

As our narrative shifts from Genesis chapter sixteen to Genesis chapter seventeen, we'll find that a considerable amount of time has passed since we last encountered Abram and Sarai in the preceding chapter. Abram and Sarai had now been together for about five decades and have been living in the land of God's promise for approximately twenty-five of those years.

Abram's son Ishmael (who was born near the end of Genesis chapter sixteen) has since grown to become a young man of thirteen years old. There is also no record of any communication between God and Abram since the time of his birth.

But that was about to change...

“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’” (Genesis 17:1).

So after what seems to be a long period of silence, God reopened His line of communication with Abram and identified Himself in a new way: *“I am the Almighty God.”* God had already made Himself known to Abram as ***“the LORD”*** in Genesis 15:17, thus emphasizing His eternal, self-existent nature. Now God further identifies Himself as *“El Shaddai,”* the Almighty God who is all-powerful and all-sufficient.

So why would God choose this moment to share this new insight into His nature? Well, it seems that God is laying the foundation for the work he is about to do in Abram's life. You see, God had extraordinary plans for Abram, plans that exceeded the realm of human capability.

By revealing Himself as the Almighty God, God conveyed his power and ability to fulfill His plans for Abram's life. God expressed that truth by identifying Himself to Abram as the all-sufficient and all-powerful God.

However, God had something for Abram to do as well: *“...walk before me and be blameless.”* There are several ways in which we might understand this directive. First, every human being “walks before God” in the sense that [no one can elude God's watchful eye](#).

“Walking before God” also conveys the idea of living responsibly before Him. This seems to be the motive behind this command to *“...walk before me and be blameless.”* Therefore, we can associate this concept with our conduct, disposition, and general manner of life.

“Walking before God” also means we are going in God's direction. A person who walks before God travels with Him in the direction He is going. In this respect, we can “walk before God” in the sense that we keep in step with His direction for our lives.

This implies that we should move slowly and steadily forward in our relationship with God, just as we do whenever we walk together with someone. We shouldn't sprint, stop and start, or go backward in our walk with God- instead, we should keep moving forward.

The Old Testament book of Micah defines the road we travel with God...

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

So if we desire to walk before God, then we must be with Him where He is going- and that road includes the characteristic qualities of justice, mercy, and humility.

So God told Abram, ***“Walk before Me and be blameless”*** or ***“be perfect,”*** as some translations render this passage. One important thing to recognize from this verse is that “blamelessness” and “sinlessness” are not synonymous. “When we talk about “blamelessness,” we are referring to a complete and whole-hearted commitment. This characteristic encompasses the qualities of integrity and dedication in one’s relationship with God.

This stands in contrast to another kind of relationship mentioned later in the Bible: ***“They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him”*** (Titus 1:6).

About twenty-five years have passed since God’s promise to bless Abram and make him into a great nation ([Genesis 12:2](#)). While twenty-five years is a long time to wait, God had not forgotten His promise...

“And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly” (Genesis 17:2).

The following verse tells us that ***“...Abram fell on his face...”*** in response to that promise. In other words, Abram demonstrated reverence and respect for God as he interacted with Him. The attitude is vastly different from the way that some relate to God in their expectation of His will for their lives.

When God did not immediately act upon Abram’s desire for a son, Abram might have responded with a demand for an explanation. This is the kind of reaction we might expect to see among those who feel that God has not moved quickly enough to suit their purposes.

But the God-honoring men and women of the Scriptures certainly did not adopt an aggressive, confrontational attitude toward God. Instead, they responded with deep respect and reverence, just as Abram did here.

For example, consider the following interaction between God and a man named Job...

“Then the Lord said to Job, ‘Do you still want to argue with the Almighty? You are God’s critic, but do you have the answers?’ Then Job replied to the Lord, ‘I am nothing—how could I ever find the answers? I will cover my mouth with my hand. I have said too much already. I have nothing more to say’” (Job 40:1-5 NLT).

The prophet Isaiah had a similar response when God appeared to him...

“...I’m doomed! Everything I say is sinful, and so are the words of everyone around me. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD All-Powerful” (Isaiah 6:5 CEV).

So while it’s not necessarily wrong to inquire of God, we must do so respectfully, even when we fail to grasp the reasons behind His actions.

“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham. For I have made you a father of many nations. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, greatly so, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you.

And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your seed after you. And I will give the land to you in which you are a stranger, and to your seed after you, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession. And I will be their God” (Genesis 17:4-8).

