

Bible Study for May 26, 2021

[adapted from The Serendipity Study Bible]

Read Genesis 17

When Abram was 99 years old,^[a] the LORD appeared to him and said,^[b] “I am the Sovereign God.^[c] Walk^[d] before me^[e] and be blameless.^[f] ² Then I will confirm my covenant^[g] between me and you, and I will give you a multitude of descendants.”^[h]

³ Abram bowed down with his face to the ground,^[i] and God said to him,^[j] ⁴ “As for me,^[k] this^[l] is my covenant with you: You will be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer will your name be^[m] Abram. Instead, your name will be Abraham^[n] because I will make you^[o] the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you^[p] extremely^[q] fruitful. I will make nations of you, and kings will descend from you.^[r] ⁷ I will confirm^[s] my covenant as a perpetual^[t] covenant between me and you. It will extend to your descendants after you throughout their generations. I will be your God and the God of your descendants after you.^[u] ⁸ I will give the whole land of Canaan—the land where you are now residing^[v]—to you and your descendants after you as a permanent^[w] possession. I will be their God.”

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep^[x] the covenantal requirement^[y] I am imposing on you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ This is my requirement that you and your descendants after you must keep:^[z] Every male among you must be circumcised.^[aa] ¹¹ You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskins. This will be a reminder^[ab] of the covenant between me and you. ¹² Throughout your generations every male among you who is eight days old^[ac] must be circumcised, whether born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not one of your descendants. ¹³ They must indeed be circumcised,^[ad] whether born in your house or bought with money. The sign of my covenant^[ae] will be visible in your flesh as a permanent^[af] reminder. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male^[ag] who has not been circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin will be cut off^[ah] from his people—he has failed to carry out my requirement.”^[ai]

¹⁵ Then God said to Abraham, “As for your wife, you must no longer call her Sarai;^[aj] Sarah^[ak] will be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will give you a son

through her. I will bless her and she will become a mother of nations.^[al] Kings of countries^[am] will come from her!”

¹⁷ Then Abraham bowed down with his face to the ground and laughed^[an] as he said to himself,^[ao] “Can^[ap] a son be born to a man who is a hundred years old?^[aq] Can Sarah^[ar] bear a child at the age of ninety?”^[as] ¹⁸ Abraham said to God, “O that^[at] Ishmael might live before you!”^[au]

¹⁹ God said, “No, Sarah your wife is going to bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac.^[av] I will confirm my covenant with him as a perpetual^[aw] covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰ As for Ishmael, I have heard you.^[ax] I will indeed bless him, make him fruitful, and give him a multitude of descendants.^[ay] He will become the father of twelve princes;^[az] I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this set time next year.” ²² When he finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.^[ba]

²³ Abraham took his son Ishmael and every male in his household (whether born in his house or bought with money)^[bb] and circumcised them^[bc] on that very same day, just as God had told him to do. ²⁴ Now Abraham was 99 years old^[bd] when he was circumcised;^[be] ²⁵ his son Ishmael was thirteen years old^[bf] when he was circumcised. ²⁶ Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on the very same day. ²⁷ All the men of his household, whether born in his household or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Footnotes

- a. Genesis 17:1 **tn** *Heb* “the son of ninety-nine years.”
- b. Genesis 17:1 **tn** *Heb* “appeared to Abram and said to him.” The proper name has been replaced by the pronoun (“him”) and the final phrase “to him” has been left untranslated for stylistic reasons.
- c. Genesis 17:1 **tn** Or “God Almighty.” The name אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי (*’el shadday*, “El Shaddai”) has often been translated “God Almighty,” primarily because Jerome translated it *omnipotens* (“all powerful”) in the Latin Vulgate. There has been much debate over the meaning of the name. For discussion see W. F. Albright, “The Names *Shaddai* and *Abram*,” *JBL* 54 (1935): 173-210; R. Gordis, “The Biblical Root *sd-y-sd*,” *JTS* 41 (1940): 34-43; and especially T. N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 69-72. Shaddai/El Shaddai is the sovereign

