

## Genesis 17 and 18 Bible Study

Chapter 17 starts thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael (vs. 24,25) with another theophanic message to Abram. Here God is restating his promises of descendants and land that we saw in Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1, 4-5, 18-21) As you read this passage notice how God refers to Himself.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old **the Lord appeared** to Abram and said to him, *"I am God **Almighty**; walk before me, and be **blameless**,<sup>2</sup> that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."*<sup>3</sup> Then Abram **fell** on his face. And God said to him, *"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the **father of a multitude of nations**.<sup>5</sup> No longer shall your name be called Abram, but **your name shall be Abraham**, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.<sup>6</sup> I will make you **exceedingly fruitful**, and I will make you into **nations**, and kings shall come from you.<sup>7</sup> And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.<sup>8</sup> And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all **the land of Canaan**, for an **everlasting possession**, and I will **be their God**."<sup>9</sup> And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall **keep my covenant**, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.<sup>10</sup> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be **circumcised**.<sup>11</sup> You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be **a sign of the covenant** between me and you.<sup>12</sup> He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,<sup>13</sup> both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an **everlasting covenant**.<sup>14</sup> Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."*

### Isaac's Birth Promised

<sup>15</sup> And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.<sup>16</sup> I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and **she shall become nations**; kings of peoples shall come from her."<sup>17</sup> Then Abraham **fell** on his face and **laughed** and **said to himself**, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"<sup>18</sup> And Abraham said to God, "**Oh that Ishmael might live before you!**"<sup>19</sup> God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an **everlasting covenant** for his offspring after him.<sup>20</sup> As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.<sup>21</sup> But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."

(Genesis 17:1-21)

**THEOPHANY [the AHF ih knee]** — any direct, visual manifestation of the presence of God.

*In verses 7, 8, 13, 19, what new emphasis on the covenant is repeated?*

The “sign of the covenant” seen here shares some important features with the Noahic covenant we saw in Genesis 6:18; 9:8-17. *Can you see three similarities between the two covenants?*

*In Genesis 9:12, do you notice a big difference between the Noahic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant?*

*What two demands on humanity do we see in verses 2 and 9-11?*

Though these two demands are new, they don’t form the foundation of the covenant. The covenant was already in place, and already promised by God based on who He is not on man’s obedience. We know this because we will see man’s repeated disobedience but God’s covenant keeping in the chapters to follow. For more on this take a look at Romans 4:1-25.

The New American Commentary puts it this way, “Circumcision was a “sign,” not the essence of the covenant; the covenant depended ultimately on the spiritual allegiance of the parties. . . . The eternal nature of the covenant describes the spiritual regeneration of the believer.<sup>1</sup>

As if to drive this covenant with Abram home, notice how God changes the pronunciation of his name from Abram, meaning exalted father, to Abraham, meaning father of a multitude. (vs. 5)

Starting in verse 15 we see a very unique blessing. This blessing is usually given to male forefathers, but here we see it given to Sarai as her name is now pronounced Sarah, meaning princess. *Do you see what incomparable blessing she is given in verse 16?*

You have probably heard of the stages of grief, well in this passage we see Abraham’s stages of reaction to his encounter with God. *Do you see the emotions he goes through in verses 3 and 17-18?*

Abraham’s mind was busy working through all that God was saying to Him. At first, he was in awe of God, but soon he just has to laugh. Sarah having a baby at such an old age! He reasons with himself about this weird promise and then he tries to argue a better idea with God, making Ishmael the son of the promise. *Have you ever tried to reason with God that your ideas might be better than His?*

*In this case, why do you think Abraham makes an alternate suggestion?*

Here we get a glimpse at the humor of God who rejects Abraham’s attempt to “fix” the situation and instead gives his promised heir the name Isaac meaning “he laughs.” But God does hear Abraham’s plea for his first born to be the child of the promise and He doesn’t

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<sup>1</sup> K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 203.

laugh. Instead, he promises Abraham that Ishmael, whose name means “God hears,” will have a good future. (see verse 20)

As we look at the next passage, notice the description of God’s movement:

When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins **that very day**, as God had said to him. <sup>24</sup> Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>25</sup> And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>26</sup> **That very day** Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. <sup>27</sup> And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

*What does this description of God’s ascension tell us about whether he was literally visible to Abraham or not?*

*When does Abraham act on his part of the covenant? (see verse 23 & 26)*

*Why do you think that he would act so quickly?*

Abraham’s obedience is recognized by the New Testament writers as an example to live by. To see more about his example, take a look at Rom 4:17–19 and Heb 11:11–12.

Now we come to **Chapter 18**.

