

Your Name Will Be Abraham, For I Have Made You a Father of Many Nations

17: 1-8

DIG: After thirteen years of God's silence, Abram must think Ishmael is the promised heir. How does ADONAI show him otherwise? With His covenant *cut* with Abram (15:9-21), how does the LORD now *confirm* it? In what way is this promise an everlasting covenant? In the ancient world, a name conveyed the essence of a person, and giving a name conveyed rule or ownership. What then do you make of Abram and Sarai's name change? Why do you think God referred to Himself as El Shaddai?

REFLECT: Who will receive a new name? If you could change your name, what name would you choose? Why? When was the last time you fell facedown in the presence of the LORD? Is He able in your life? How can you be sure that God will fulfill His covenant promises to you?

Twenty-four years since the covenant was sealed with blood (15:9-21) and thirteen years since the birth of Ishmael (16:15), ADONAI once again spoke to Abram. His appearance was not to criticize Abram for taking matters into his own hands by fathering Ishmael, but to strengthen Abram's faith in the blood covenant that God had with him. After this long absence, the LORD assured Abram that He was still at work and the covenant promises were sure.²⁷⁹

When Abram was ninety-nine and Sarai was eighty-nine years old, ADONAI appeared to him in a theophany, or a visible appearance of God.²⁸⁰ This is the fourth of seven times that Abraham receives direct revelation from Elohim (12:1-7, 13:14-17, 15:1-21, here, 18:1-33, 21:12-13 and 22:1-18). The LORD said to him, "I am El Shaddai," or "God Almighty" (17:1a). The name comes from the idea that all might and power is expressed in the term God or El. The word *Almighty* comes from the root word meaning strong, powerful or to do violence, especially in the sense of one who is so powerful as to be able to set aside the laws of nature. As God Almighty, He was able. He was wholly capable of fulfilling all the promises that He had made to Abram.

Who holds the universe together? No one but God, who is infinitely superior in strength and power, knows all things, sustains the universe. That's mighty!

El Shaddai said to him, "Walk *before Me.*" There are other passages that also describe our walk with God. The children of Isra'el were encouraged to walk *after the LORD* (Deuteronomy 13:4). To walk *after* becomes a servant following his master. Of Enoch and Noah it was written that they walked *with God*, which indicates fellowship and friendship. (5:24, 6:9). But those who are members of the body of Christ are told to walk *in Him* (Colossians 2:6). To walk *before* is suggestive of a child running ahead and playing in the presence of her father, conscious of her perfect *security* because He is just behind. But to walk *in* expresses union or being a member of His body. This is a concept of progressive revelation that is developed throughout the Scriptures.²⁸¹

Not only was Abraham to walk before El Shaddai, he was to be blameless (17:1b). All through the Bible, the standard of *perfection* is set before us. The Torah required that Isra'el should love ADONAI her God with *all* her heart (Deuteronomy 6:5). The Psalmist said that the Torah of the LORD is perfect, *reviving the soul* (Psalm 19:7). It was an impossible standard, and it was meant to be such. Rabbi Sha'ul taught that the Torah became a tutor to lead Jews to the Messiah and be justified by faith (NASB Galatians 3:24). A *paidagogos* or a tutor was a slave employed by Greek or Roman families, whose duty was to supervise young boys on behalf of their parents. The role was never permanent, and it was a great day of deliverance when a boy finally gained freedom from his *paidagogos*. His purpose was to take care of the child only until he grew into adulthood, then he was free.²⁸²