king of the world who grants, blesses, and judges. In the Book of Genesis, he blesses the patriarchs with fertility and promises numerous descendants. Outside Genesis he both blesses/protects and takes away life/happiness. The patriarchs knew God primarily as El Shaddai (Exod 6:3). While the origin and meaning of this name are uncertain (see discussion below) its significance is clear. The name is used in contexts where God appears as the source of fertility and life. In Gen 17:1-8 he appeared to Abram, introduced himself as El Shaddai, and announced his intention to make the patriarch fruitful. In the role of El Shaddai God repeated these words (now elevated to the status of a decree) to Jacob (35:11). Earlier Isaac had pronounced a blessing on Jacob in which he asked El Shaddai to make Jacob fruitful (28:3). Jacob later prayed that his sons would be treated with mercy when they returned to Egypt with Benjamin (43:14). The fertility theme is not as apparent here, though one must remember that Jacob viewed Benjamin as the sole remaining son of the favored and once-barren Rachel (see 29:31; 30:22-24; 35:16-18). It is quite natural that he would appeal to El Shaddai to preserve Benjamin's life, for it was El Shaddai's miraculous power which made it possible for Rachel to give him sons in the first place. In 48:3 Jacob, prior to blessing Joseph's sons, told him how El Shaddai appeared to him at Bethel (see Gen 28) and promised to make him fruitful. When blessing Joseph on his deathbed Jacob referred to Shaddai (we should probably read "El Shaddai," along with a few Hebrew MSS, Smr, the LXX, and Syriac) as the one who provides abundant blessings, including "blessings of the breast and womb" (49:25). (The direct association of the name with "breasts" suggests the name might mean "the one of the breast" [i.e., the one who gives fertility], but the juxtaposition is probably better explained as wordplay. Note the wordplay involving the name and the root טַדַּד, [*shadad*, "destroy"] in Isa 13:6 and in Joel 1:15.) Outside Genesis the name Shaddai (minus the element "El" ["God"]) is normally used when God is viewed as the sovereign king who blesses/protects or curses/brings judgment. The name appears in the introduction to two of Balaam's oracles (Num 24:4, 16) of blessing upon Israel. Naomi employs the name when accusing the Lord of treating her bitterly by taking the lives of her husband and sons (Ruth 1:20-21). In Ps 68:14; Isa 13:6; and Joel 1:15 Shaddai judges his enemies through warfare, while Ps 91:1 depicts him as the protector of his people. (In Ezek 1:24 and 10:5 the sound of the cherubim's wings is compared to Shaddai's

powerful voice. The reference may be to the mighty divine warrior's battle cry which accompanies his angry judgment.) Finally, the name occurs 31 times in the Book of Job. Job and his "friends" assume that Shaddai is the sovereign king of the world (11:7; 37:23a) who is the source of life (33:4b) and is responsible for maintaining justice (8:3; 34:10-12; 37:23b). He provides abundant blessings, including children (22:17-18; 29:4-6), but he can also discipline, punish, and destroy (5:17; 6:4; 21:20; 23:16). It is not surprising to see the name so often in this book, where the theme of God's justice is primary and even called into question (24:1; 27:2). The most likely proposal is that the name means "God, the one of the mountain" (an Akkadian cognate means "mountain," to which the Hebrew טוֹי, [*shad*, "breast"] is probably related). For a discussion of proposed derivations see T. N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 70-71. The name may originally have depicted God as the sovereign judge who, in Canaanite style, ruled from a sacred mountain. Isa 14:13 and Ezek 28:14, 16 associate such a mountain with God, while Ps 48:2 refers to Zion as "Zaphon," the Canaanite Olympus from which the high god El ruled. (In Isa 14 the Canaanite god El may be in view. Note that Isaiah pictures pagan kings as taunting the king of Babylon, suggesting that pagan mythology may provide the background for the language and imagery.)

- d. Genesis 17:1 **tn** Or "Live out your life." The Hebrew verb translated "walk" is the Hitpael; it means "to walk back and forth; to walk about; to live out one's life."
- e. Genesis 17:1 **tn** Or "in my presence."
- f. Genesis 17:1 **tn** There are two imperatives here: "walk...and be blameless [or "perfect"]." The second imperative may be purely sequential (see the translation) or consequential: "walk before me and then you will be blameless." How one interprets the sequence depends on the meaning of "walk before": (1) If it simply refers in a neutral way to serving the LORD, then the second imperative is likely sequential. (2) But if it has a positive moral connotation ("serve me faithfully"), then the second imperative probably indicates purpose (or result). For other uses of the idiom see 1 Sam 2:30, 35 and 12:2 (where it occurs twice).
- g. Genesis 17:2 **tn** Following the imperative, the cohortative indicates consequence. If Abram is blameless, then the LORD will ratify the covenant. Earlier the LORD ratified part of his promise to Abram (see Gen 15:18-21), guaranteeing him that his descendants would live in the land. But the

expanded form of the promise, which includes numerous descendants and eternal possession of the land, remains to be ratified. This expanded form of the promise is in view here (see [vv. 2b, 4-8](#)). See the note at [Gen 15:18](#) and R. B. Chisholm, "Evidence from Genesis," *A Case for Premillennialism*, 35-54.

