and Sarah who were as good as dead where offspring was concerned. Through Him, they would have future offspring as the dust (Genesis 13:16), stars (Genesis 15:5), and sand in number (Genesis 22:17).

**Nachmanides:** '*E-il Sha-dai*,' These are two distinct Divine names, each one descriptive in itself. Now the meaning of the word *eil* is "mighty", derived from the expression, *Eilei Moab* (the mighty ones of Moab). The meaning of *Sha-dai*, according to Rashi, is "He whose G-dship suffices for every creature." In the book *Moreh Nebuchim* the Rabbi explained that the name *Sha-dai* signifies "he who is sufficient." That is to say, He does not require the existence of what He created or the conservation of any other being; rather, His existence is self-sufficient. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained in the name of the Nagid that the name is from the root *shodeid*, meaning "victor and prevailer over the hosts of heaven." This is the correct interpretation, for the name *Sha-dai* represents the attribute of power which conducts the world, concerning which the Sages have said that it is "the attribute of Justice of the world below."

The reason for mentioning this Divine Name now is that with it are done the hidden miracles for the righteous<sup>1</sup>

**[walk before me]** set thyself to walk—be firmly purposed, thoroughly determined to obey, before me; for my eye is ever on thee, therefore ever consider that God seeth thee. Who can imagine a stronger incitement to conscientious, persevering obedience?

**[walk before me, and be thou perfect]** The standard of holiness and perfection was no higher under the Abrahamic covenant than it is under the new covenant. If God could help Abraham be perfect, could He not also help believers in Christ today to be the same? According to Scripture, the state of perfection and holiness required by God is not explained away by the theory that all saved men are sinners and sin every day. See Luke 1:74-75; Romans 6:1-23; Romans 8:1-13; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 1:18-30; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:9-20; 1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 2 Cor. 7:1; Galatians 5:16-26; Ephes. 4:22-24; Col. 3:5-10; 2 Tim. 2; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 1:7-9; 1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:5-10; 1 John 5:1-4,18. Abraham had the same gospel we have (Galatians 3:8; Romans 4).

**Chrysostom; Abraham was Ninety-nine Years Old:** After the tenth year he took Ishmael, his child by the maidservant, and considered that the promises had been fulfilled for him in the child. The patriarch was, you remember, the text tells us, eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. The loving God, however, exercised the virtue of the just man for a still further period of thirteen years. When god saw that he had been purified like gold in a furnace for a long period of time and had rendered the just man's virtue

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<sup>1</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

more conspicuous and resplendent, Scripture says, “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him again.” Why did God delay so long? Not simply that we should get to know the just man’s endurance and his great virtue, but for us to see as well the extraordinary degree of his power. You see, when nature lost its potency and was now useless for childbearing, his body being wasted and chilled with old age, God put into effect the promise to demonstrate his peculiar power.<sup>2</sup>

**Ambrose; Be Blameless:** The words “be blameless” are addressed to Abraham, to whom had been given the spirit of wisdom, holy, marvelously agile, unpolluted. The soul of the just man, therefore, must be in training night and day, ever on the lookout, never indulging in sleep but on perpetual watch, intent on God, so as to understand the things that are and to comprehend the causes of each. But wisdom is also the interpreter of future things: “She knows the things of old and infers the things to come. She understands turns of speech and the solutions of riddles. She has foreknowledge of signs and wonders and of the outcome of seasons and time.” One who has obtained her, therefore cannot but be good and perfect, because he possesses every virtue and is the very image of goodness. Even the sophists of this world drew from this text a definition of such a wise man: The wise man is (by definition) a good man and an accomplished communicator.<sup>3</sup>

## **Genesis 17:2**

**And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.**

**[covenant]** Thirteen times in this chapter we find the word *covenant*. For it to appear thirteen times in twenty-seven verses obviously gives great importance to the covenant.

Abraham’s body was dead, Sarah’s womb actually was a tomb—it was the place of death. And out of death came life: Isaac was born. Paul concludes that fourth chapter by saying this about the Lord Jesus: “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Life out of death—that is the promise God is now making to this man. Abram is 99 years old, and that means that Sarai is 89 years old. When Isaac was born, Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90.

**(Rom. 4:17-25)** <sup>17</sup>*(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.* <sup>18</sup>*Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.* <sup>19</sup>*And being not weak in faith, he considered not*

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<sup>2</sup> Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>3</sup> Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

*his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: <sup>20</sup>He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; <sup>21</sup>And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. <sup>22</sup>And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.*

*<sup>23</sup>Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; <sup>24</sup>But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; <sup>25</sup>Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*

**[And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.]** The 20th prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 17:2, fulfilled and being fulfilled). Next prophecy is in Genesis 17:4.

