

# Explore the Bible: February 18

*Established • Genesis 17:1-10,15-19*

*By Laura Lee Leathers*



Leathers

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A quick review: At the age of eighty-six, Abram's son, Ishmael, was birthed by Hagar. Life rocks on for the aging couple. Abram and Sarai, have now lived in the land for twenty-four years. They continue to wait for their heir of

promise.

**Covenant (Gen. 17:1-8)** – When the chapter opens, the Lord appears to Abram, now ninety-nine. The Lord's appearance is referred to as a theophany, the arrival of God the Father in human form (see John 1:18; 1 John 4:12). The Lifeway commentary states that the theophany is "actually Christophanies – the appearance of the pre-incarnate Son of God in human likeness."

The conversation begins, "I am God Almighty." In Hebrew, this is El Shaddai, God's name for Himself. It is the first usage. The name means He is all-powerful and all-sufficient.

"Live in my presence and be blameless," is a powerful command. "The literal translation is, "walk before me and be faultless," with walk referring to the lifestyle Abram was to have. The Lord required faithfulness and obedience" (Lifeway). It's a phrase for Christ-followers to follow.

Their meeting is a formal occasion. The focus is on the covenant God originated. It is an extension (see Gen:12:15). There are three main elements: "(1) God would make Abram into a great nation; (2) God would bless Abram; and (3) Through Abram, God would bless all the peoples of the earth" (Lifeway). Jesus Christ, the coming "seed," through His new covenant (the Gospel), would allow us to participate in the Abrahamic covenant of faith.

Abram's response to the news was to fall facedown. He understood and recognized that God, the great King, stood before him. After all that God had been telling him along this journey, he finally understood the weight of the promise of an offspring.

God changes Abram's (meaning "exalted father") name to Abraham ("father of a multitude"). The promise is for the future, but it has already been fulfilled in God's eyes. God continues: Abraham would be extremely fruitful, and the covenant would be

between God and all future offspring. It's a permanent covenant, and "all the land of Canaan" is a permanent possession, with a stipulation – if the Israelites were obedient and loyal to the Lord.

**Sign (Gen. 17:9-10)** – As God continues with His instructions, He tells Abraham the covenant is for him and his offspring through their generations. The sign was that "males must be circumcised" (see Lev. 12:2-3). It was a physical demonstration of obedience.

Circumcision was not something new; other nations practiced the procedure in their cultures. In verses 11-14, God further explains a male child was to be circumcised eight days after birth, and if the male child was not circumcised, "That person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

Later, in the early church, circumcision became a sensitive subject (see Acts 10-15). Paul did address the topic and defined what circumcision meant for Christ's followers (see Romans 2:25-19).

**Promise (Gen. 17:15-19)** – Now, the conversation focuses on Sarai. Her name would change to Sarah. Notice what God will do in her life: "I will bless her, I will give you a son through her, and she will produce nations and kings."

Once again, Abraham fell facedown. Words like gratitude, reverence, humility, and wonder must have filled his heart and mind. Yet, notice that Abraham laughs to himself, a sign of joy. Then he asks God how a hundred-year-old man and ninety-year-old woman could have a baby. Abraham brings up plan A again – "if only Ishmael were acceptable to you!"

Have you ever made a statement to a child or teenager and said, "What part of 'no' don't you understand?" Here, with strong rejection, God dismisses Abraham's suggestion.

Sarah would bear a son, and his name would be Isaac – God's

plan, God's timing. A covenant was confirmed and permanent for all his future offspring. Later, God states, "My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this next year" (v. 21, NKJV).

"God promised Abraham at age 75 (Gen. 12:4) that He would make him into a great nation – and then made him wait a quarter of a century to fulfill that promise. But God acts on behalf of those who wait for him!" (*The Charles Stanley Life Principles Bible*).

*Leathers is a member of First Church, Lexington. Visit her website: <https://www.lauraleeleathers.com>*