

## CHAPTER 17 - 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. - McGee

### Abraham and the Covenant of Circumcision

***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.***

Think of that! Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born, and it was not until fourteen years later that Isaac was born.

“The LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.” God says, “I am El Shaddai, the Almighty God”—this is a new name.

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

Thirteen times in this chapter we find the word covenant. For it to appear thirteen times in twenty-seven verses obviously means that God is talking about the covenant. This is God's fifth appearance to Abram. He comes now not only to make the covenant, but also to reaffirm the promise of a son that He has made, which absolutely rules out this boy Ishmael, of course.

Paul, writing in the fourth chapter of Romans, says this: “And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb” (Rom\_4:19).

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. – McGee

***Gen 17:3-4 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.***

God says to Abram that he will be a father of many nations. I suppose it could be said that this man has probably had more children than any other man that has ever lived on the earth, as far as we know. Just think of it: for four thousands years, there have been two great lines—the line of Ishmael and the line of Isaac—and there have been millions in each line. What a family! What a homecoming! Added to that, there is a spiritual seed, for we Christians are called the children of Abraham by faith in Christ. In Rom\_4:16, speaking of Abraham, Paul says, “... who is the father of us all”—that is, of believers, of the nation Israel, and also of the Arabs, by the way. Just think of the millions of people! God says here, “I am going to make you a father of many nations,” and He has made that promise good. – McGee

***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.***

Abram means “high father” or “father of the height” or “exalted father.” Abraham means “father of a multitude.”

## CHAPTER 17 - God gives Abraham a new name; God's covenant; Ishmael's inheritance

I am going to inject a little story here to illustrate to you something of the faith of this man 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.

There were many hospitable people in that day, and that is quite interesting. We speak of the caveman way back yonder and how terrible he was. May I say to you, in that day a stranger could not go through the country without somebody opening his home and entertaining him. But if you came into Los Angeles as a stranger, I don't know anybody who would take you in, although there are a lot of Christians in this area. Our culture is altogether different today, and we certainly lack the hospitality they had in that day.

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.

***Gen 17:6-7 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 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.***

What kind of covenant did God make with Abraham? An everlasting covenant. If it is everlasting, is it good today? It certainly is. God promised you and me everlasting life if we will trust Christ—that is a covenant God has made. My friend, if God is not going to make good this covenant that He made with Abraham, you had better look into yours again. But I have news for you: He is going to make your covenant good, and He is also going to make Abraham's good. — McGee

***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."***

God tells Abraham what He will do. God says, "I 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.

The Hebrew people have been in that land on three occasions, and it is theirs, but the important thing is that they occupy it only under certain conditions. First of all, God sent them down into the land of Egypt, and they were dispersed there. They went down a family of about seventy and came out a nation of at least one and one-half million. They were put out of their land again at the Babylonian captivity because they went into idolatry and were not witnessing for God.

## CHAPTER 17 - God gives Abraham a new name; God's covenant; Ishmael's inheritance

We find that they again went out of the land in A.D. 70 after they had rejected their Messiah. Actually, they have never been back. God predicted that three times they would be put out of the land and three times they would be returned. They have been returned twice. (I do not consider the present return to the land a fulfillment.) When they return the next time, I take it that it means they will never go out of the land again. The Millennium will take place when God gathers and brings them back into the land. – McGee

***Gen 17:9-11 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 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; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.***

Circumcision is the badge of the covenant. The Israelites did not circumcise themselves in order to become members of the covenant. They did this because they had the covenant from God. Circumcision occupied the same place that good works occupy for the believer today. You do not perform good works in order to be saved; you perform good works because you have been saved. That makes all the difference in the world.