### **Genesis 17:3**

**And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,**

**[fell on his face] Three Kinds of Prostrations**

1. From being overpowered by God's presence (Genesis 15:12-17; Deut. 9:18,25; Judges 13:20; Ezekiel 1:28; Ezekiel 3:23; Ezekiel 43:3; Ezekiel 44:4; Daniel 8:17; Daniel 10:5-19; Matthew 17:6; Acts 9:4; Acts 10:10; Rev. 1:17)
2. Voluntary prostrations in prayer (Genesis 17:3,17; Leviticus 9:24; Numbers 14:5; Numbers 16:4,22,45; Numbers 20:6; Numbers 22:31; Deut. 9:18,25; Joshua 5:14; Joshua 7:6; 1 Kings 18:39; Luke 17:16; Rev. 5:8,14; Rev. 7:11; Rev. 11:16)
3. Prostrations under burdens of prayer (Joshua 7:6; Matthew 26:39; Mark 3:11; Mark 5:22; Mark 7:25; Mark 14:35; Luke 5:12; John 11:32)

**Nachmanides:** *“And Abram fell on his face”* The purpose of this expression was to direct his mind towards the prophecy. When the prophecy concerning the commandment of circumcision was completed, Abraham rose and stood. When the word from heaven came to him a second time, saying to him, *As for Sarai thy wife*, etc., he once again fell on his face to direct his mind towards the prophecy, and he also prayed concerning Ishmael, in line with the verses: *and they fell upon their faces*, and said, *O G-d, the G-d of the spirits*, etc.; *That I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

## **Genesis 17:4**

**As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.**

God says to Abram that he will be a father of many nations, not just the Jewish nation. Just think of it: for four thousand years, there have been two great lines—the line of Ishmael and the line of Isaac—and there have been millions in each line. Added to that, there is a spiritual seed, for we Christians are called the children of Abraham by faith in Christ, Romans 4:16.

*(Rom. 4:16) Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,*

The 21st prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 17:4-8, fulfilled and being fulfilled). Next, prophecy is in Genesis 17:15.

**Torah Class:** And, in this new appearance, God adds a covenant to the earlier one He has already made with him, by declaring that Abraham will be the father of many nations. And, by the way, this does not necessarily mean only Hebrew nations nor, even more importantly, will every one of these nations be of the line of the covenant promise.

The Hebrew word used here for “nations” is goyim. The usage of the word “goyim” has changed a little over time, but has held basically the same meaning: goyim means nations or people that are NOT of Hebrew descent. Now, it can also have the plain meaning of any nation, Hebrew or not; the context is the key. Today, the most common usage of goyim when it applies to a person is “gentile”...a non-Hebrew, or a non-Jew.

Now, did Abraham take the word “goyim”, nation, to mean “non-Hebrew” people? No. Abraham was just, himself, becoming the first Hebrew. To Abraham, this simply meant that not only would his offspring be many, but also that they would separate into several people groups, and become several distinct and separate nations. Yet, as we have the benefit of looking back 4000 years, what we will see is that indeed, Abraham fathered both Hebrews AND non-Hebrews. Abraham fathered the Jewish people as well as a number of gentile people groups. We’ll see that shortly.<sup>5</sup>

## **Genesis 17:5**

**Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.**

[Abram] means “high father” or “father of the height” or “exalted father.”

[Abraham] means “father of a multitude.”

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<sup>5</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

**McGee** tells a story about Abram: Suppose that one morning Abram and Sarai get up, and as they are working around the tent there suddenly appears a group of traders at their little oasis created by the spring at Hebron. Abram goes out to meet them, and they want to know if they can water their camels. Abram goes out to meet them, and the conversation probably sounded like this: “Sure, help yourselves, and I’ll feed your stock. Would you like to stay for awhile?” They say, “No, we’re on a business trip and are in a hurry to get down to Egypt.”

One of the men then says, “My name is Allah,” and the other says, “My name is Ali Baba. What’s your name?” When Abram replies, “My name is High Father,” the men exclaim, “My! Boy or girl?” Abram says, “I don’t have any children.” The men just laugh and say, “You mean to tell us that you don’t have any children and your name is Abram? How in the world can you be a father and not have children?” And they ride off across the desert, laughing.

Six months later, they come by again. When he goes out to greet them again, they all begin to laugh, “Hello there, High Father!” But he says, “My name is not High Father anymore. It is now Father of a Multitude.” The traders say, “My, must have been twins!” And then they really laugh when Abraham says, “No, I still don’t have any children.” They say, “How ridiculous can that be?”

Here was a man who was a father before he had any children. Abraham was Abraham, father of a multitude, by faith at that time. But four thousand years later, where you and I sit, we can say that God sure made this good. The name stuck, if you please, and he is still Abraham, the father of a multitude.<sup>6</sup>

Rabbi Solomon Jarchi defines the name cabalistically, and says that its numeral letters amount to two hundred and forty-eight, which, says he, is the exact number of the bones in the human body. But before the ה he was added, which stands for five, it was five short of this perfection.

Rabbi Lipman says the ה he being added as the fourth letter, signifies that the Messiah should come in the fourth millenary of the world.

Clarius and others think that the ה he, which is one of the letters of the Tetragrammaton, (or word of four letters, יהוה Yehovah), was added for the sake of dignity, God associating the patriarch more nearly to himself, by thus imparting to him a portion of his own name.

The *he*, is the sound of a breath and is associated with the Holy Spirit. There may be a connection with God filling Abraham with the Holy Spirit and putting the Holy Spirit in his name. It is interesting to look at the names of God, and see that *abba* means Father, a familiar term. *Ab, Ben, Ruch a cadasch* – The words for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This may be where the magic word Abracadabra originated.

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<sup>6</sup>McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

**Name changing.** Names had power in the ancient world. By naming the animals, Adam demonstrated his mastery over them. In a similar way, God's changing Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah signifies both a reiteration of the covenant promise and the designation of these people as God's chosen servants.

