

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Deepening Our Roots with God

Genesis 17:1–5, 9–10, 15–19, 21–22



LET'S BEGIN HERE

A certain wise old proverb begins with a question: “When is the best time to plant an oak tree?” The answer quips: “A hundred years ago . . . or today.” The point is this: we can't go back in time and change the past, but we can change our future by what we choose today. Today is the best time to plant good seeds that benefit us later. But we must be patient. Like slow-growing oaks, humans mature over the seasons, not overnight. Chuck Swindoll states,

Maturity and depth do not come quickly. They take time. If greed is the demon of money, if lust is the demon of sex, if pride is the demon of power, speed is the demon of depth.

In our hurry-up, high-tech culture, we assume we can acquire anything of value with a tap on a screen. We want rapid transit, fast computers, instant meals, speedy service, and immediate success. We lack patience for a careful cultivation of character that includes being quiet, waiting, and listening for God's “gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12).

Sometimes, to give our faith and character time to mature, God must slow us down and lead us into a long dormant season—similar to the season of barrenness that Abraham and Sarah experienced as they waited on God to give them a son. For years, nothing appeared to be happening. But under the soil, out of sight, their roots of spiritual maturity were deepening.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As we begin our study on deepening our roots, let's enter a period of quiet prayer.

- Invitation: Invite the Lord into your study time, and ask Him to guard you from distraction.
- Openness: Open your heart as David prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23).

Quotable

Maturity and depth do not come quickly. They take time. If greed is the demon of money, if lust is the demon of sex, if pride is the demon of power, speed is the demon of depth.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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- **Attentiveness:** Ask the Lord to help you hear His “gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12).
- **Examination:** Let your mind drift through past decades of your life. Where were you ten years ago? Twenty? Thirty? Acknowledge to the Lord the ways you’ve seen His hand guiding you.
- **Thanksgiving:** Conclude with giving thanks for His presence and for the truths you are about to study.

Now open the Word and read Genesis 17. As you read, notice the focus on God in verses 4–8 (“As for Me” [17:4 NASB]); Abraham, in verses 9–14 (“as for you” [17:9 NASB]); and Sarah, in verses 15–16 (“as for Sarai your wife” [17:15 NASB]).

From your initial reading, what stands out to you?

As we dig deeper into this chapter, we’ll apply our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation and interpretation.



Observation and Interpretation: Waiting on God, Listening to God, Talking with God

Observation is the necessary beginning point as we look for action words, details, places, events, repetitions, comparisons, and contrasts. *Interpretation* is deciphering the meaning of the text—based on the author’s intended meaning to his original audience. As we interpret, we form *principles* which we can apply to our lives.

Waiting on God—Genesis 17:1–2

Read Genesis 17:1–2. The opening two verses of Genesis 17 form a bridge from the birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16:15) to the promised birth of Isaac (17:19), from Abraham and Sarah’s running ahead of God to their waiting on God.



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Observation

What do you notice about Abraham's age in Genesis 17:1, compared to his age in Genesis 16:16? What is the significance of this passing of time?

Thirteen years of silence lie sandwiched between Genesis 16 and 17. However, *don't mistake God's silence for His absence*. Through each passing moment, God was near. And don't assume that nothing of significance happened. Although God gave Abraham no vision, voice, or visit, He did give Abraham something equally precious—time to deepen his faith as he waited on God.

Let's continue by contrasting the events recorded in Genesis 16 with the opening lines of Genesis 17. What was Abraham and Sarah's assumption in Genesis 16:1–3 in contrast with God's reassurance in Genesis 17:1–2?

What were God's expectations in 17:1, and how had Abraham and Sarah come short of these expectations in Genesis 16:4–6? Why might God state these expectations here?



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Interpretation

What is the meaning of God's name in 17:1, *El Shaddai*? What do you think this name teaches Abraham and Sarah—and the original readers of Genesis—about trusting God?¹ For added insight into *El Shaddai*, note that this name appears in Scripture 48 times, of which 31 times are in Job. Like Abraham, Job also wrestled with trusting God. What is it about the meaning of *El Shaddai* that inspires faith in those who struggle with doubt?

Principles

What principles about waiting on God emerge from observing and interpreting the text so far?

Abraham and Sarah learned not to run ahead of God but, as God instructed, to “walk before Me and be blameless” (17:1 NASB). As they trusted Him and rested in His promises over the long haul, their roots with God deepened until, *finally*, God announced that their growing season was over and the fruit of their faith was about to appear.