- h. [Genesis 17:2](#) **tn** *Heb* "I will multiply you exceedingly, exceedingly." The repetition is emphatic.
- i. [Genesis 17:3](#) **tn** *Heb* "And Abram fell on his face." This expression probably means that Abram sank to his knees and put his forehead to the ground, although it is possible that he completely prostrated himself. In either case the posture indicates humility and reverence.
- j. [Genesis 17:3](#) **tn** *Heb* "God spoke to him, saying." This is redundant in contemporary English and has been simplified in the translation for stylistic reasons.
- k. [Genesis 17:4](#) **tn** *Heb* "I."
- l. [Genesis 17:4](#) **tn** *Heb* "is" (הִנֵּה, *hinneh*).
- m. [Genesis 17:5](#) **tn** *Heb* "will your name be called."
- n. [Genesis 17:5](#) **sn** *Your name will be Abraham*. The renaming of Abram was a sign of confirmation to the patriarch. Every time the name was used it would be a reminder of God's promise. "Abram" means "exalted father," probably referring to Abram's father Terah. The name looks to the past; Abram came from noble lineage. The name "Abraham" is a dialectical variant of the name Abram. But its significance is in the wordplay with אֲבִי הָמוֹן (*'av hamon*, "the father of a multitude," which sounds like אֲבִרָהָם, *'avraham*, "Abraham"). The new name would be a reminder of God's intention to make Abraham the father of a multitude. For a general discussion of renaming, see O. Eissfeldt, "Renaming in the Old Testament," *Words and Meanings*, 70-83.
- o. [Genesis 17:5](#) **tn** The perfect verbal form is used here in a rhetorical manner to emphasize God's intention.
- p. [Genesis 17:6](#) **tn** This verb starts a series of perfect verbal forms with *vav* (ו) consecutive to express God's intentions.
- q. [Genesis 17:6](#) **tn** *Heb* "exceedingly, exceedingly." The repetition is emphatic.
- r. [Genesis 17:6](#) **tn** *Heb* "and I will make you into nations, and kings will come out from you."

- s. Genesis 17:7 **tn** The verb **קום** (*qum*, “to arise, to stand up”) in the Hiphil verbal stem means “to confirm, to give effect to, to carry out” (i.e., a covenant or oath; see BDB 878-79 s.v. **קום**).
- t. Genesis 17:7 **tn** Or “as an eternal.”
- u. Genesis 17:7 **tn** *Heb* “to be to you for God and to your descendants after you.”
- v. Genesis 17:8 **tn** The verbal root is **גור** (*gur*, “to sojourn, to reside temporarily,” i.e., as a resident foreigner). It is the land in which Abram resides, but does not yet possess as his very own.
- w. Genesis 17:8 **tn** Or “as an eternal.”
- x. Genesis 17:9 **tn** The imperfect tense could be translated “you shall keep” as a binding command, but the obligatory nuance (“must”) captures the binding sense better.
- y. Genesis 17:9 **tn** *Heb* “my covenant.” The Hebrew word **בְּרִית** (*b^erit*) can refer to (1) the agreement itself between two parties (see v. 7), (2) the promise made by one party to another (see vv. 2-3, 7), (3) an obligation placed by one party on another, or (4) a reminder of the agreement. In vv. 9-10 the word refers to a covenantal obligation which God gives to Abraham and his descendants.
- z. Genesis 17:10 **tn** *Heb* “This is my covenant that you must keep between me and you and your descendants after you.”
- aa. Genesis 17:10 **sn** For a discussion of male circumcision as the sign of the covenant in this passage see M. V. Fox, “The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in the Light of the Priestly *’ot* Etiologies,” *RB* 81 (1974): 557-96.
- bb. Genesis 17:11 **tn** Or “sign.”
- cc. Genesis 17:12 **tn** *Heb* “the son of eight days.”
- dd. Genesis 17:13 **tn** The emphatic construction employs the Niphal imperfect tense (collective singular) and the Niphal infinitive.
- ee. Genesis 17:13 **tn** *Heb* “my covenant.” Here in v. 13 the Hebrew word **בְּרִית** (*b^erit*) refers to the outward, visible sign, or reminder, of the covenant. For the range of meaning of the term, see the note on the word “requirement” in v. 9.
- ff. Genesis 17:13 **tn** Or “an eternal.”
- gg. Genesis 17:14 **tn** The disjunctive clause calls attention to the “uncircumcised male” and what will happen to him.

