

An Everlasting Agreement



SABBATH—APRIL 17

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 3:14; Genesis 17:1–6; Genesis 41:45; Daniel 1:7; Genesis 15:7–18; Genesis 18:19.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I will make My agreement between Me and you and your children after you through their whole lives for all time. I will be God to you and to your children’s children after you’ ” (Genesis 17:7, NLV).



Humans who live on this earth after the Flood are the same as a sick child.

DO YOU REMEMBER A TIME during your childhood when you are sick? Maybe you have a cold or flu. Or maybe you are sick with something else that will make you feel worse. You wake up during the night with an awful fever. Then you see your mother or father sitting in a chair next to your bed in the soft glow of the night-light.

Humans who live on this earth after the Flood are the same as a sick child. At that time, sin and evil start to grow again in human hearts. God is the same as a parent who sits by his sick child. God has a plan to make humans well. He chooses Abram to start a family who will teach other people about God and His plan to save humans. Remember, God later changed the name of Abram to Abraham.

God makes an agreement with Abram and his future children. The agreement shows humans more about the plan of God to save people from sin. The Lord sees that humans are in deep need of being saved. The Lord will not leave humans alone with no help. He promises to save them. This week we will look at the wonderful saving promises in the special agreement that God makes with Abram.

THE LORD AND THE AGREEMENT WITH ABRAHAM (Genesis 15:7)

“He said to Abram, ‘I am the LORD who led you from Ur of Babylonia. I did this so that I could give you this land. You will own this land’ ” (Genesis 15:7, ERV).

What do you think of when you read these names: Albert Einstein? Martin Luther King, Jr.? Ghandi? Or Dorcas? Each name makes you think of the beliefs, personality, or success of that person, right?

During Bible times, people who lived in the Near East felt that names were very important. “The Hebrew people always felt that the name of a person showed them something special about his or her personality. Or they believed that names showed them what the parents were thinking or feeling at the time they named their child. Sometimes names showed something important about what was happening in the land during the time the child was born.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 1, page 523, adapted.

When God first makes an agreement with Abram, God tells Abram that His name is Yahweh. Yahweh is written as LORD, in upper case letters, in the ERV (read Genesis 15:7). So, really, Genesis 15:7 says, “I am YAHWEH who led you from Ur of Babylonia.”

The name Yahweh is written 6,828 times in the Old Testament. The name itself is a mystery. It may come from the Hebrew verb “hayah,” which means “to be.” This information tells us that the name Yahweh may mean “the Everlasting One,” or “the One Who Lives Always and Forever.” These names show us that God always has been alive. He also is Someone we can trust. He is the living God. All life starts with Him. Compare Yahweh to the gods of the people in Bible times. These gods did not have any life.

In Exodus 3:14, God Himself explains what the name Yahweh means: “**I AM WHO I AM**” (ERV). This meaning shows us that God always has been alive. His name also shows us that God controls the past, now, and the future.

Yahweh is the personal name of God, too. Yahweh is the One who brings Abram out of Ur. This name connects the Lord to the agreement God makes with Abram in Genesis 12:1–3. God wants Abram to know His personal name. The name of God shows us who God is in His heart: God is love. This special knowledge about God will teach us to trust His promises (Psalm 9:10; Psalm 91:14).



“The Hebrew people always felt that the name of a person showed them something special about his or her personality.”

GOD ALL-POWERFUL (Genesis 17:1)

“When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared [showed Himself] to him. He said, ‘I am God All-Powerful. Obey me and live the right way’ ” (Genesis 17:1, ERV).

The Lord showed Himself to Abram several times before (Genesis 12:1, 7; Genesis 13:14; Genesis 15:1, 7, 18). Now, in Genesis 17:1, the Lord again shows Himself to Abram. The Lord announces His name as “God All-Powerful.” This name is used only in the book of Genesis and in the book of Job. The name “God All-Powerful” has two parts: “**El Shaddai**.” “**El**” is the basic name for God that people used at the time. We are not really sure what the name “**Shaddai**” means exactly. But we believe that it means “All-Powerful.” (Compare Isaiah 13:6 and Joel 1:15.) The name “**El-Shaddai**” shows us an important idea about God. He is powerful and mighty, while humans are weak.