**Torah Class:** In V5, we see God change Abraham's name (this won't be the last time a person's name is changed): he goes from being called Avram (spell), to being called AvraHAM (spell). That is, from being called exalted father, to father of many...or, in a better translation, father of multitudes. This is also the point at which one could reasonably say Abraham became a Hebrew. Now, at exactly what point in time Abraham started calling himself, and certain offspring, "Hebrew", we don't know. In fact there is even disagreement over what "Hebrew" means. It's generally accepted in the bible scholar community that it means "one who crossed over". Bible anthropologists and archaeologists, however, will tell you that it is probable that the word Hebrew was a word that did not come until much later in time. And, it would have come from an oriental word, Ipuru (spell). Ipuru was used in Canaan and other nearby areas as a term simply meaning foreigners, or wanderers that had no specific nation they could be identified with. Certainly, at the point in history we are talking about, Abraham and his clan were betwixt and between: although they came from Ur, they no longer considered themselves Ur-Chasdim, that is, home was no longer Ur of Chaldea back in Mesopotamia. Yet, Abraham's clan certainly had not yet established a separate identity, nor could they point to a place in Canaan that they could say they belonged to. For though God promised them the Land of Canaan as their inheritance, they had yet to claim that inheritance.<sup>7</sup>

**Augustine; "From that Time"** However, a question arises here which should not be passed over and which may perhaps also quite independently, be bothering some of you. What does it mean that when the name of Abraham, this man Jacobs's grandfather, was changed (he was previously called Abram, you see, and God changed his name and said you shall not be called Abram, but Abraham). From that time on he was never called Abram. Search in the Scriptures, and you will see that earlier on, before he received another name, he was only called Abram. After he had received the new one he was only called Abraham. This man Jacob, however, heard the same words when he received another name: You shall not be called Jacob, but you shall be called Israel. Now search the Scriptures, and see how he was always called either name, both Jacob and Israel. When Abram got another name, he was never called anything but Abraham; when Jacob got another name, he was called Jacob and Israel.

The name Abraham was to receive its explanation in this world, because it was here that he became the father of many nations, from which his name is derived. The name Israel, on the other hand, belongs to the next world, where we will see God. So the people of God, the Christian people, is in this world and this time bother Jacob and Israel; Jacob in our actual situation, Israel in our hopeful expectation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>8</sup> Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, IntersVarsity Press

### **Genesis 17:6**

**And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.**

Now, this covenant in V6 about fathering many nations is another of those permanent, unconditional, covenants; all Abraham could do is be blessed by it, for he had no real obligations within the covenant.

One can well imagine that Abram was hurt by the suppressed smiles on the faces of his men when he told them to call him Abraham, meaning the “father of a multitude of nations”—when he was 99 years old (vv. 1, 24).

[**nations**] Abraham was the progenitor of Israelites, Ishmaelites, Midianites, Edomites, and other Arabians (Genesis 17:20; Genesis 25:1-3,24-27).

### **Genesis 17:7**

**And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.**

[**everlasting covenant**] If it is everlasting, is it good today? It certainly is.

[**to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee**] A fulfillment of Genesis 9:26.

### **Genesis 17:8**

**And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.**

[**everlasting possession**] If it is everlasting, is it good today? It certainly is, and countries like America should be very careful about wanting Israel to give up that land for peace.

God tells Abraham what *He* will do. God says, “*will.*” “I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee .... And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed .... And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee ... all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.”

God has made a covenant with these people that is an everlasting covenant. Since it is, it is not one that will be easily broken, and it is not one that is going to run out. God did not give them a ninety-nine-year lease on the land. God gave them an *everlasting* possession.<sup>9</sup>

**Torah Class:** let's take a look at verse 8. It says that God is giving the land to Abraham and his descendants forever. I know we've talked about this quite a bit, and I don't want to repeat myself. Yet, I need to make something clear that is so often missed: there is a difference between Israel having been given the land, and Israel living in the land. The Bible term we usually find referring to Israel living in the land is "possess". Possess doesn't mean quite the same thing we usually think of; possess means more to "occupy". It doesn't really refer to ownership. Let me give you an analogy. You buy a car. The local bank finances it. Until you fully pay for it, They own the car. Right? It is not legally your car, you are just using it. So, the Bank owns the car, but it is put into your possession until you either pay it off, or default. If you fail to pay, the bank re-posses the car.....that is, they have always owned it, but they now take it from your possession and take possession of it for themselves. That's why it's called repossess. Yet, notice, that in all cases, THEY have owned the car. It's just that sometimes you had possession, and now they do!

From the moment God made the covenant with Abraham, the land has belonged to the Hebrews but the time hadn't yet come for them to possess it. Even for the 400 years Israel spent in Egypt, Israel already owned the land of Canaan....they just didn't possess it.....they didn't occupy it. People tend to confuse things and say that Israel lost ownership of the land when God removed them to Babylon for their sins. And yet again, when the Romans gained control and destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Not so. The ownership remained with Israel. God simply refused to allow Israel to occupy the land.....to possess it....for an extended time. This is hardly splitting hairs; it is just understanding the difference between possessing and owning. And, it is rather pertinent to those that say, well Israel lost possession of the land for 1900 years, so they don't have a right to it anymore. Wrong. They're the ONLY ones that have right to it, because despite not possessing it at times, they've NEVER stopped owning it. I hope you see this rather critical difference.

