

## EXPOSITION OF GENESIS

Message #39

Genesis 17:1-8

**GOD WILL ALWAYS KEEP HIS WORD AND FULFILL HIS PROMISES TO HIS PEOPLE EVEN WHEN HIS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN UNFAITHFUL AND DONE FOOLISH THINGS.**

John Phillips said, “No failure on Abram’s part, no flaws, no forgetfulness on the part of his posterity can annul the decrees. As God is God, so the covenant must stand” (p. 144).

God’s people may at times fail, and forget and demonstrate many flaws, but they will **never** be forsaken by God.

**NARRATIVE REALITY #1** - God appears to Abram. Genesis 17:1a

The word “appeared” is one that means the LORD visibly appeared to Abram. Since Abram was 99 years old, this event occurred 13 years after the birth of Ishmael, which occurred when he was 86 (Genesis 16: 16). There is no record of any communication between God and Abram for 13 years, which tells us that Abram had been living in the shadow of his failure and for 13 years has been in somewhat of a spiritual drought.

Now one question we may ask is why did God make Abram wait 13 years before He appeared to him to fulfill His promise? I believe the answer to this question is clearly found in Romans 4:17-20. **God wanted to teach Abram that no human works or efforts were needed in order for Him to fulfill His word.**

**NARRATIVE REALITY #2** - God gives a message to Abram. 17:1b-8

**Message #1** - God gives Himself a new Divine name. 17:1b

Moses uses three names for God in these three verses: LORD = Jehovah (17:1a); God Almighty = El Shaddai (17:1b); and God = Elohim (17:3). Obviously, the new name God gives Himself is El Shaddai. The word “El” is one that refers to something strong and mighty and the noun “Shaddai” refers to one who is most powerful, one who has all might. There is no question that a good English word to express the meaning of “El Shaddai” is Almighty. He uses this name to teach Abram a lesson, namely Almighty God does not need any help from finite, sinful man to accomplish His will.

**Message #2** - God gives Abram a Divine challenge. 17:1c

God challenges Abram to do two things – “walk before him” and “be blameless.” When God challenges Abram to walk before Him, He is not suggesting that Abram has been out of His sight, He is challenging Abram to live His life with a constant awareness that he is being watched by Almighty God.

Dr. Arthur Pink says God's challenges to His people "to walk" take on different meanings: To "walk before" means walk in the presence of God, to "walk after" (Deuteronomy 13:4) means to walk following God, to "walk with" (Genesis 5:24) means to walk in fellowship with God and to "walk in" (Colossians 2:6) means to walk in union with Christ (Pink, *Gleanings From Genesis*, p. 187).

The second challenge "be blameless" is not one that means to be sinless, but one that means to be a person of integrity and uprightness and completeness. This challenge is for one to be a person of integrity and not hypocrisy.

**Message #3** - God gives Abram a reaffirmation of the Divine Covenant . 17:2-8

Abram had really botched things, but God still intends to fulfill His covenant. Prior to this text, God has only used this word eight times: 6:18; 9:9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16; 15:18. But in this one chapter, the word "covenant" shows up twelve times (17:2, 4, 7 (twice), 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19 (twice), 21). God wants to encourage Abram in that even though he has had some lapses in his spiritual life, God still fully intends to fulfill His covenantal promises. **God had not forgotten about His promise to Abram even though Abram had forgotten about the power of God.**

**Point #1** - This is God's covenant. 17:4a

God is in effect saying, "Abram, even your failures cannot stop the covenant I have made with you. This is my legal promise to you." Did you know at the moment of salvation God entered into a legal pact with you - Hebrews 13:20.

**Point #2** - This is an international covenant. 17:4b-5

Many nationalities would come from this 99 year old man. We already have Ishmael on the scene, so Abram is the father of the Ishmaelites (Genesis 25:12). He will also be the father of the Midianites (25:1-2) and the Edomites (25:19, 25; 36:31) and also he will be the father of the Israelites. God so wanted to stress this point that He changed Abram's name.

The name "Abram" comes from two Hebrew words - "ab" meaning father and "ram" meaning exalted. So the name Abram means "exalted father." Now the name "ham" comes from a Hebrew word "hamon" which means multitude. By God changing Abram's name to Abraham, the name means exalted father of the multitude or exalted father of the nations.

**Point #3** - This is a royal covenant. 17:6

Not only would Abraham be the father of many nations, but he would also become the father of many kings. Two of the many kings that Abraham had in his lineage were David and Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1). This royalty came from a man who was 99 years old.

**Point #4** - This is an eternal covenant. 17:7

Abraham's seed is a reference to the specific seed line of Israel and the seed line of Jesus Christ who is "the seed."

**Point #5** - This is a land covenant. 17:8

God specifically promised Abraham that he would give his descendants a specific land. Almighty God will do this by His power.

Can we literally expect that God will give Israel this land? It has been many years and she has not been too faithful to God so do we believe that God will still keep His promise and give Israel her land? Just ask Abraham. When he finally came to the place where he had to totally trust God realizing he was dead to be able to fulfill the promise, God did it. That is what God will do for Israel too. When she finally comes to the place where she totally relies on Jesus Christ to give her God's blessing and her land, she will get it.

This is why we may believe that when we come to the end of ourselves and see ourselves as a dead, helpless and hopeless sinner and we totally rely on Jesus Christ to save us, we are saved.