EVERLASTING LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT, PART 3

Terry N. Wilson, Pastor-Teacher

Genesis 17:1-14

This chapter records significant revelations, commands, and statements regarding the central personages related to the foundational Abrahamic Covenant. The chapter opens with the fact that Abram was ninety-nine years old. This chronological notation directly connects with the previous chapter's last verse, which tells us that Abram was eighty-six years of age when Ishmael was born (**16:16**). Thirteen years had elapsed, and the faithless surrogacy that produced Abram's and Hagar's child would not accomplish Yahweh's plan already announced to Abram in **Genesis 15:4**.

Self-Identification

Now, Yahweh appears to the patriarch again. He reveals Himself as God Almighty (**v. 1**). The Hebrew term for our English word is *El Shaddai*. This appellation discloses a particular attribute of Yahweh's which was eminently suitable for the stupendous covenant promise He made to Abram (**15:5**). *El Shaddai* refers to the One who grants fertility and life. In fact, each time the name appears in Genesis, it is associated with God's power to grant numerous offspring (**17:1-2; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3-9; 49:25**) or to preserve life (**43:14**).[1] The name also communicates omnipotence.

This self-disclosure to Abram was a significant development in the Abram saga because at that time, Abram was past reproductive capability. He had no resource by which to bring to bear a seed, much less descendants comparable to the stellar bodies (**15:5**).

[1] Robert Chishom, Jr., *A Case for Premillennialism.*

The Command

From this point onward, Yahweh demanded that Abram walk in integrity (**v. 1**). His life must be consonant with his affirmation of belief in Yahweh. The purpose for the command is that Yahweh may confirm, "My covenant between Me and you" (**v. 2**). The covenant had already been established (**15:18**). This statement refers to further confirmation and ratification of the covenant previously established. The idea here is, as Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. notes, "component parts of a covenant."[2] Yahweh did not repeat the full covenant with Abram but a component of it.

Obedience by Abram and his seed was not demanded in order for the covenant to be ultimately fulfilled. Rather, their obedience to Yahweh was the means of personally experiencing the covenant's blessing (**17:1, 9-14**). Furthermore, the covenant is unilateral and, with respect to its fulfillment, unconditional.

The Abrahamic Covenant is also characterized as everlasting (**17:13**). The certainty of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant is asserted in **Genesis 18:18**.

Multiplication and Name Change

Yahweh reasserts His promise to multiply Abram exceedingly (**v. 2**). This promise includes Abram becoming the father of nations. Hence, Yahweh changed Abram's name to Abraham (**vv. 4-5**). "Abram" means *exalted father*. "Abraham" signified *the father of a multitude*.

[2] Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., "The Covenant with Abraham and Its Historical Setting," *BSac* 127 (1970):249-250.

The Covenant Sign

Verses 10-14 record the sign of the covenant made between Yahweh and Abraham and his descendants. Circumcision was practiced previously in history, but its practice as a sign of the covenant took on new significance.

Circumcision identified those belonging to the physical and ethnical lineage of Abraham.[3] "Significantly, circumcision involved Abraham's power of procreation – the area of life in which he had resorted to fleshly expediency – and had so failed. Man's best plans and strength of will would never bring about the promise. For Abraham circumcision was an act of repentance and a sign of dependance upon God for the promise."[4]

[3] *MacArthur Study Bible.*

[4] R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing.*