Further, the phrase of the promise in vs. 7 whereby the covenant will continue between God and Abraham.....and then it says....."and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant".....the part about the offspring is not a throw-in statement. This was pure legal terminology from that era. Law codes from that era have been found, and it was understood that there were limitations as to how property could be handed down, before it reverted to some king or prince who laid claim to that area. By inclusion of those words "and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant".....it LEGALLY for that day meant that Abraham's descendants kept that property, and could continue to hand it down, without restriction. So, understand, this was legal terminology, not hyperbole.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

<sup>10</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

## **Genesis 17:9**

**And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.**

## **Genesis 17:10**

**This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.**

**Torah Class:** God was about to make yet another covenant with Abraham, and while this next covenant would be permanent, perpetual, it was most definitely conditional. It was also bi-lateral, as opposed to unilateral: that is, Abraham, and his descendants, had obligations to perform to keep this covenant intact. However, this covenant also was individual; each person of Abraham's line had the responsibility to accept this covenant for himself, or not. In other words, the person who broke the covenant would only affect the provisions of the covenant as it pertained to himself; the covenant would still remain in effect for each individual who chose to accept it. This covenant the Jews call B'rit milah: we call it circumcision.

Now, understand what this new covenant of circumcision means. In the first covenant with Abraham....which God just said remains fully intact.....Abraham was just a passive participant. He didn't have to do anything. But, in the new covenant, meant for Abraham's offspring, there WAS an obligation: circumcision as a SIGN that they chose to participate in the Abrahamic covenant; which meant, they gave their loyalty to the God of Abraham. Now, as we will see as time goes on, this covenant of circumcision follows ONLY a certain line of Abraham's descendants. It doesn't mean that ALL of his children will be eligible. Just the "who" is part of what will be called "the line of promise"? Hebrews, which will eventually lead to the Israelites.

Basically, each male following Abraham, who expects to be able to partake in the blessings of the covenants that God gave to Abraham, must AS AN OBLIGATION be circumcised. That is, ACTIVE participation is required.

Now, I don't need to get overly graphic about circumcision, because this procedure of removing the males' genital foreskin is a common practice today in most societies, and thus is common knowledge. And, usually it is done by non-Jewish families simply for medical reasons, and even the need for that is disputed. Jews, to this day, have a bris, a circumcision ceremony, for each male child, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after his birth.

The practice of male circumcision existed long before this instruction from God to Abraham.....it was not a new invention, any more than the covenant ceremony we saw God participate in with Abraham was a new invention. Rather, it had been employed in many cultures of that day as either part of the marriage ceremony or, more typically, as a sign of entrance into puberty. One thing God did was to take the trauma out of it by having it performed not on a young teenage boy, but on an 8-day-old baby. Plus, God employed this existing rite as a sort of loyalty oath; and He added great meaning to it. Just as with stars and planets, God used things from nature when He chooses to create a sign for His own good purposes. After all, every one of these natural things owed it's

very existence to God.....the sad fact that so many then, as now, had decided to attach their own meanings, like astrology, to the things God made was simply a perversion.

But, here's the thing: remember that standard covenant protocol required shedding of blood, typically animal blood, and the cutting of flesh, typically animal flesh, and the separating of that cut-up flesh into two groups. Here, with circumcision, the covenant procedure occurred using the male body as the sacrificial flesh; the flesh was cut, blood shed, and the cut-up flesh separated; one part buried in the ground, the other remaining on the body. Quite literally, Abraham and his male descendants WORE the covenant, and WERE the covenant. The penalty for refusing the circumcision covenant was stern: you were to be cut-off from your people. This was both spiritual and literal. When a male descendant of Abraham refused the circumcision, or when a parent refused to have their boy-child have a B'rit Milah on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after birth, they were physically separated from the clan, and they were spiritually separated from God. They were no longer Hebrews and could claim no right to any of God's promises.

This is why God, through Paul, explained that what God really wanted was circumcised hearts, not circumcised flesh. God wanted our hearts to accept and wear the covenant that came to us at so great a price. By accepting Christ, Paul says we have our hearts circumcised: we are very literally accepting God's covenant protocol upon ourselves. And, since the advent of Yeshua, and the New Covenant He established, we find ourselves in the same position as Abraham: either we are circumcised by accepting the New Covenant which is the blood of Christ, or we refuse it. If we accept it, we are perpetually a part of the chosen of God. If we refuse, we are cutoff..... separated....from God's people, and from God Himself. While that may startle some of you, Paul's words probably knocked some of those Jews he was speaking to, to their knees. Because they well understood all the in's and out's of covenant ceremony and symbolism. But, because the Church has, for so long, turned our backs on the Jewish nature of the Bible, the impact of things like the act of covenant making has not been understood.<sup>11</sup>

### **Book of Jasher 17:17 – 18:3:**

17 At that time the Lord appeared to him and he said to him, I will make my covenant between me and thee, and I will greatly multiply thy seed, and this is the covenant which I make between me and thee, that every male child be circumcised, thou and thy seed after thee.

18 At eight days old shall it be circumcised, and this covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

19 And now therefore thy name shall no more be called Abram but Abraham, and thy wife shall no more be called Sarai but Sarah.

20 For I will bless you both, and I will multiply your seed after you that you shall become a great nation, and kings shall come forth from you.

### **CHAPTER 18**

1 And Abraham rose and did all that God had ordered him, and he took the men of his household and those bought with his money, and he circumcised them as the Lord had commanded him.