“I will give you many children. . . . You shall be the father of many people groups.”

Read Genesis 17:1–6. In these verses, the Lord announces to Abram His might and power. Why do you think the Lord wants Abram to know about His might and power at this time? What is the Lord saying that shows Abram his need to trust in that might and power?

Genesis 17:1–6 also can be written this way: “The LORD shows Himself to Abram. The LORD says, ‘I am ’El-Shaddai [the All-Powerful God]. Obey Me. Live the right way. If you do, I will make an agreement with you. I will give you many children. . . . You shall be the father of many people. . . . I will give you much success.’ ” The name ’El Shaddai also is written in Genesis 28:3. In this verse, Isaac says that ’El Shaddai will bless Jacob and give him many children and much success.

In other places in Genesis, ’El Shaddai makes promises to people that are much the same as the promise He makes to Abram. Read Genesis 35:11; Genesis 43:14; and Genesis 49:25. In these verses, we see that God wants to give good gifts to the ones who obey Him and search for Him in faith.

Some people say that names are not important. What if the name of the Lord was “The Weak God”? How much hope does that give you? None, right? How does the name ’El-Shaddai give us comfort?

FROM ABRAM TO ABRAHAM (Genesis 17:4, 5)

Names of people in the Near East during Bible times have deep meaning. If someone today names his or her child Mary or Suzy, the meaning of the name often is not very important. But for people living in the Near East during Bible times, human names had deep spiritual meaning. A name from that time may be a short sentence that shows thankfulness or the wish of a parent for something. Here are some examples: Daniel means “God is my judge.” Joel means “Yahweh is God.” Nathan means “Gift of God.”

So, names are very important in Bible times. So, why are names in the Bible changed? They are changed to show a big change in the life of someone.

Look up the following verses. What is happening in these verses? Why are the names changed?

1. **Genesis 32:28** _____

2. **Genesis 41:45** _____

3. **Daniel 1:7** _____

Let us say that someone is named “stupid” or “ugly” all the time by other people. Sooner or later, those names may change the way a person thinks about himself or herself. A name change also can change what a person will think, feel, or do.

Now that we know this information, we will better understand why God wants to change the name of Abram to Abraham. Abram means “Father is praised.” Abraham means “Father of many people.” Now let us look at a promise in the agreement between God and Abraham. God says, “ ‘I will give you many descendants [future children]. New nations [countries] and kings will come from you’ ” (Genesis 17:6, ERV). This promise makes sense now that we know that the name Abraham means “Father of many people.” Maybe the name change is part of the plan of God to help Abraham have faith in the special agreement with God. God makes this agreement with Abraham when Abraham is 99 years old. His wife, Sarai, is an old woman who has no children. So, God changes the name of Abram to Abraham to help Abraham believe in the promises of God.



Sarai, the wife of Abram, is an old woman who has no children.

PARTS OF THE AGREEMENT (Genesis 12:1, 2)

Genesis 12:1, 2 shows us the first two parts of the agreement between God and Abram. The agreement has three parts: (1) God comes to Abram. (2) God gives Abram an order. (3) God makes Abram a promise. Part 1 is the choice. This part shows us that God is very kind to choose Abram to enter into this special agreement with Him. Part 2 is the command. This part shows us the test of trust that God gives to Abram. Abram will need to show total trust in God (Hebrews 11:8). Part 3 is the promise (Genesis 12:1–3, 7). God makes a promise to the future children of Abraham. At the same time, this promise includes the whole human family (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:6–9).

Part 2 of the special agreement of God with Abram is shown in Genesis 15:7–18. Which of these verses shows us the same three things that happen in part 1? Write the verses on the lines below that show each part.



When people made agreements in Bible times, they walked between cut-up pieces of meat.