*“The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest time of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing across from him. When he saw them he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, “My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by and leave your servant.” (Genesis 18:1–3)*

There are two clues here that help us to see this encounter as another theophany, where God comes to man in a human form and interacts with him. *What two things reveal that among the three visitors is the Lord Himself?*

It was typical in Abraham’s culture to rise and wait for visitors to approach your tent, but in this visit, Abraham runs to meet them and then prostrates himself on the ground. Asking if he has found favor in His sight also reveals that Abraham is subordinate to this Visitor.

*“Let a little water be brought so that you may all wash your feet and rest under the tree. And let me get a bit of food so that you may refresh yourselves since you have passed by your*

*servant's home. After that you may be on your way." "All right," they replied, "you may do as you say." (Genesis 18:4-5)*

In verses 4 -5, we see the custom of hospitality which was prevalent in biblical times. What does Abraham do for the visitors in order to care for them on their long journey?

As you read the next section, notice what the visitors say, why they have come and where Sarah is as this is going on:

**They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." <sup>10</sup> The Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."** And Sarah was listening at the tent door **behind him.** <sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. <sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" <sup>13</sup> **The Lord said** to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' <sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the Lord? **At the appointed time** I will return to you, about **this time next year**, and Sarah shall have a son." <sup>15</sup> But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh." (Genesis 18:9-15)

The attributes of God which only God has are called non-commutable attributes. Unlike his commutable attributes of love, mercy, kindness, etc., these non-commutable attributes are descriptive of God alone; for example, his omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience are not shared with any other being in the universe. When we see a being with any of the Lord's non-commutable attributes, we recognize him as the Lord. *What non-commutable attributes do you see in the visitor who speaks with Abraham?*

*How does the Lord respond to Sarah's laughter?  
What does this response reveal about the Lord?*

*Have you ever laughed to think about the Lord blessing you when it seems an impossibility?  
How does this doubting response affect your emotional and spiritual life?*

If you are struggling with doubt or negative thoughts about your circumstances or the state of the world, spend some time this week meditating on God's promises to you. Remind yourself of Philippians 4:8-9 as you do:

*"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or*

*praiseworthy, think about these things. And what you learned and received and heard and saw in me, do these things. And the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8-9)*

Let’s get back to Genesis 18.

Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. <sup>17</sup> The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, <sup>18</sup> seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? <sup>19</sup> **For I have chosen him**, that he may command his children and his household after him to **keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice**, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” <sup>20</sup> Then the Lord said, “**Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave**, <sup>21</sup> I will **go down to see** whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.” (Genesis 18:16-21)

*According to verse 19, why did God choose Abraham?*

*What do you think it means to do righteousness and justice in the world in which we live?*

*Why is God choosing to go to Sodom and Gomorrah? (see verse 20)*

The Hebrew words translated “outcry,” *za‘ăqâ* (v. 20) and *šě‘āqâ* (v. 21; 19:13), may describe the woeful cry of victims who suffer injustice, express grief over distressful circumstances (e.g., Esau’s loss, 27:34) or be cries of lament for deliverance from oppressors. Whatever the very grave sin was, social injustice was driving the masses to cry for help from the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

*What does verse 21 tell us God is planning to do regarding their very grave sin?*

*Have you ever wished that God would attend to the grave sins of our country?*

*What is your hope for those who reject God and live in sin?*

Let’s take a look at Abraham’s request to God regarding the sinful kingdoms of Sodom and Gomorrah:

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<sup>2</sup> K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 11:27-50:26](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 225.

<sup>22</sup> So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed **sweep away the righteous with the wicked**? <sup>24</sup> Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then **sweep away** the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the **Judge** of all the earth do what is **just**?" <sup>26</sup> And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." <sup>27</sup> Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. <sup>28</sup> Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." <sup>29</sup> Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." <sup>30</sup> Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." <sup>31</sup> He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." <sup>32</sup> Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." <sup>33</sup> And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place." (Genesis 18:22-33)

*What does Abraham believe God is going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah?*

*In verse 25, what do Abraham's words say about the character of God?*

The way Abraham 'stands before the Lord,' is a reminder of someone who is standing at a bar of justice, seeking aid from the only Judge who can help. It's a similar stance to the Israelites in Leviticus 9:5. *As we see Abraham pleading for the lives of the evil and the righteous, how does this compare to Jonah's thoughts towards Nineveh?*

*Who has the last word in this exchange?*

*By the end of this passage, do we know for sure what will come of Sodom and Gomorrah?*

In Genesis 19, we will see what happens to Sodom and Gomorrah, but before we get there let's take a look the description of Sodom in Ezekiel 16:

"Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So, I removed them, when I saw it. (Ezekiel 16:49-50)

*What are the sins of Sodom that we see here?*

It can be said that pride is the foundation of all sin. This week consider the pride in your own life as you pray for others, interact with them and react to them, and choose humility.