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<sup>11</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

2 And there was not one left whom he did not circumcise, and Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised in the flesh of their foreskin; thirteen years old was Ishmael when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.<sup>12</sup>

**Nachmanides:** Now they have said concerning the reason for the commandment of circumcision that He has thereby placed a reminder in the organ of lust, which is the source of much trouble and sin, in order that it should not be used excepting where it is commendatory and permissible.<sup>13</sup>

**Chumash; The Last Word:** The covenant of circumcision has a three-fold implication:

- a) It is one of the 613 mitzvos, like any other.
- b) It represents the general connection (covenant) between a Jew and God via the 613 mitzvos.
- c) It represents the intrinsic connection (covenant) that a Jew has with God by virtue of being Jewish.

It is this third aspect (c) that began with Avraham our father, for he was the first Jew from which all other Jews are descended, and he struck a covenant with God. The other two aspects (a & b) represent a further development of that initial covenant via the giving of the Torah.<sup>14</sup>

### **Genesis 17:11**

**And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.**

### **Genesis 17:12**

**And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.**

Have you noticed how meticulous the record concerning the birth of Christ is? All the law was fulfilled in connection with the birth of this little baby. It is recorded that He was the son of Abraham, the son of David; He was in the line, and on the eighth day He was circumcised. He was “born under the law,” Paul says in Galatians 4:4.

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<sup>12</sup> The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

<sup>13</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>14</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

### **Three classes of persons to be circumcised:**

1. All male children of Israelites
2. All male servants and children
3. All males of foreigners in Israel

### **Circumcision the 8<sup>th</sup> day:**

Vitamin K, clotting element, not formed in an infant until the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

Prothrombin, also necessary for clotting

- 3<sup>rd</sup> day: 30% of normal

- 8<sup>th</sup> day: peaks at 110%, then levels off at 100% of normal.

How did Moses know to circumcise on the 8<sup>th</sup> day?

**Torah Class:** Now, there is a principle and pattern contained in verse 12 that we need to be aware of: that it was NOT just those from Abraham's gene pool that could become part of this covenant. Here, the home-born slave or purchased slave of a Hebrew....that is a foreigner....could be included in the covenant by being circumcised. Understand, by Law, a purchased slave BECAME a family member. They had almost all rights of a family member.... almost, but not quite. Therefore, a baby born to a purchased slave ALSO became a family member. This is so foreign to the usual picture we have of what slavery amounted to in Bible times, among the Hebrews. The foreign slaves of Hebrews weren't generally mistreated.....because they were family! The concept of slave ownership among Hebrews is VERY close to our modern concept of adoption. And, do not confuse slave ownership to indentured servitude. Being a bond-servant....someone who is your servant only for a period of time while they repay a debt owed to you.....did NOT qualify that person to be a family member. ONLY a purchased slave was a family member. It's kind of reversed from what might seem logical to us.

So, very early on the idea that genetics.....blood lines.....wasn't the sole determining factor for membership in the holy community, was established. Here, beginning with Abraham, a foreigner who was willing to follow the Hebrew ways and the Hebrew God, could be given full citizenship as a Hebrew, and with it all the covenant rights that any natural born Hebrew would have. This is the same principle that we, as gentiles, rely on by being grafted into the covenants given through Abraham, Moses, and Yeshua.....covenants that were given to ISRAEL, and no one else.<sup>15</sup>

### **Genesis 17:13**

**He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.**

The second of three times the Abrahamic covenant is declared to be eternal (Genesis 17:7,13,19).

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<sup>15</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

### **Genesis 17:14**

**And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.**

[cut off] Cut off by death. So used 145 times (Genesis 9:11; Exodus 12:15,19; Exodus 31:14; Leviticus 7:20,21,25,27; Psalm 101:5; Isaiah 53:8; Daniel 9:26; Zech. 14:2; Malachi 2:12). The manner of death is not stated. One was simply under the sentence of death if he willfully neglected the sign of the covenant. The letter of the law was evidently not carried out, for children were not circumcised in the wilderness (Joshua 5:2-10).

### **Genesis 17:15**

**And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall* her name *be*.**

[Sarai] my lady; my princess

[Sarah] lady; princess; princess of the multitude

If old Abraham is going to be a father of nations, then Sarah is going to be a mother of nations.

The 22nd prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 17:15-16, fulfilled and being fulfilled). Next, prophecy in Genesis 17:19.

### **Genesis 17:16**

**And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother* of nations; kings of people shall be of her.**

Sarah, “Princess.” It is the feminine form of *sar*, “prince”; and was fitting for one whose seed would produce kings (v. 16; cf. v. 6). Hearing this, Abraham laughed because it seemed incredible that a barren 90-year-old woman could give birth to a son. Abraham had assumed that his descendants would come through Ishmael.

### **Genesis 17:17**

**Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall *a child* be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?**

Questions 21-22. Next, question in Genesis 18:9. Jesus spoke of the joy Abraham had here (John 8:56).

The above verses are basically God conveying to Abraham that Sarah, his wife, is miraculously going to give birth to a child. Why miraculous? She had a dead womb. She was incapable of producing children which is why she gave her handmaiden Hagar to Abraham to have a child in her stead. And, even if her body had been functioning properly she was well beyond childbearing years, as Abraham himself attests; for, at this time, Sarah was 90 years old.

### **Genesis 17:18**

**And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!**

Abraham was concerned when he learned Ishmael was excluded from God's plan to bring Messiah into the world. God assured him of His plan for Ishmael in Genesis 17:20-21.

