

# Genesis 17:1-2

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/gen/gen-17/genesis-171-2/>

*When Abram was 99 years old, God established a covenant with him to bless him greatly if he walked blameless. God expanded His covenant to add this mutual condition, where Abram would receive blessings if he walked in righteousness.*

Thirteen years pass between the end of chapter 16 (when Abram was 86 years old) and the beginning of Chapter 17. Chapter 16 ended with the birth of Ishmael. *Abram was ninety-nine years old* and had been in the land for 24 years ([Genesis 12:4](#)). Abram's age has been mentioned during key events in his life ([Genesis 12:4](#), [16:16](#)). In the phrase *The Lord appeared to Abram* the word "appeared" in Hebrew is *raah*. *Raah* is a verb meaning "to see," particularly to physically see with the eyes. Perhaps a better translation would be, "Abram saw with his own eyes the Lord." There are other passages that note God appearing visibly to Abram ([Genesis 12:7](#)). It could be that Abram saw God by visiting with the angel of the LORD in the same way Hagar had seen the LORD ([Genesis 16:13](#)).

Compound names for God highlight a particular attribute of God or aspects of His nature. God here reveals himself for the first time in the Bible under the new name of *God Almighty* (Hebrew *El Shaddai*). "El Shaddai" a compound word made from the root *El* (the mighty one with strength and power, i.e. God) and *Shaddai* (the almighty). Together, they mean the one who is more than enough, the all-sufficient one ([Exodus 6:2-3](#); [Numbers 24:4,16](#); [Job 11:7](#)). El Shaddai is translated as "God Almighty" signifying that He can fulfill His promises. In the context of this chapter, El Shaddai has the power to enable the barren Sarai to bear Abram a son. This will also demonstrate that El Shaddai has the power to keep the unconditional promises as well as the expanded promise to bless Abram if he walks *blameless*.

God had already made a number of promises to Abram. He promised Abram's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens ([Genesis 15:5](#)). He had also granted the promised land to Abram as a reward for his past obedience ([Genesis 15:7-19](#)). In each case, the promise contained no remaining conditions. No subsequent behavior was required from Abram for these promises to be fulfilled by God.

In this chapter God adds a conditional promise. God tells Abram to *walk before Me, and be blameless*. This covenant provision includes an obligation for Abram. A promise that will be conditional on Abram's choices. God tells Abram that He *will establish My covenant between Me and you*. In chapter 15 God conducted a covenant ceremony in answer to Abram's question how he could have assurance he would inherit the land. God did the ceremony by Himself, signifying that the grant of the Promised Land was God's promise alone; Abram had no remaining obligation in that covenant.

But now God establishes a covenant *between me and you*. This is a mutual agreement, that also depends upon Abram. If Abram will walk blamelessly, then God tells Abram He *will multiply you exceedingly*. *Multiply* goes beyond mere numbers of people. God already promised a large number of descendants, without further condition. This promise speaks of greatness. God had granted unconditionally to Abram land and descendants. Now He adds that if Abram will exercise those gifts in a righteous manner, God will make him great.

The expression "*walk before me*" conveys the service or devotion of a faithful servant to his king or suzerain (1 Kings 1:2, 10:8; Jeremiah 52:12; Deuteronomy 10:8, 18:7; Judges 20:28; Ezekiel 44:15). God was commanding Abram to live in the way that He approves, to serve Him faithfully and live a blameless life. The reward for this would be a great blessing.

The word "blameless" is the Hebrew word *Tamiym* which means complete. It is most associated with an animal to be sacrificed to God "without blemish" (Exodus 12:5, 29:1; Leviticus 3:1, 4:3,23, 14:10). David used *Tamiym*, (translated blameless) in his song commemorating an escape from Saul: "I am blameless before God; I have kept myself from sin. The LORD rewarded me for doing right. He has seen my innocence" (2 Samuel 22:24-25). David clearly did not live a sinless life. He was however innocent of treason to King Saul. David praises God for blessing his innocence by helping him escape.

Abram had already been declared righteous in God's sight solely by faith (Genesis 15:6). This command to be blameless does not overthrow this grace of God and replace it with an impossible requirement to earn righteousness in God's sight. God's acceptance had already been unconditionally given to Abram (Genesis 15:6). Rather, this is a command to live righteously in order to inherit an additional blessing. God had already rewarded Abram for obedience, and now promises to reward him further. God's approval, or

reward, is connected with our choices. Rewards continue to accumulate if we continue to walk in obedience.

Abram is promised a blessing to be *multiplied*, or made great if he will be *blameless*. Noah is an example of excellent conduct that received a blessing ([Genesis 6:9](#)). The New Testament has many passages that promise God will reward believers greatly if we walk faithfully. This will be a pattern throughout scripture. God grants acceptance into His family unconditionally, to be His children by declaring us righteous in His sight through faith. This acceptance is a free gift that cannot be earned or lost. But with our position in God's family comes responsibility. We receive God's rewards or blessings that bring us greatness when we faithfully discharge our responsibility. One such example is in [Revelation 3:21](#)

*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

In this passage, Jesus makes a conditional promise to "His bond-servants" ([Rev 1:1](#)) who are addressed in this letter. His conditional promise is that He will bestow the greatness of sharing the power and glory of His throne for any of His bond-servants who overcome as He overcame. Jesus came to earth as a human, and overcame temptation, shame, and death and lived righteously. As a result, He was rewarded by His Father. Jesus "sat down with" His "Father on His throne" as the human king of earth. His Father "highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" because of His obedience, even through suffering and humility ([Phil 2:5-9](#)).

This conditional promise of Revelation is made to "bond-servants" who already have the unconditional promise of being God's child, or bond-servant. The pattern runs from Genesis to Revelation. God's acceptance is given unconditionally, received by faith, and cannot be lost. Then God rewards obedient behavior. Abram's rewards were granted without reservation. But additional rewards remained, with many rewards reserved until the next life. Abram received many rewards during his life. God blessed him greatly. But his greatest rewards occurred after he died and went to be with his Savior. This pattern will repeat throughout scripture, and applies to New Testament believers.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>1</sup> Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be**

**blameless. <sup>2</sup> “I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly.”**