

# Genesis 17: The God Who Promises

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One of the strong themes of this chapter is God's **ownership** of Abram. (Gen 17:2)

The name God uses in this chapter is **El Shaddai**. (Gen 17:1) This name is strongly associated with the covenant promise of **children**. The Hebrew root is **shad**, which refers to the **female breast**.

Changing the names of Abram and Sarai represent **ownership** as well as a **new mission**.

The new names that God gives are intended to point to **descent** rather than **ancestry**.

*Abram* = exalted father; *Abraham* = father of a multitude  
*Sarai* = princess; *Sarah* = princess

Furthermore, changing the names to include a breath sound ("ah") may signify the working of the **Spirit** as well as personal identification with God's covenant name ("YHWH").

As the revelation of the covenant unfolds, we now get a **sign** and a **son**. (Gen 17:10, 16)

Notice the parallel between cutting the covenant in Chapter 15 and cutting the flesh in Chapter 17. The blood ritual of circumcision points to **consecration** as well as **consequences**. (Gen 17:14)

The fact that circumcision was applied to everyone in the household is evidence that God's mercy was always extended beyond **natural descendants**. (Gen 17:12-13)

What is the significance of waiting such a long time to institute the sign of the covenant? (Rom 4)  
How has the passage of time raised the stakes?

Notice that the sign of the covenant is not **justification**, but a **response** to saving faith.

Notice also that external circumcision was always intended to point to an *inward* condition: circumcision of the **heart**. (e.g., Acts 7)

Abraham **laughed** first. (Gen 17:17)

God rejects **Ishmael** and points to **Isaac** as the one to inherit the promises. (Gen 17:19)

"I have heard you." God nevertheless promises to make Ishmael the father of **twelve princes**. (Gen 17:20; 25:13-15)

God then tells Abraham to look for Isaac **next year**. (Gen 17:21)

Abraham and his household are circumcised **that very day**. (Gen 17:26)

*Timeline*: Chapter 17 begins thirteen years after the end of Chapter 16 and takes place in a single day.