



Following in Faith

Gen 17:1-8, 15-16

Main Themes

Gen 17:

- I. Faith is what God is looking for (v. 1-2)**
 - A. Integrity matters in how we live our lives**
- II. God's covenant with Abraham**
 - A. Names matter (v. 4-5)**
 - B. The Promise made (v. 6-8)**
- III. The same covenant includes Sarah (v. 15-16)**



Gen 17

When Abram was 99 years old, the Eternal One appeared to him again, assuring him of the promise of a child yet to come.

Eternal One: I am El-Shaddai. Walk before Me. Continue to trust and serve Me faithfully. Be blameless and true. If you are true and trust Me, then I will make certain the covenant with you that I promised. I will bless you with a throng of descendants.



“Walk before me”

“Walk” meant to live his life before God. Abraham’s walk will be one that God is watching and watching over, which is both an encouragement and a challenge. God will be watching over Abraham protectively, as God has been doing through Abraham’s ill-advised Egyptian adventure and his expedition to rescue Lot (Genesis 12–14), as he promised in Genesis 15 and will promise again here. God will also be watching to see what kind of person he is.



“Be Blameless”

The word God uses suggests not the absence of any faults but the presence of a positive quality. More literally, God wants Abraham to be “whole.”. God wants Abraham to be wholly committed to God’s ways. God doesn’t expect him to be sinless; God is realistic and can cope with people making moral mistakes. Rather, God looks for a certain direction in people’s lives, a certain cast to their lives, a fundamental moral wholeness or straightness.



“Covenant with you that I promised?”

Actually God had already done that, and Genesis 15 was clear that making the covenant did not issue from Abraham’s being a person of integrity. He had not been that when they went down to Egypt. If Abraham made a contribution at all to the making of the covenant, it was simply by trusting in God’s promise. Nor was the making of that covenant conditional on any acts Abraham would do. Yet God’s commitment to Abraham was designed to involve Abraham’s integrity, and if that integrity is not forthcoming, it is not clear that God’s purpose in relating to Abraham can be fulfilled. Abraham’s integrity was not the basis of the covenant, but it was essential to its working. In this sense, God can only go on affirming the covenant commitment if Abraham does the same.



Gen 17

:3 Abram bowed low, his face and body flat on the ground.

Eternal One: :4 Here is My covenant with you. I promise you will become the root of a huge family tree of multiple nations. :5 To symbolize your foundational role in this covenant, I hereby change your name. You will no longer go by the name “Abram.” Your new name will be “Abraham,” which means “father of a great multitude of nations,” because that is exactly what I will make of you.



Horde of nations

If you asked someone back in Harran what the name Abraham meant, they would probably say it meant the same as Abram (that is, these are two different spellings of the same name, like John and Jon or Ann and Anne). But in Hebrew, a “horde” is a hamon, so that within the name Abraham you can see most of that word

Father of a horde



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Gen 17

:6 Your descendants will be exceedingly fruitful. Nations and kings will descend from you. :7 I hereby make this covenant—this sacred bond—between Me and you and all of your children and their children’s children throughout the coming generations. It will be an eternal covenant. I will be your God and the God to all who come after you! :8 I will fulfill My promise to give you and your descendants the land of Canaan, where you now live as aliens. I will place all of Canaan into your hands to be yours forever. I will be your God and their God forever.



Aliens

Genesis 12–16 has twice referred to the status Abraham and his people have as aliens in describing his position in Egypt and the position his descendants will eventually have in Egypt. In both contexts they will be aware of the insecurity attached to this status. It makes Abraham nervous about what will happen to Sarah (and to him!), and it will lead to his descendants being ill-treated by their hosts, as can happen to aliens in any country.



Israel lost their land

The question would be how this loss of the country could have happened, though they should have little difficulty working that out; it is implicit in that comment about the Canaanites' losing the country because of their waywardness (Gen 15:16). If that can happen to the Canaanites, it can surely happen to the Israelites, as the Torah makes explicit. The possibility issues from that word "agelong" or "perpetual." English translations often use the word "everlasting," which may suggest too much. In the Old Testament, how long is agelong or how perpetual is perpetual depends on the context.



Israel lost their land

The word can mean “through all your life.” Maybe God simply means, “The country will be theirs as long as they live with integrity, but if they give themselves up to waywardness and fail to turn from that waywardness, they could totally lose it.” But then, if in the context of exile people do turn back, this promise offers them hope. Maybe their exile is not the end. In the context of twenty-first-century politics, the implication would be that we can see the Jewish people’s freedom to live unhindered in the country as an outworking of this promise that goes back to Abraham.



Gen 17

:15 (continuing to Abraham) As for Sarai, your wife, the covenant applies to her as well. No longer will she be known as Sarai; her new name will be Sarah.
:16 She will receive My special blessing, and she will conceive a son by you. With My blessing on her, she will become the founding princess of nations to come. Kings of many peoples will be counted among her children





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