

On the Beginning

21. Almighty God

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 17:1-27

God is introduced to us in the Book of Genesis by several Hebrew names. As we have learned, *Elohim* is God the Creator. It means “Mighty One.” *Jehovah* (translated “*the LORD*”) is God’s name associated with His relationship to men. “*The Most High God (El Elyon—Genesis 14:18-19)* is His name of authority, used especially in connection with His relation to Gentiles. In Genesis 15:2, Abram calls Him, “*Lord God,*” using the title *Adonai* (Lord), which means Master or Lord. Abram was submitting himself to God, and so he called Him Lord. Now in Genesis 17,

“... the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.” (verse 1)

For the first time in the Bible, God is called “*the Almighty*.” Here is a beautiful name for God, used especially in the Books of Job and Revelation. The Book of Genesis uses it six times:

1. Here in 17:1;
2. In 28:3, used by Isaac talking to Jacob;
3. In 35:11, used by God giving Jacob the Abrahamic Covenant;
4. In 43:14, used by Jacob;
5. In 48:3, used by Jacob talking to his son Joseph; and
6. In 49:25, in Jacob’s blessing for Joseph.

In Hebrew it is “*Shaddai*,” which has the idea of “powerful.” In the Old Testament, the term “*Almighty God*” emphasizes the fact that God is able to keep His promises! It was in the role of Promise-Keeper that God revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Exodus 6:3, God says,

“And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.”

This means that the full meaning of Jehovah was not revealed until Moses (See Exodus 3:13-14). As we have seen, the patriarchs knew the name Jehovah, but they apparently they weren’t told the significance of that name. God mainly revealed Himself to them as the Almighty, the One Who keeps His promises. See how that is shown in Genesis 17.

1. Abram’s New **Name** .

Again, the LORD speaks of His covenant with Abram (vs. 1-8). This time, He emphasizes how He will “*multiply*” his descendants, and therefore He changes Abram’s name. Abram (high father) becomes Abraham (father of many nations). So far, the only offspring of Abraham was Ishmael, and so the meaning of the new name was at first mysterious.

2. The **Token** of the Covenant.

Now God adds something to the covenant relationship He had with Abraham: “*a token*” (vs. 9-14). That token is the circumcising of the baby boys in his family and nation. Making a man a Jew by circumcising him does not save his soul, the New Testament teaches (Romans 4, Galatians 5). It just established him as part of God’s earthly covenant people. Circumcision symbolically speaks of

regeneration, the new birth (See Romans 2:25-29).

3. Sarah's **Son**.

In verses 15-21, God tells Abraham that he (ninety-nine years old) was going to have a son the next year by Sarai. As a matter of fact, Sarai's name would also be changed—to Sarah. We aren't sure what Sarai really means, but Sarah means "princess."

"And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." (verse 16)

Abraham couldn't believe it, and he even laughed at the idea (v. 17). Almighty God then said that the son would be named Isaac, which means "laughter." It is interesting to trace the laughter about Isaac's birth: 17:17-19, 18:10-15, and 21:1-7. The laughter of unbelief was turned into the laughter of joy! God really can keep His promises, and we must believe that He will!

4. Ishmael's **Blessing**.

Read again verses 15 through 21. Then finish the chapter. God agreed to bless Ishmael, even though Ishmael was born contrary to God's plan. Ishmael was the product of the patriarch's unbelief and presumption, yet God said He would bless him. Why? Because Abraham asked Him to do it (v. 18). It is truly amazing what God will do in answer to the prayer of the servant who delights in Him.

"Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."
(Psalm 37:4)

See what He did in response to the request of Moses in Exodus 32 (verses 7 through 14). See what He did because Joshua made a request (Joshua 10:12-14). God Almighty can do amazing things, and He will do them in order to keep His promises and to bless those who love Him.