**Torah Class:** When God tells Abraham that Sarah is going to give him a son, Abraham responds with these infamous words in V18: “If only Ishmael could live in your presence!” I hope you all hear the pain, shock, and desperation with which Abraham uttered this plea. Abraham was happy with Ishmael. He loved Ishmael. He considered Ishmael his firstborn son. He NEVER even remotely thought of Ishmael as anything other than his legitimate, much loved, heir. And, even before God issued His answer, Abraham knew what was coming.<sup>16</sup>

### **Genesis 17:19**

**And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.**

Hebrew *sòhahaq* means “to laugh.” It is the root verb from which the word Isaac is derived. [Ishmael was not forgotten, however, for God said he would have many descendants also. Even the number of Ishmael’s sons—12—was predicted. It is noticeable that both Abraham (Genesis 17:17) and Sarah laughed when they heard the announcement concerning the birth of Isaac (Genesis 18:12-15).

The second of seven persons named before birth.

The 23rd prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 17:19-21, fulfilled). Next, prophecy is in Genesis 18:10.

**[with his seed after him]** Fullfilled in Jacob (Genesis 28:12-15), David (2 Samuel 7), and Christ (Isaiah 42:6; Isaiah 49:8; Hebrews 8:6).

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<sup>16</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

In V19, God says “NO!” to Abraham’s plea. That the child that Sarah was about to produce would be Abraham’s heir, and further, that this boy-child would be the one who God would establish, and continue, His covenant with. And, that this child’s name would be Yitzchak, meaning laughter, because both Abraham and Sarah had laughed at the astounding notion that they, at their advanced age, would have a child.

Now, let’s be very clear here: God emphatically rejected Ishmael as the one who would carry on the line of the covenant promise that God had made with Abraham. This is not conjecture. Rather, it would be Isaac, Yitzchak, who would be the one. Today, Muslims claim that the scriptures have been modified to reflect Isaac as the favored son, when it should have been Ishmael. Here is another division by God; a separation, and an election.

You see, Isaac would be grandfather of the Israelites, who would eventually bring the Savior into the world; while Ishmael would be grandfather to the Arabs. Understand, Islam is not a *race* of people; it is but the *religion* the Arabs adopted some 6 centuries after Christ’s death and resurrection. But, the Muslims see no difference for they call Ishmael, and Abraham, the father of Islam.<sup>17</sup>

**Nachmanides:** “*Aval Sarah they wife*” This is like the verse, “*Aval*” she has no son, the word *aval* meaning “only.” He thus said: “Only the son of whom I informed you, your wife Sarah will give birth to and with him will I establish My covenant forever and with his seed after him; and Ishmael I will bless by making his children numerous, but this will not be because of My covenant with him.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Genesis 17:20**

**And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.**

See the names of these twelve princes, Genesis 25:12-16. From Ishmael proceeded the various tribes of the Arabs, called also Saracens by Christian writers. They were anciently, and still continue to be, a very numerous and powerful people. “It was somewhat wonderful, and not to be foreseen by human sagacity,” says Bishop Newton, “that a man’s whole posterity should so nearly resemble him, and retain the same inclinations, the same habits, and the same customs, throughout all ages!

**Gen. 25:12-16** <sup>12</sup>*Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s handmaid, bare unto Abraham: <sup>13</sup>And these are the names*

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<sup>17</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>18</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

*of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, <sup>14</sup>And Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa, <sup>15</sup>Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah: <sup>16</sup>These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations.*

**[I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly]**

The terms of the Hagaric covenant were stated to Hagar (Genesis 16:10-12; Genesis 21:18) and Abraham (Genesis 17:20-21; Genesis 21:13), but not to Ishmael.

**Torah Class:** Yet, how quickly we tend to overlook what God says to Abraham in V20. Referring to Ishmael, God says, “I have blessed him”. Or, in a better translation, “I am blessing him”.

Isaac is the line of promise. But, Ishmael is also blessed.....just not as being the line of promise. In fact, it is noteworthy that just as Israel would consist of 12 princes.....that is, 12 tribes.....so would the descendants of Ishmael be made up of 12 tribes.

It's important to remember that not only is Abraham the true father of the Arabs, just as he is the true father of Israel; but that Shem, the blessed line of good, is the forefather of both Arabs and Jews. Both of these people groups are Semites.

Has Ishmael been blessed? Well, not only have the Arabs grown into an enormous population, far outstripping the number of Israelites, but look in our time how they have been blessed. 100 years ago the Middle East was looked upon as perhaps the most worthless expanse of land on the entire planet. Yet, there, under the dry desert sand, they have also discovered about half of the Earth's oil reserves, which have made the Arabs among the wealthiest people in the world. Unfortunately, the Arab culture has remained tribal, and so only a few of the most powerful benefit from this vast wealth.

In any case, Ishmael, 13 years old at the time of this blessing, is circumcised, along with Abraham, and every male, free and slave, in Abraham's household.<sup>19</sup>

### **Genesis 17:21**

**But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.**

This was fulfilled in Genesis 21.

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<sup>19</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

### **Genesis 17:22**

**And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.**

In other words, Abraham, you might just as well keep quiet. God has already decided this. My friend, there are things which you and I might as well stop petitioning the Lord for. There are times when you've said enough and you don't need to say any more. Sometimes folk just pester the Lord in a prayer when they already have the answer—which, of course, is *No!* God says to Abraham, "Let this alone, now. This is enough; you need not mention this anymore. I have not accepted it, and I do not intend to." God is going to hear and answer other prayers of Abraham. We will find that God listens to Abraham. However, in the case of His covenant, He is making it with Isaac not with Ishmael. That is settled, and Abraham might just as well stop trying to change God's mind. A great many people today pray about things that God maybe does not intend to hear or answer at all. I try to be very careful about asking people to pray about certain things. I want at least to feel like there is a reasonable chance of God's hearing it and answering.<sup>20</sup>

### **Genesis 17:23**

**And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.**

### **Genesis 17:24**

**And Abraham *was* ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.**

### **Genesis 17:25**

**And Ishmael his son *was* thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.**

### **Genesis 17:26**

**In the selfsame day *was* Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son.**

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<sup>20</sup>McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

## **Genesis 17:27**

**And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.**

### **Abrahamic Covenant:**

**Genesis 12:** 1) Make a great nation 2) Bless you and your name 3) Make you a blessing  
4) Bless those who bless you, curse those who curse you 5) Give this land to your seed.