God comes to man. Verses _____

God commands man to obey Him. Verses _____

The promise of God. Verses _____

In part 2 of the agreement, the Lord comes to Abram and passes between pieces of three animals. First, the three animals are killed. Then they are cut in half. The two halves of each animal are placed next to each other with a space between them. The birds are killed. But they are not cut in half. When people made agreements in Bible times, they walked between cut-up pieces of meat. Their walking between the meat is a word picture. It shows us that the people will do everything they promise.

What happens during part 3 of the agreement between God and Abraham? (For the answer, read Genesis 17:1–14.)

The meaning of the name Abraham shows us that God wants to save all people. That includes both Jews and non-Jews. The true children of Abraham are people who have the faith of Abraham. They trust in the blood of Jesus to save them. (Read Galatians 3:7, 29.) As far back as Abraham, God wanted to save as many people as possible. God has not changed. He wants to do the same thing today.

THE SPECIAL THINGS THAT ABRAHAM MUST DO
(Genesis 18:19)

“ ‘I have chosen him. He must direct [command] his children to live in the way that pleases me. And he must direct the members of his family after him to do the same [thing]. So he must guide [lead] all of them in doing what is right [good] and fair. Then I, the LORD, will do for Abraham what I have promised him’ ” (Genesis 18:19, NIV).

As we have seen so far, the special agreement of God is always an agreement of grace. As you know, grace is the gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin that God gives us. We cannot earn this gift. We can accept it only by faith. So, this agreement shows us that God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. God saves us from sin.

God chooses Abraham to help Him announce His saving plan and His mercy to the people on the earth. God will keep His promise to Abraham. But Abraham must do what is right and obey God by faith. If Abraham does not obey, then God cannot use Abraham to do special work on the earth.

Genesis 18:19 shows us how the mercy of God and His law are connected. The verse starts with “I have chosen him.” This sentence shows us the mercy of God. Then the verse shows us that Abraham is someone who will obey the Lord. Abraham will teach his family to obey God, too. So, in this verse, we see faith and works have a close connection. (Read James 2:17.)

Do you see the last part of Genesis 18:19? What is this verse saying about the obedience of Abraham? Our obedience does not save us. But why is obedience important? What does this verse show us in answer to this question? Can the agreement between God and Abraham be kept with no obedience? Explain.

Abraham cannot enjoy the blessings of the agreement if he does not do the things that God asks him to do. God promises to do His part, too. Abraham must do his part. He must show God love, faith, and obedience. If Abraham obeys, then God can give Abraham blessings because they have an agreement.

What happens if a human breaks the agreement with God? We must understand that the agreement itself does not change. But when someone breaks the agreement, God cannot keep His promises. The special connection of love and trust between God and humans is broken, too.

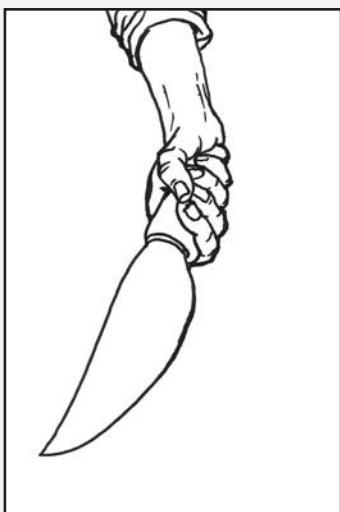


Abraham is someone who will obey the Lord.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Call of Abraham,” pages 125–131, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Jew and Gentile,” pages 188–200, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

The rainbow shows the special agreement of God with Noah. Read Genesis 17:10 to learn about the sign that shows the agreement of God with Abraham. What is it? The answer is circumcision. Circumcision is removing the loose skin from the end of the male sex parts. Circumcision “shows: (1) that the children of Abraham are different from the non-Jews (Ephesians 2:11). (2) Circumcision helps the Jews remember their agreement with God (Genesis 17:11). (3) Circumcision helps the people to live in the right way (Deuteronomy 10:16). (4) Circumcision shows us that we are saved by faith alone (Romans 4:11). (5) Circumcision shows us that we must have clean hearts (Romans 2:29). Finally, (6) circumcision shows us baptism (Colossians 2:11, 12).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 1, pages 322, 323, adapted.