- hh. Genesis 17:14 **tn** *Heb* “that person will be cut off.” The words “that person” have not been included in the translation for stylistic reasons.**sn** The meaning of “cut off” has been discussed at great length. An entire tractate in the Mishnah is devoted to this subject (tractate *Keritot*). Being ostracized from the community is involved at the least, but it is not certain whether this refers to the death penalty.
- ii. Genesis 17:14 **tn** *Heb* “he has broken my covenant.” The noun בְּרִית (*b^erit*) here refers to the obligation required by God in conjunction with the covenantal agreement. For the range of meaning of the term, see the note on the word “requirement” in v. 9.
- jj. Genesis 17:15 **tn** *Heb* “[As for] Sarai your wife, you must not call her name Sarai, for Sarah [will be] her name.”
- kk. Genesis 17:15 **sn** *Sarah*. The name change seems to be a dialectical variation, both spellings meaning “princess” or “queen.” Like the name Abram, the name Sarai symbolized the past. The new name Sarah, like the name Abraham, would be a reminder of what God intended to do for Sarah in the future.
- ll. Genesis 17:16 **tn** *Heb* “she will become nations.”
- mm. Genesis 17:16 **tn** *Heb* “peoples.”
- nn. Genesis 17:17 **sn** *Laughed*. The Hebrew verb used here provides the basis for the naming of Isaac: “And he laughed” is וַיִּצְחַק (*vayyitskhaq*); the name “Isaac” is יִצְחָק (*yitskhaq*), “he laughs.” Abraham’s (and Sarah’s, see 18:12) laughter signals disbelief, but when the boy is born, the laughter signals surprise and joy.
- oo. Genesis 17:17 **tn** *Heb* “And he fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart.”
- pp. Genesis 17:17 **tn** The imperfect verbal form here carries a potential nuance, as it expresses the disbelief of Abraham.
- qq. Genesis 17:17 **tn** *Heb* “to the son of a hundred years.”
- rr. Genesis 17:17 **sn** It is important to note that even though Abraham staggers at the announcement of the birth of a son, finding it almost too incredible, he nonetheless calls his wife Sarah, the new name given to remind him of the promise of God (v. 15).
- ss. Genesis 17:17 **tn** *Heb* “the daughter of ninety years.”
- tt. Genesis 17:18 **tn** The wish is introduced with the Hebrew particle לוּ (*lu*), “O that.”
- uu. Genesis 17:18 **tn** Or “live with your blessing.”

- vv. Genesis 17:19 **tn** *Heb* “will call his name Isaac.” The name means “he laughs,” or perhaps “may he laugh” (see the note on the word “laughed” in v. 17).
- ww. Genesis 17:19 **tn** Or “as an eternal.”
- xx. Genesis 17:20 **sn** The Hebrew verb translated “I have heard you” forms a wordplay with the name *Ishmael*, which means “God hears.” See the note on the name “Ishmael” in 16:11.
- yy. Genesis 17:20 **tn** *Heb* “And I will multiply him exceedingly, exceedingly.” The repetition is emphatic.
- zz. Genesis 17:20 **tn** For a discussion of the Hebrew word translated “princes,” see E. A. Speiser, “Background and Function of the Biblical *Nasi*,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 111-17.
- aaa. Genesis 17:22 **tn** *Heb* “And when he finished speaking with him, God went up from Abraham.” The sequence of pronouns and proper names has been modified in the translation for stylistic reasons.**sn** *God went up from him*. The text draws attention to God’s dramatic exit and in so doing brings full closure to the scene.
- bbb. Genesis 17:23 **tn** *Heb* “Ishmael his son and all born in his house and all bought with money, every male among the men of the house of Abraham.”
- ccc. Genesis 17:23 **tn** *Heb* “circumcised the flesh of their foreskin.” The Hebrew expression is somewhat pleonastic and has been simplified in the translation.
- ddd. Genesis 17:24 **tn** *Heb* “the son of ninety-nine years.”
- eee. Genesis 17:24 **tn** *Heb* “circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin” (also in v. 25).
- fff. Genesis 17:25 **tn** *Heb* “the son of thirteen years.”

Questions to Consider

1. What is the silliest contract you once signed? The most serious contract? How did you confirm your agreements?
2. After 13 years of God’s silence, Abram must think Ishmael is the promised heir. How does God show him otherwise? With his covenant cut with Abram [15.9-21], how does God now confirm it [17.2, 4-8]? What does circumcision demonstrate [15.6; 17.1; cf. Rom. 4.9-12]?

3. In the ancient world, a name conveyed the essence of the person. What do you make of Abram and Sarai's name change?
4. How does Abraham respond, initially, to God's promise [v.17]? Eventually [vs.23-27]?
5. If cutting of one's foreskin is no longer required of God's people, what is required [see Gal. 5.6]?