**Genesis 15:** 1) Covenant to Abraham's physical seed 2) Land defined: Euphrates to Nile.

**Genesis 17:** 1) Covenant with physical seed, forever 2) Land of Canaan everlasting possession.

### **Adam Clarks Commentary**

THE contents of this chapter may be summed up in a few propositions:—

1. God, in renewing his covenant with Abram, makes an important change in his and Sarai's name; a change which should ever act as a help to their faith, that the promises by which God had bound himself should be punctually fulfilled. However difficult it may be for us to ascertain the precise import of the change then made, we may rest assured that it was perfectly understood by both; and that, as they had received this name from God, they considered it as placing them in a new relation both to their Maker and to their posterity. From what we have already seen, the change made in Abram's name is inscrutable to us; there is something like this in Revelation 2:17: To him that overcometh will I give a white stone, and a NEW NAME—which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it. The full import of the change made in a soul that enters into covenant with God through Christ, is only known to itself; a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy. Hence, even men of learning and the world at large have considered experimental religion as enthusiasm, merely because they have not understood its nature, and have permitted themselves to be carried away by prejudices which they have imbibed perhaps at first through the means of ignorant or hypocritical pretenders to deep piety; but while they have the sacred writings before them, their prejudices and opposition to that without which they cannot be saved are as unprincipled as they are absurd.
2. God gives Abraham a precept, which should be observed, not only by himself, but by all his posterity; for this was to be a permanent sign of that covenant which was to endure for ever. Though the sign is now changed from circumcision to baptism, each of them equally significant, yet the covenant is not changed in any part of its essential meaning. Faith in God through the great sacrifice, remission of sins, and sanctification of the heart, are required by the new covenant as well as by the old.
3. The rite of circumcision was painful and humiliating, to denote that repentance, self-denial, etc., are absolutely necessary to all who wish for redemption in the blood of the covenant; and the putting away this filth of the flesh showed the necessity of a pure heart and a holy life.

4. As eternal life is the free gift of God, he has a right to give it in what way he pleases, and on what terms. He says to Abraham and his seed, Ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and he that doth not so shall be cut off from his people. He says also to sinners in general, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Repent, and believe the Gospel; and, Except ye repent, ye shall perish. These are the terms on which he will bestow the blessings of the old and new covenants. And let it be remembered that stretching out the hand to receive an alms can never be considered as meriting the bounty received, neither can repentance or faith merit salvation, although they are the conditions on which it is bestowed.
5. The precepts given under both covenants were accompanied with a promise of the Messiah. God well knows that no religious rite can be properly observed, and no precept obeyed, unless he impart strength from on high; and he teaches us that that strength must ever come through the promised seed. Hence, with the utmost propriety, we ask every blessing through him, in whom God is well pleased.
6. The precept, the promise, and the rite, were prefaced with, “I am God all-sufficient; walk before me, and be thou perfect.” God, who is the sole object of religious worship, has the sole authority to prescribe that worship, and the rites and ceremonies which shall be used in it; hence he prescribed circumcision and sacrifices under the old law, and baptism and the eucharist under the Gospel; and to render both effectual to the end of their institution, faith in God was indispensably necessary.
7. Those who profess to believe in him must not live as they list, but as he pleases. Though redeemed from the curse of the law, and from the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish Church, they are under the law to Christ, and must walk before him—be in all things obedient to that moral law which is an emanation from the righteousness of God, and of eternal obligation; and let it ever be remembered that Christ is “the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him.” Without faith and obedience there can be no holiness, and without holiness none can see the Lord. Be all that God would have thee to be, and God will be to thee” “all that thou canst possibly require. He never gives a precept but he offers sufficient grace to enable thee to perform it. Believe as he would have thee, and act as he shall strengthen thee, and thou wilt believe all things savingly, and do all things well.

## **PROFILE: ABRAHAM**

We all know that there are consequences to any action we take. What we do can set into motion a series of events that may continue long after we're gone. Unfortunately, when we are making a decision most of us think only of the immediate consequences. These are often misleading because they are short-lived.

Abraham had a choice to make. His decision was between setting out with his family and belongings for parts unknown or staying right where he was. He had to decide between the security of what he already had and the uncertainty of traveling under God's direction. All he had to go on was God's promise to guide and bless him. Abraham could hardly have been expected to visualize how much of the future was resting on his decision of whether to go or stay, but his obedience affected the history of the world. His decision to follow God set into motion the development of the nation that God would eventually use as his own when he visited earth himself. When Jesus Christ came to earth, God's promise was fulfilled; through Abraham the entire world was blessed.

You probably don't know the long-term effects of most decisions you make. But shouldn't the fact that there will be long-term results cause you to think carefully and seek God's guidance as you make choices and take action today?

