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The LORD Appears Again (Gen. 17:1-2)

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

- Thirteen years have passed since the birth of Ishmael. Why is God silent in our lives sometimes?
- God now appears to Abram in another *theophany*.
- He will give Abram the terms of a covenant; really this represents the expansion of the existing covenant. See how God gradually unfolds more and more of His will to us as we go along.

El Shaddhai

God again identifies Himself by a Name that addresses Abram’s concerns – He is the Almighty God. El Shaddhai means He is all sufficient.

El Shaddhai gives Abram two responsibilities under the covenant.

- The first one is to walk before Him.
- The second is to be blameless.
- In turn, God s will make His covenant between Abram and Himself. The first specific thing He says to Abram is that He will multiply him exceedingly.

God's Promises To Abram (Gen. 17:3-8)

3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 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. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 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. 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 falls on his face to give reverence to God.
- First, there is a promise that he will be a father of many nations. He will not only have children through Hagar but with Sarah and Keturah.
- Now there comes something highly significant. God will actually change his name. Abram means *exalted father*. Abraham on the other hand, means *father of a multitude*. Romans 4 says Abraham believed in the God *who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did*.
- Another promise: kings will come from him.
- A third promise: God will confirm this covenant with his descendants who will come after him. It will be an everlasting covenant, and He promises that He will be their God also.
- A fourth promise: God reiterates the promise of the Land of Canaan to Abraham and to his descendants.

The Covenant Of Circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14)

9 And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your

descendants after you throughout their generations. 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; 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. 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. 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. 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.”

- This is Abraham’s side of the agreement: every one of Abraham’s descendants will be required to undergo circumcision on the eighth day. This was to be the distinguishing sign of the people of the covenant.
- God was so serious about this that a male child who does not undergo circumcision cannot even be a part of the people.

Why Circumcision?

- First, God says it is a sign. It is something very obvious.
- Second, circumcision was a reminder of the power of procreation. It speaks to the idea of giving life and having descendants.
- Third, it reminds us that covenants are always entered into with blood. God Himself, as Abraham’s covenant partner, would also, in due time, shed blood.
- Circumcision also has a spiritual meaning. It represents the cutting away of what must be removed so that we can serve God with a tender heart.
- Circumcision also shows us that there is only one way of salvation. There was no way into this covenant except by undergoing the ritual.

Promises For Sarah (Gen. 17:15-18)

15 Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 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.”

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?” 18 And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!”

- Sarai means *my princess*, but now God would change her name to Sarah, which just means a *princess* in general.
- This is an unusual blessing because God says He will directly bless her.
- Of course, the most significant thing here is that Abraham would have a child by **her**, not just by a servant-girl.
- Abraham laughed at this with a mixture of joy and disbelief. Paul speaks highly of Abraham’s faith here, in Romans 4: *And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.*
- Now Abraham asks that Ishmael might live. God will surely bless Ishmael, as we will see, but perhaps not the way Abraham might have wished.

Isaac The Promised Seed (Gen. 17:19-22)

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. 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. 21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.” 22 Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

- God says “no” to us sometimes, even in things that mean very much to us. Ishmael was not to be the child of the promise, and he was not to be the one that would inherit the promises of the covenant. God says He will establish His covenant with this new child, called Isaac.
- Isaac is the Hebrew name *Yitzhak*, which means *laughter*. So here again there would always be a reminder of how God had turned sorrow and longing into joy.
- In verse 20 God shows that He is indeed gracious and He will bless Ishmael. He is also going to bless him, and not just a little bit. He’s going to bless him *exceedingly*. He is going to become a great nation. However, the covenant will be established with Isaac, and God says that Isaac will be born at this time next year.
- Once God says this, He goes up. So clearly this is a theophany, a visible appearance.

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