

# GENESIS 17

## WHAT'S IN A NAME

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*“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet.”*

Juliet spoke this in act 2 of Romeo and Juliet. She was troubled by the fact that she was forbidden to love and marry Romeo due to the fact that they were from rival families: her family, the Capulets and his family, the Montagues.

I don’t know if that is even required reading in schools anymore, but many of us have at least read the “Cliff’s Notes” of selected works of Shakespeare. The point Juliet made was a good one. No matter the difference in the family names and stations, Romeo was still her love. You can call a rose whatever you like, but that doesn’t change the fact that it smells sweet. And for the most part that is the way our culture looks at a name.

However, that is not at all the case, Biblically speaking. Eve was so named because she was the “mother of all living.” Jacob was renamed Israel after a night of wrestling with God. Simon was renamed Peter after his revelation that Jesus was the Christ. So, at least Biblically speaking, a name means a great deal.

In another respect, when it comes to God, who has many different names, a name is a vehicle whereby an aspect of His character is communicated. We will see another one of those names today.

Last week in Genesis we saw how Sarai and Abram got in the flesh and attempted to fulfill God's plans for them without God. They tried to get ahead of God. They were tired of waiting on God. They wanted their piece of the pie and they wanted it right then. We also talked about how we are the same way. We see things and we tend to want them right now. We want what is seen as the good life and we want to achieve it right now. Many times we don't consult God on how chasing things affects His plans for our lives.

We saw how God ministered to Hagar and Ishmael. This week we will see how God responds to Abram and Sarai. The natives are restless and He knows it. Today God will again confirm His covenant with Abram, but He will also take it a step further. Let's look at Genesis 17.

***Gen 17:1*** *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.*

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

***Gen 17:3*** *Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying:*

***Gen 17:4*** *"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.*

***Gen 17:5*** *No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.*

**Gen 17:6** *I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.*

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

**Gen 17:8** *Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."*

**Gen 17:9** *And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.*

First of all: 13 years have passed since chapter 16. In the Bible we find that many times it is a matter of years between the times that God spoke to His people on certain things. This doesn't mean that God hasn't spoken to Abraham in 13 years, nor does it mean that it has been 13 years since they have spoken about this subject, but it does show that God waited until it was time for Abram and Sarai to conceive before He told Abram about the addition to His covenant. God doesn't have to retell the same old story. He just confirms and reconfirms at the perfect interval. We can't let the doubt creep in between the conversations.

When Abram was 99 God appeared to him and gave him another revelation. What was it? God approached Abram with a new name. there is a lot of renaming in this chapter. Always pay attention to proper names in the OT. Why did come with a new name? He did so because He is revealing a new aspect of Himself to Abram. He states that He is God Almighty! In Hebrew this is "El Shaddai."

There are many names for God in scripture. Why so many names? Each different name reveals to us a new aspect of God. I personally don't believe that there is limit to the number of names God has. God is infinite. Therefore there are an infinite number of facets to Him.

In this instance we see *El*, the common Semitic word for God that highlights the particular attribute of God necessary to fulfill this part of the Abrahamic covenant. In this context, God's power will enable Sarai to bear a son to Abram at age 90.

### *WALK BEFORE AND BE BLAMELESS*

God then gave Abram two closely related commands.

1. Walk before me. This 2-fold command challenges Abram to an ongoing relationship with God.
2. Be blameless. There is a distinctive verbal form in the Hebrew at this point that we also see in Gen. 5:22-24. It is used in the context of Enoch walking with God. It refers to an intimacy with God. Enoch was so intimate with God that he was taken from earth to Heaven without experiencing physical death. The Hebrew term for "blameless" is "*tamim*" It is used of sacrificial animals that were to be presented without spot or blemish. In Gen. 6:9, Noah was described as a blameless man that walked with God. No less is expected from Abraham.

***But how is that possible? Didn't Jesus say that there was none good?***

***Mt. 19:16-17***

***16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" 17 And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good.***

Blameless does not mean sinless. That is an impossible goal for anyone on this side of Heaven. Rather, it speaks of integrity. The word means single-hearted, without blame, sincere, wholly devoted to God. Noah and Enoch walked with God. Abram is told to walk before God in the knowledge that the eyes of God were always upon him. Do you think that would have an impact on your life if we were to walk daily knowing that they eyes of God were upon our every thought and action? I believe it would. With this further revelation of the character of God, combined with the promises of God Abram has more responsibility.

***Lk. 12:48b***

***"To whom much is given, much is required."***

Now Abram gets a new name.

***Gen 17:5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.***

***Gen 17:6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.***

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

***Gen 17:8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."***

Abram means “high” or “exalted father.” Abraham means, “Father of many nations.” Everything else in this chapter hinges on this name change. The covenant now extends to Abraham’s descendants and anyone else in his house as long as they are circumcised.