When I went away from home as a boy, although I did get into a lot of trouble, the one thing that kept me from becoming an absolute renegade was the thought of my dad. I said to myself, "Because I'm a son of my father, I won't do this or enter into that." I refrained from things because of my dad. Now, I did not become his son because I did not do certain things. I already was his son. But because I was his son, I didn't do them. The badge of the covenant was circumcision. The thing that put them under the covenant wasn't circumcision, but circumcision was the badge of it, the evidence of it. – McGee

***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.***

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 Gal\_4:4. - McGee

***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.***

Again, circumcision is the badge of the covenant. They did not have to do this in order to get the covenant; God had already made the covenant with them. I trust that you see this because it is so important. The same thing is true today. A great many people think that, if they join the church or are baptized, they will be saved. No, my friend, you don't do those things to get saved. If you are saved, I think you will do both of them—you'll join a church, and you'll be baptized—but you don't do that to get saved. We need to keep the cart where it belongs, following the horse, and not get the cart before the horse. For in fact, in the thinking of many relative to salvation, the horse is in the cart today.- McGee

***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."***

The fact that there were those who disobeyed (practically the entire nation disobeyed when they came out of the land of Egypt) did not militate against the covenant. That disobedience simply meant that the individual would be put out. However, as far as the nation is concerned, no individual or group could destroy this covenant which God had made with

## CHAPTER 17 - God gives Abraham a new name; God's covenant; Ishmael's inheritance

Abraham and his seed after him. It is an everlasting covenant. The man who had broken the covenant was put out, but the covenant stood. That is how marvelous it is. – McGee

### *Isaac's Birth Promised*

***Gen 17:15-16 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 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."***

Her name was Sarai before; now it is changed to Sarah. If old Abraham is going to be a father of nations, then Sarah is going to be a mother of nations. – McGee

***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?"***

Old Abraham just laughed. This is not the laughter of unbelief. I think it is the laughter of just sheer joy that this could happen. I am sure that you have had this experience. Every now and then in our lives, God does something for us that is so wonderful that we just feel like laughing. You don't know anything else to do but to laugh about it. This was something unheard of. There was "the deadness of Sarah's womb," and Abraham was "dead"—have you ever noticed how Paul described this? "(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. 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. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body was now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness" (Rom\_4:17-22). Abraham believed in God, and he is absolutely overwhelmed by the wonder and the goodness of God.

But then, all of a sudden, a thought comes to Abraham like an arrow to his heart. He thinks of a little boy who is his, a boy by the name of Ishmael.-McGee

***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."***

Abraham is saying, "Oh, Lord, this little fellow who has been growing up in my home ... !" Abraham is attached to Ishmael. He was fourteen years old when Abraham sent him out a little later on. I do not think that Abraham ever saw him again. My friend, I don't care what you might think of Ishmael; he was Abraham's son, and Abraham loved his son. It was a heartbreak for him to have to give him up.

I am of the opinion that Abraham thought many, many times, "I made a great big mistake in taking Hagar." You see, that was a sin that not only plagued him, but there has also been trouble in that land from the beginning because Abraham sinned. Don't tell me that sin is a little thing or that sin is something you get by with. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal\_6:7). A man does not reap something similar; he reaps just that which he sowed. And this man Abraham is certainly reaping: "O that Ishmael might live before thee!"

In other words, God says, "No, I won't accept him. That was wrong." Don't say that God approved polygamy just because it is recorded in the Bible. I cannot see that He is approving it at all. - McGee

## CHAPTER 17 - God gives Abraham a new name; God's covenant; Ishmael's inheritance

***Gen 17:20-21 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. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year."***

God holds to the promise that He has made. God is not to be deterred or deferred from this at all. He is going to do the exact thing that He said He would do. He speaks as if Isaac were already born and in their midst. He speaks of things that are not as if they are—and it is going to be next year.

***Gen 17:22 Then He finished 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.

***Gen 17:23-27 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. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.***

Circumcision is the badge of the covenant which God has made with Abraham. Someone will ask, "Why was Ishmael included?" Hasn't God promised that Ishmael is going to be a great nation also? He is included in it in that sense, but he is not the one whom God had promised to Abraham at the beginning. He is not to be the father of the nation that God will use and the nation through which the Messiah will come.