### **Strengths and accomplishments:**

- His faith pleased God
- Became the founder of the Jewish nation
- Was respected by others and was courageous in defending his family at any cost
- Was not only a caring father to his own family, but practiced hospitality to others
- Was a successful and wealthy rancher
- Usually avoided conflicts, but when they were unavoidable, he allowed his opponent to set the rules for settling the dispute

### **Weakness and mistake:**

- Under direct pressure, he distorted the truth

### **Lessons from his life:**

- God desires dependence, trust, and faith in him—not faith in our ability to please him
- God's plan from the beginning has been to make himself known to all people

### **Vital statistics:**

- Where: Born in Ur of the Chaldeans; spent most of his life in the land of Canaan
- Occupation: Wealthy livestock owner
- Relatives: Brothers: Nahor and Haran. Father: Terah. Wife: Sarah. Nephew: Lot. Sons: Ishmael and Isaac
- Contemporaries: Abimelech, Melchizedek

### **Key verse:**

“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Abraham's story is told in Genesis 11-25. He is also mentioned in Exodus 2:24; Acts 7:2-8; Romans 4; Galatians 3; Hebrews 2, 6, 7, 11.<sup>21</sup>

What does the New Testament emphasize as the central message of Abraham's life? What it emphasizes is not that he, like us, was a lost sinner, but that Abraham was lifted beyond himself by faith.

Hebrews 11:8-19 focuses on three events in Abraham's life that God fondly remembers:

By faith, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered Him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand of the seashore. . . .

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

These three times when reason might well have challenged the spoken word of God, Abraham responded with faith.

It is here, in Abraham's faith-response to God, that we find this basic Bible theme brought into clear focus.

Earlier God had affirmed His existence and His care for men. God had spoken to individuals before, like Noah and Cain. But it is in Abraham that we discover a clear illustration of what has always separated mankind's Noahs from its Cains. It isn't that Cain was intrinsically "worse." Both were men of mixed character. Both did good things, yet found reflected in their actions the taint of sin.

No, what sets men apart as far as relationship with God is concerned has always been a simple thing: faith. Noah trusted God and built an ark in which he and his family were saved. Cain refused to trust God. This led directly to his final bondage to sin, a servitude whose full expression is found in the murder of his brother.

Faith divides man from man. The way you and I respond to God as He speaks His message to us is the critical issue of our lives. This is the message we hear in the story of Abraham. From Abraham we learn much of the nature of that faith which pleases God and frees Him to act in our lives today.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Profile from Life Application Notes*

<sup>22</sup> *What does the New Testament emphasize, Teachers commentary*

## The Abrahamic Covenant

Genesis 12:1-3	God initiated His covenant with Abram when he was living in Ur of the Chaldeans, promising a land, descendants, and blessing.
Genesis 12:4, 5	Abram went with his family to Haran, lived there for a time, and left at the age of 75.
Genesis 13:14-17	After Lot separated from Abram, God again promised the land to him and his descendants.
Genesis 15:1-21	This covenant was ratified when God passed between the sacrificial animals Abram laid before God.
Genesis 17:1-27	When Abram was 99 God renewed His covenant, changing Abram's name to Abraham ("father of a multitude"). Sign of the covenant: circumcision.
Genesis 22:15-18	Confirmation of the covenant because of Abraham's obedience.

The Abrahamic covenant was foundational to other covenants:  
The promise of land in the Palestinian Covenant (Deut 30:1-10)  
The promise of kingly descendants in the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:12-16)  
The promise of blessing in the "Old" and "New" Covenants (Ex 19:3-6; Jer 31:31-40)

<b>The Abrahamic Covenant</b>			
	<b>God's Promise</b>	<b>God's Command</b>	<b>Reaction</b>
<b>Gen. 12:1-3</b>	God promises to make Abram into a great nation and bless all others through him.	Leave your country. Be a blessing.	Abram leaves Ur and goes to Canaan.
<b>Gen. 13:14-18</b>	God promises to multiply Abram's descendants and give Canaan to them forever.		Abram worships God by building an altar.
	<b>God's Covenant</b>	<b>God's Command</b>	<b>Reaction</b>
<b>Gen. 15:1-21</b>	God makes a formal covenant by passing through sacrificial animals. He promises to multiply Abram's descendants and give them the land.	Do not be afraid.	Abram believes.
<b>Gen. 17:1-27</b>	God promises to establish an everlasting covenant with Abram's descendants and promises to give the land as an everlasting possession.	Walk before Me and be blameless. Keep the covenant and circumcise all males as a sign of the covenant.	Abraham circumcises all males in his household.
<b>Gen. 18:1-18</b>	God promises to give Sarah a son.		Sarah laughs.
<b>Gen. 22:1-19</b>	God promises to make Abraham's descendants numerous and to bless all nations through them.	Sacrifice your son, Isaac. (Then God provided a ram to sacrifice instead.)	Abraham obeys.
<b>Gen. 26:23-25</b>	God promises to increase Isaac's descendants	Do not be afraid, for I am with you.	Isaac builds an altar and calls on God.
<b>Gen. 35:9-15</b>	God promises to multiply Jacob's descendants and give them the land.		Jacob sets up a stone pillar and pours oil on it.

In being fruitful for God, we have nothing in ourselves that will accomplish the task. Abraham and Sarah had tried their own plan, and it failed miserably. Jesus said, “Without Me, ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). “We say that we depend on the Holy Spirit,” wrote Vance Havner, “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.”

There is a story 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.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1991). *Be obedient* (Ge 17:3). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.