Sha'ul tells us that this was the purpose of the Torah. ADONAI purposed that when the Messiah came on the scene and offered salvation by faith alone, the Jews, who should have been tired of butting their heads up against the standard of *perfection*, would embrace Him. They would finally be set free from the perfect standard of the Torah. Unfortunately, by the time Yeshua came, the Jews had pulled God's high standard down to something they *could* do and instead embraced the Oral Law of the Pharisees (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law](#)), by which they nullified **the Word of God for the sake of their tradition** (Matthew 15:2 and 6) and enslaved themselves even further. However, when we believe in, have faith in, or trust in Christ, we become blameless. The righteousness and *perfection* of Christ is transferred to our account, and we are justified and accepted in His sight. But now, apart from the Torah, God's way of making people righteous in His sight has been made clear - although the Torah and the Prophets give their witness as well - and it is a righteousness that comes from God, through the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah, to all who continue trusting. For it makes no difference whether one is a Jew or Gentile, since all have sinned and come short of

earning God's praise. By God's grace, without earning it, all are granted the status of being considered righteous before Him, through the act redeeming us from our enslavement to sin that was accomplished by the Messiah Yeshua (Romans 3:21-24 CJB).

There are seven I will's in these verses. El Shaddai said: **(1) I will confirm My covenant between Me and you and (2) I will greatly increase your numbers (17:2).** This is the fourth confirmation of God's covenant with Abraham (12:1-3, 13:14-17, 15:7-21, here, and 22:15-18). The LORD had promised to make Abram a great nation (12:1-3), to make his descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth (13:14-17), and like the stars of heaven without number. Then we are told that Abram believed God, who credited it to him as righteousness (15:5-6). But the years passed, and Abram had no child. He was getting to be an old man and Sarai an old woman. Still there was no seed. They had Ishmael, but he did not bring the fulfillment of the promise and Abram was now ninety-nine years old. But is anything too hard for ADONAI? *Nothing is impossible with Him!* And it is precisely at this point that the promise of a seed is confirmed, and the name of Abram is changed to Abraham by the revelation of El Shaddai.²⁸³

Sarai's womb was a tomb - it was a place of death. And out of death came life. Isaac was born.²⁸⁴ Rabbi Sha'ul tells us that without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He had promised (Romans 4:19-21). Here the promise of the TaNaKh gives way to the reality of the B'rit Chadashah. Life out of death was the promise El Shaddai made to Abraham. Moreover, Paul takes this promise of life out of death and applies it to us through Christ, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Then Abram fell facedown (17:2b). This is the natural position of those who are in the presence of God. We see this throughout the Bible. Abraham would fall facedown again in 17:17 when he heard that Sarah would bear a son. Moses and Aaron fell facedown continually in the desert (Numbers 14:5, 16:4, 22 and 45, 20:6). When Balaam saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the road with His sword drawn, he fell facedown (Numbers 22:31). Joshua fell facedown when confronted by the Commander of the army of ADONAI before the fall of Jericho (Joshua 5:14). David and the elders of Israel fell facedown when they saw the Angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth with a drawn sword in His hand extended over Jerusalem (First Chronicles 21:16). Even as

the evil spirits saw Christ, they fell down before Him and cried out, "You are the Son of God" (Mark 3:11). Lastly, in the book of Revelation, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb (Revelation 5:8, 14). From Genesis to Revelation, we see men and women falling facedown in the presence of El Shaddai. Consequently, Abraham was in good company.

And God Almighty said to him, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations" (17:3-4). This is a new promise. Up to now the LORD had said he would father one nation, the nation of Israel. But now he would be the father of many nations. I suppose it could be said that Abraham has probably had more children than any other man that has ever lived on the earth. Just think of it. For four thousand years there have been two great lines, the line of Ishmael and the line of Isaac, and there have been millions of people in each line. What a family! What a homecoming! Added to that, there are spiritual descendants because Gentile believers are also called children of Abraham by faith in Messiah. When God promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations, El Shaddai certainly made good on His promise!²⁸⁵

"No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many Gentile nations" (17:5). Abram means *exalted father*. All his life this childless man had to go around with the name *exalted father*. What an embarrassment for someone who had no children! But now he would be called Avraham, which means *the father of many*. The person changing the name of another would be claiming ownership of that person.

