

• *God's displeasure*

• *14 year delay before God speaks again*

• *God's offer*

1. God's covenants need to be 'established'

• *First a promise is offered then...*

• *Second an oath and then it becomes a certainty*

2. God's word of assurance

• *El Shaddai*

• *The God who is powerful to act when His people are in a desperate situation'*

God was displeased with Abram's foolish unbelief concerning the promise and his turning to Hagar instead, and God's displeasure leads to Him being silent. Fourteen years went by before God gave Abram another major revelation of His plans ^{☞1}. Eventually, when Ishmael was at least thirteen years old, God spoke again.

God is still offering Abram an oath. A 'covenant of generosity' is a relationship in which God offers to give a promise on oath. The promise will then be so firmly established that it is certain of fulfilment and cannot be reversed.

Yet there is a long delay between the incident with Hagar and the next occasion when God gives a major revelation to Abram. God was rather displeased with Abram's folly and it was a long time before He spoke again to Abram about establishing His promises.

1. **God's covenants need to be 'established'**. The covenant- oath is on offer. God keeps on describing the promise. The covenant ceremony has taken place. But the covenant is not fully completed since no verbal oath has been given. At this point God speaks of 'establishing' the covenant. The word in 17:2 is the Hebrew word often translated 'give' but it has the sense of 'deliver', 'grant', 'set up'. In 17:7 there is a different word which means 'establish' or 'cause to stand'. To 'establish' a covenant is to turn the offer into a certainty. At present promises have been given but they have not yet been 'obtained' ^{☞1}. They are genuinely intended. God does not lie and in that sense the promise is sure. But they still could be lost. Promises are inherited by faith and patience, and they are lost by unbelief and impatience. The fact that God is speaking of 'establishing' a covenant is a proof that in Genesis 12–22 there is one covenant spread over the entire story of Abraham's life. It is on offer, but it has not yet been 'established'. There are two things in this matter in which it is impossible for God to lie ^{☞2}, the promise and the oath. God was not lying when He gave the promise; it was sincerely intended. But if the offered- promise becomes a sworn-promise it is established! When God first gives the promise it is offered; when God gives the oath it is sealed and cannot be lost.

As God moves forward with Abram seeking to carry forward His purpose, there comes an unprecedented word of assurance, and an unprecedented call to godliness.

2. **God gives an unprecedented word of assurance when He reminds Abram He is 'El Shaddai'** ^{☞1}. 'El Shaddai' is the main name for God used by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ^{☞2}. When we study the way it is used it is clear that the name has the meaning of 'The God who is powerful to act when we are in a desperate situation', 'the God who is Almighty on behalf of the helpless'.

In Genesis 17:1, Abram has been promised a son, but the son has not been born. Now Abram is old. The name is used in a situation of desperate need. God promises to be 'El Shaddai'. Other occasions when the name is used are similar. In Genesis 28:3, Jacob was in bad trouble and was running away from home. 'El Shaddai' is the One who can Again in Genesis 35:11 we find a patriarch in trouble. He again is in a crisis situation; he is about to meet his brother who had threatened to kill him. In Genesis 43:14 Jacob is having to release Benjamin. He has already lost

Joseph (or so he thinks). Now it seems he will lose Benjamin. So he says 'May El Shaddai show you mercy'. In Genesis 48:3 Jacob is on his death bed and refers to the time when he was in such a terrible situation and 'El Shaddai' appeared to him. In Genesis 49:25 Jacob is giving his farewell blessing. He talks of Joseph ^{☞1} and refers to the time when he had been attacked by the family and by Potiphar's wife – but 'El Shaddai ... blesses you'.

^{☞1} see 16:16; 17:1

^{☞1} see Hebrews 11:33

^{☞2} Hebrews 6:18

^{☞1} 17:1
^{☞2} see Exodus 6:3

^{☞1} 49:23

There is a consistent pattern in the use of 'El Shaddai'. It means 'The God who is powerful to act when His people are in a desperate situation'.

3. God's call to godliness

- *Blameless - sincere and straight-forward*

3. **God gives an unprecedented call to godliness.** The covenant gets established as the believer reaches to a high level of godliness. Abram is asked to 'walk before' God, and to be 'perfect' ¹. To 'walk before' God means to act visibly and publicly as God's servant in loyalty, openness and integrity.

To be 'perfect' means to have every area of one's life beyond easy criticism. It is not absolute sinlessness. It is blamelessness, sincerity, straight-forwardness.

God has not asked anything like this from Abram before. **God's grace and mercy was experienced by Abram long before God began making such high demands.** But now the high demands have come! If Abram wants the oath of God's blessing, he must walk before God and have every area of his life to be straightforward and honest.

4. Abram is motivated by fuller revelations of God's plans

- *Progress in faith brings progress in revelations*

- *The promises concern the eternal purposes of God*

- *Promises are given to motivate to a higher level of obedience*



4. **Abram is further motivated by fuller revelations of what God has in mind for him.** Progression in faith brings progress in God's revelations. After the incident of Hagar's pregnancy, it might be thought that Abram was not making much progress in faith. But God does not view the matter that way. Despite weaknesses and digressions Abram still is following after the promises of God. Even his mistakes are mistakes about getting the promises of God fulfilled.

In Genesis 17:2-9 the promise concerning numbers is repeated ¹. While Abram is in a passive position before God ², further enlargement is given. Abram will be the father of many nations ³. God has a son for Sarai in mind, not merely the descendants of Ishmael ⁴. And the promise takes in the worldwide blessing that will finally come through Abram's seed ⁵. Abram will become a new person, being given a supernatural enabling. His name will be changed as a sign of the newness of his ability ⁶. The people of Abraham will extend into the far distant future. The covenant is to be 'an everlasting covenant' ⁷. This suggests that there are aspects to the promise that are more than local and temporary. We are dealing here with the eternal purpose of God.

The **realisation** of God's promises will involve Abram's high level of obedience. The vast description of the promise here is intended to motivate him. God motivates us to go after our inheritance, by assuring us of His mighty power and willingness to assist the weak, and by putting before us the greatness of the vision. Then we are to walk before Him and be blameless. A persistent walk of faith will lead us to inherit all that God has in mind for us. It was true for Abraham; it will be true for Abraham's children, those who belong to Jesus Christ.

¹ 17:1b

¹ 17:2; see 13:16; 15:5
² 17:3
³ 17:4-6
⁴ see 17:16
⁵ see 12:3; Romans 4:16-17
⁶ 17:5
⁷ 17:7-8

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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