If you remember back when we discussed the tower of Babel, we noted that God disinherited the nations at that point. They wanted to worship other gods (Elohim) therefore He gave them what they wanted. God then had no “nation” or land. Therefore He chose Abram and with this covenant establishes that He will be the God of Abraham’s lineage and that Canaan would be HIS land as well as Abraham’s. This is important to the rest of the Biblical story. It is the purpose for everything else.

***Gen 17:9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.***

I want to bring out another point here. When we read of the *barat*, the sealing of the initial part of the covenant, we saw that Abram was put to sleep and God walked between the animal carcasses alone. That shows that the deal was based on God’s faithfulness and abilities. However, we see here that obedience is required of Abraham. Verse four begins with God saying, “As for me...” In verse 9 God says, “As for you...”

Abraham had some responsibility also. Obedience was required. Remember, Abraham was to be blameless. The key to a perfect walk before God is a personal worship of God. We can’t get lax in our walk just because of the realization that we can’t be perfect.

***“It is more blessed to be smitten with the longing to win the unwon than to stagnate in ignoble contentment with partial attainments.***

*Better to climb, with faces turned upwards to the inaccessible peak, than to lie at ease in the fat valleys.” Alexander Maclaren*

Growing in our Christian walk is not a work of perfecting ourselves. It is an exercise of perfecting a relationship. The relationship, in turn, affects our walk and behavior.

*Now we see the sign or token of the covenant*

**Gen 17:10** This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;

**Gen 17:11** and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

**Gen 17:12** He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant.

**Gen 17:13** He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

**Gen 17:14** And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

Circumcision - a sign of the covenant. Certain others in the Middle East were circumcised.

It is like baptism today, an outward sign. It is supposed to show a change of heart and an allegiance to God. The part of the body affected served to remind those of the covenant, especially Abraham that the promise was related to his seed and was perpetual. It had no magical significance. In later Judaism and even the early church, some thought

circumcision was necessary for salvation. The sign or token had become a means to an end. Sadly, to some, baptism has become the same way.

The NT speaks of the circumcision of the heart.

**Rom 2:29** but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and **circumcision** *is that* of the **heart**, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

Why eight days old? The number 8 stands for new beginnings. God started to repopulate the earth with just 8 people. The eighth day is the first day of the new week.

At birth the body begins to produce prothrombin. On the 8th day the body is producing vitamin K. These are necessary for the clotting of the blood. So on the 8th day and after the baby would not bleed to death due to the circumcision.

### *Sarai's new name*

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

**Gen 17:16** And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother of* nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."

**Gen 17:17** Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall *a child* be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear *a child*?"

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



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

**Gen 17:20** And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.

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

- Sarai's name change - from princely to princess; a mother of many nations.
- Abraham laughed in his heart, doubting due to the natural circumstances of their ages.
- Just let it be Ishmael! But it can't be. Ishmael is a child of the flesh. It would be a violation of God's plan. (Gal. 4:22-26)
- God can and will fix our mistakes, but He won't violate his plans. If Ishmael were allowed to be the child of Promise then Abraham and Hagar could take the credit for the nation. The glory is for God, not us.
- God wants to shine through us. This is one reason He waited until they were so old to have the child. This is why many times in our lives we don't understand God's timing or reasoning. Then God comes through just when it seems like things are impossible. That way He gets the glory. If we take the glory it will ruin us. We tend to put ourselves in God's place.

**Gen 17:22** Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

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

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

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

**Gen 17:26** That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael;

**Gen 17:27** and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Abraham complies. One thing we see consistently is that he obeys. After he has a talk with God he goes and does that he has to do. He gets refocused. This is why we need to talk with God on a daily basis. There is no substitute for prayer.

#### Summation and Application:

1. We have to be patient. God's timetable is not necessarily the same as ours. In fact most of the time they are totally different.
2. We are to walk before God and be blameless. This means that we are to walk with integrity. We are to be different from the world.
3. God has established a covenant with us. He wants to be our God! He has made it possible to spend eternity with Him in paradise. He wants that relationship to start here, on this side of Heaven. It has to start here. If we don't want it now, He won't force us into it then.

4. Our hearts have to be circumcised. We can't walk before God and be blameless if we are walking in the flesh instead of the Spirit.
5. We have to take God at His Word. We can't doubt. Notice that God didn't smoke Abraham for his doubt.
6. We have to talk to God on a daily basis. Pray!
7. Once we get our marching orders we should take a page out of Abraham's playbook. Put your faith in motion. Go do what it is that God has told you to do.
8. Expect God to move in your life.