Later, God would change Jacob's name to Isra'el, in commemoration of his prayer (32:28. 35:10). The king of Egypt changed the name of Joseph to Zaphnath-paaneah, because of his ability to reveal secrets (41:45). Another king of Egypt subsequently changed the name of Eliakim the son of Josiah to Jehoiakim, when he made him king of Judah (Second Kings 23:34). When the king of Babylon made Mattaniah king he changed his name to Zedekiah (Second Kings 24:17). So, also, when Nebuchadnezzar wished to have a few of the young Jewish prisoners taught in the Chaldean language and customs, he changed their names from Dani'el or *God is my judge*, Hananiah or *beloved of the Lord*, and Azariah, or *the Lord is my help*, and Misha'el or *who is as God*, to Belteshazzar, or *prince of Baal*, Shadrach, or *the command of Aku, the Babylonian god of the moon*, Meshach, or *who is as Aku is*, and Abed-nego, or *servant of Nebo, the Babylonian god of wisdom*, because he was their earthly master (Dani'el 1:6-7).²⁸⁶ Jesus changed the name of Simon to Kefa (Matthew 16:17-18) and Sha'ul to Paul (Acts 13:9).

The Bible tells us that one day believers will receive **a new name**. Jesus says: **To those who overcome, I will give them a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to them who receive it (Revelation 2:17)**. We will not know what the **new name** is until we receive it (**Deuteronomy 29:29**). **New** does not mean in contrast to what is old in time, but **new** in the sense of being completely different. The **new name** will serve as each believer's admission into heaven. It will uniquely reflect **God's** special love for and adoption of every one of **His** true children. **He** will give us **a new name** because **He** is our **Master** and **Savior**.²⁸⁷

After naming **Abraham**, **ADONAI** continued to prophesy and said: **(3) I will make you very fruitful; (4) I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you (17:6)**. The fact that both **Jewish and Gentile kings** would come from **Abraham** was also a new promise.

Then **God Almighty** reaffirmed the covenant that **He** had make with **Avraham**. **(5) I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you (17:7)**. The Hebrew word **everlasting**, or *oran*, does not carry the concept of eternity, but means *up to the end of a certain time period, in this case, the whole duration of human history*. It does not have the same concept as the English word. Therefore, the **covenant** would be established with and through only one specific seed, **Abraham's seed**. The **LORD** would make **many nations** through **Abraham**; it would be sustained through only one nation, the nation of **Isra'el**.

Then **God** said: **The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, (6) I will give as an everlasting possession to you, Abraham, and your descendants after you (17:8a)**. However, even though **Abraham** owned almost nothing of **the Promised Land**, and while his **descendants** would own much more of the **Promised Land**, *never* in Jewish history have the **Jews** owned *all* of the **Promised Land**. This will only be fulfilled in the messianic Kingdom and will be an **everlasting possession** until the creation of a **new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1)**.

And **(7) I will be their God (17:8b)**. Though many have gone astray, and the history of **Avraham's descendants** has been long and sad, there has always been at least *a remnant in every generation that continues to worship and obey the God of Abraham*. **ADONAI** is, of course, **the Savior** of all mankind, whether they acknowledge Him or not; but **He** undertook here to be in a special and unique way **the God of Abraham's descendants**.²⁸⁸ **This is the fourth confirmation of God's covenant with Abraham (12:1-3, 13:14-17, 15:7-21, here, and 22:15-18)**.

El Shaddai made an **everlasting covenant** with **Avraham**. Is it good today? It certainly is. **The LORD** promised **everlasting** life for **whoever believes in Him (John 3:16)**. If **God Almighty** is not going to make good on **His covenant** with **Abraham**, then you had better read the fine print on your **covenant** again. But I have some good news for **you**. **He is** going to make **Avraham's covenant** good and **He** is going to make good on your **covenant**. **Jesus Himself** said: **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that you may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10)**.