The rainbow will always show us the promise of God not to destroy the earth again with a flood. This promise will continue until the end of time. Circumcision will not. Paul tells us that Abraham accepted circumcision as a sign of his faith in God to save him (Romans 4:11). As time passed, the meaning of circumcision changed. Later, circumcision had a bad meaning. It showed humans who tried to earn the favor of God. These people believed that their obedience to the law of God saved them. By New Testament times, circumcision no longer had special meaning. A new belief replaced it: we now believe that our faith in Jesus changes us.



“Circumcision helps the Jews remember their agreement with God.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What is the connection between faith and works? Can we have one and not the other? If no, why not?
- ② “God gave Abram a test. In the same way, God gives many people a test today, too. Maybe they do not hear the voice of God talking to them. But God talks to them from the teachings in the Bible. . . . God has work for them to do. . . . Who is ready to do this work?”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 126, 127, adapted. Talk in class about modern examples of people that God invited to do special work for Him.

Summary: God invites Abraham to be His special friend. Their friendship will show the plan of God to save humans from sin.

GOD ALWAYS HAS A WAY

David grows up in a rich family. He also comes from a country that does not believe in God. So, David never learns to care about God. Then David loses his business. David loses all hope in the future. He decides to study religion at a Seventh-day Adventist college in the Philippines. David has no wish to become a pastor. He just wants to learn more about God.

David studies about God for many months. During this time, David continues to worry about his future. A little later, David joins a team of Bible workers. They plan to preach about Jesus for a whole month. These meetings are part of the religious education. So, David signs up to help out with the meetings. He preaches in the evenings. There, he talks with the visitors. One schoolteacher tells David she wanted to be baptized for many years. But she was scared her husband will kill her. Then she asks David to give her Bible studies. Finally, she gets baptized.

Later, David asks her, "You are not afraid that your husband may try to kill you for becoming a Christian?"

"He may kill me, but I wanted to be baptized anyway," the woman says. David is surprised that her faith is stronger than her fear. How can she have a faith that is so strong? David is grateful that her husband does not kill her.

David also becomes friends with a boy who comes to the meetings every night. The boy wants to get baptized, too. So, David goes to his house and asks his parents to let their son get baptized. But the parents belong to a different religion. They tell David to leave. David visits them many times after that. But the parents will not change their minds.

Six months later, an Adventist pastor comes looking for David at the college. He tells David a strange story. A family of four showed up at the church of the pastor. The family wanted to be baptized. The pastor quizzed the father, mother, son, and daughter and found that they understood the Bible fully. No one from the local church knew the family or gave them Bible studies. So, where did they learn about the Bible?

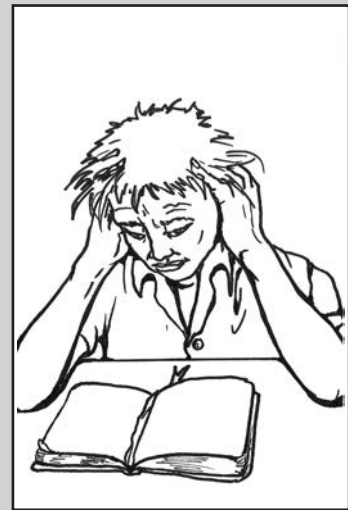
Finally, the pastor asked the family, "How did you hear about the Adventist Church?"

"There were Bible meetings in our town six months ago," the father said. "A foreigner came to our house many times to talk about our son, who wanted to be baptized. But we did not give our permission. But after six months, our whole family decided to join the church." David cannot believe this story. David sees that God always has a way, even when everything is hopeless. David gives his heart to Jesus and becomes a pastor.

"My life has been a long journey," David says. "I have learned to trust God and to work for Him."

INSIDE Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



David studies about God for many months. During this time, David continues to worry about his future.