Listening to God—Genesis 17:3–16

Read Genesis 17:3–16. In this section, God does all the talking, as Abraham reverently bows and attentively listens.



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Observation

In the first part of this section, God reaffirmed His unconditional covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:3–8). Refer to the chart, “A Patriarch in Panorama—The Life of Abraham,” in the first study in this series. Review the passages in which God previously affirmed or reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant. As you read, make mental notes of the many times in these passages in which God used the phrase, “I will.” Note also the ways in which each passage builds on and expands the previous one. What is new in Genesis 17:3–8?

The *seal* of God’s promise—“I will guarantee to give you countless descendants” (17:2)—was Abram’s new God-given name, *Abraham*, which means “father of multitudes.”

What is the *sign* that future generations would be included in the covenantal blessings (17:9–14)? List the specifics of God’s instructions.

The next part addressed Sarah’s role (17:15–16). Although “long past the age of having children” (18:11), Sarah would bear Abraham’s heir. What specifics do you observe in God’s promise to Sarah (17:16)?

Highlighting the promise that “kings of nations will be among her descendants” (17:16), Sarai’s new name, *Sarah*, means “royal princess”—a regal name for the mother of future kings!



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Interpretation

The apostle Paul interprets the Jewish rite of circumcision in light of our spiritual union with Christ. Read Colossians 2:11–12, and write down the meaning of Christ's "spiritual circumcision."

Circumcision symbolized purification and membership in the covenant community. The coming birth of Isaac represented the hope of new life—the next generation in fulfillment of God's promise of a family line. For Christians, we receive purification, identification, and hope of new life through our union with Christ (Colossians 3:3–4).

Principles

What principles about listening to God emerge from observing and interpreting this text?

Talking to God—Genesis 17:17–22

Until now God did all the talking, but when Abraham heard that Sarah would become a mother in her old age, incredulous Abraham had something to say!

Observation

What do you observe about Abraham's reaction (Genesis 17:17–18)?



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Abraham's objection and offer of an alternative heir sounds familiar, doesn't it? In Genesis 15, Abraham offered Eliezer as his heir. In the following chart, compare Abraham's offer of Ishmael as his heir with his similar offer of Eliezer.

	Offer of Eliezer Genesis 15:2-5	Offer of Ishmael Genesis 17:17-22
Abraham's Objection		
Abraham's Idea		
God's Response		
Abraham's Obedience (15:6; 17:23)		

Interpretation

Despite Abraham's objections, God insisted that Abraham's heir would be through Sarah. What lesson do you think the author of Genesis was teaching his readers about God's ways?

Principles

What principles about talking to God emerge from observing and interpreting this text?



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Application: Responding to God

After God finished speaking, Abraham obeyed God's command to circumcise, "on that very day" (Genesis 17:23). He obeyed immediately because he trusted God to know what was best. Wholehearted trust leads to *total obedience* and characterizes people with deep spiritual roots.

Ninety-nine-year-old Abraham deepened his roots with God through years of waiting on God, listening to God, talking with God, and responding to God. Which of the *principles that you wrote down in this study* can you "plant" right away in your life? What choices can you make today that will deepen your roots and mature you?

Close your study as you began by inviting the Lord to slow you down to take life step-by-step as you walk with Him in deeper faith.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, slow me down. Quiet my spirit. I want to eliminate distractions so I can listen only to You. There is a quietness in Your presence and a beauty in Your plan. Like Abraham and Sarah, I wait patiently for Your will and trust completely in You through all the seasons of my life. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. "This is the first OT occurrence of the title 'God Almighty' . . . which is used several times in Gen. [17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; cf. 49:25]. Some scholars suggest that *sadday* is related to the Akk. word *sadu* that means breast or mountain or both. . . . So *sadday*, when used of God, refers either to His ability to supply abundantly ["the Abundant One"] or to His majestic strength ["the Almighty One"]." Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Old Testament ed., ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, SP Publications, 1985), 58.



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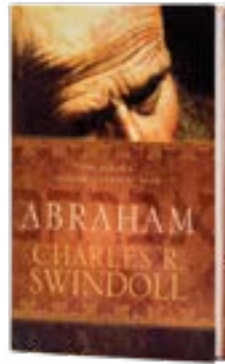
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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