So God changed Abram’s name from Abram (a name that means “exalted father”) (1) to the name we

are familiar with today. That would be “Abraham,” or “father of a multitude.” (2)

Now before we continue, we should remember that Abram was a man who was childless for many years. That remained so until he fathered a son with a woman he had taken as a second wife (Genesis 16:15-16). For a man whose name meant “exalted father,” this reality was undoubtedly a source of pain, confusion, and embarrassment for Abram.

So, on one hand, Abram may have been relieved to learn that God had decided to change his name. On the other hand, this change to “father of a multitude” may have led to a greater sense of apprehension on Abram’s part. For a ninety-nine year old man with a ninety year old wife, this change signified another area in which Abram had to exercise faith and trust in God.

“And God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations'” (Genesis 17:9).

Having already pledged to uphold His part of their covenant, God reminded Abraham that he and his descendants had a duty to honor their part as well. God will direct Abraham to express that commitment in a very specific way next.

(1) H87 - abram - *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon* (kjv). (n.d.). Blue Letter Bible.
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h87/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

(2) Abraham or Abram - *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. (n.d.). Blue Letter Bible.
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=BT0000063>

“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.

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. 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.

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” (Genesis 17:10-14).

When this passage says, “***You shall be circumcised,***” it makes a reference to the penile skin covering known as a foreskin. “Circumcision” is the act of removing that small fold of skin. This act correlates to God's covenant with Abram mentioned earlier in Genesis chapter twelve.

In that passage of Scripture, God told Abram, “***I will make you into a great nation...***” (***Genesis 12:2***). This tells us that God planned to build a great people group through Abram's genetic descendants and explains why this sign involves their reproductive organs. It also explains why Abraham and his male progeny received a physical sign of this covenantal agreement, but their marital partners didn't.

This act served as a reminder to Abraham, and his posterity, that they were set apart by God. In addition, this requirement applied to Abraham and everyone associated with his family, even if they weren't genetically related. Every male within Abraham's family circle assumed the responsibility to join him in obeying God's directive.

It's important to remember is that the external act of circumcision did not make Abraham right with God- it was *faith* that made him right with God. That truth was previously affirmed in Genesis 15:6, where we read, “***Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.***”

Abraham had “right standing” (or “righteousness”) with God in light of his faith- and that demonstration of faith occurred long before God commanded him to undergo the act of circumcision.

Unfortunately, a significant change took place in the interval between Abraham’s life and Jesus’ advent in the New Testament era. One of the prevailing beliefs among the religious leadership of Jesus’ day involved circumcision as an act that guaranteed divine favor. If a man could demonstrate his ancestral link to Abraham and had undergone the rite of circumcision, the belief was that he would be considered righteous in the eyes of God.

It was that attitude that led to the following warning from John the Baptist...

“Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones!” (Matthew 3:9 NLT).

Being born into a certain family (even a “religious” one) or taking part in a religious ceremony or ritual doesn’t make someone right with God. The Apostle Paul explained God’s true objective in the New Testament book of Romans...

“...For God is not looking for those who cut their bodies in actual body circumcision, but he is looking for those with changed hearts and minds” (Romans 2:29 TLB).

Genuine circumcision, the kind that God seeks, does not consist of a mere external observance. Instead, real circumcision represents a new attitude towards God through a relationship with Him in Christ.

“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!’” (Genesis 17:15-16).

The name “Sarai” means “my princess.” “Sarah” is a general reference to “princess” or “noble woman.” So, in bestowing this name upon Sarai, God highlighted her new position as a woman of honor and esteem among many families.

So how did Abraham respond to this? Well, it wasn’t quite what we might expect.

“Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, ‘Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!’” (Genesis 17:17-18 NIV).

Abraham demonstrated his deep respect for God by bowing with his face to the ground and immediately using the name that God had just bestowed upon his wife. But the rest of God’s message caused Abraham to laugh silently to himself.

Now perhaps Abraham laughed because this promise seemed too incredible to accept. It also appears that Abraham sought to make it easier for God to fulfill His promise by saying, ***“Why not let Ishmael inherit what you have promised me?” (CEV).*** The problem was that Ishmael was not the son God was talking about...

“Then God said, ‘Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation.

But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.' When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him" (Genesis 17:19-22 NIV).

And so, the countdown to the realization of God's long-awaited promise had now commenced: "...***my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year" (NLT).***

"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." (Genesis 17:23-27).

It's clear that Abraham was serious about following God's instructions. In fact, this passage repeats the fact that Abraham acted on God's directive the very same day he received it. Abraham simply did what God told him, even when it wasn't easy.

For example, let's remember that Abraham had a [small army under his leadership](#). It seems highly unlikely that those soldiers were pleased to receive these orders. But Abraham was ready to act upon his faith, even at the risk of a potential backlash from others.