

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 17.1-27

Topic

God changes Abram's and Sarai's names by adding the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, ה (HEH, pronounced *hey*) to each of them

Title

"The Say 'HEH' Kids"

Introduction

It's not uncommon for celebrities to change their names. See if you can recognize a few of them by their 'real' names.

I'll start off with an easy one: Norma Jeane Baker.

Most everyone in my generation knows that Norma Jean Baker is the real name of actress Marilyn Monroe because of the Elton John song, *Candle in the Wind*.

(Elton John's real name, by the way, is Reginald Dwight).

Guess a few others:

- Melvin Kaminsky (comedian Mel Brooks).
- Caryn Johnson (comedienne Whoopi Goldberg).
- Alecia Beth Moore (singer Pink)
- Carlos Irwin Estevez (actor Charlie Sheen)

Some celebs have had multiple name changes. Rapper and actor Sean Combs has gone by Puff Daddy, Puffy, Puff, P Diddy, Diddy, and King Combs. Back in May he changed his name for one week. On his official

Twitter account he explained, “for a week, this week only, you can call me by my new name, Swag.”

Bible characters have had their share of name changes. Saul became Paul and Simon became Peter.

Perhaps the most significant biblical name changes were those of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah.

The change is significant not just because of the importance of Abraham and Sarah in biblical history, but also because of the particular addition God made to their names. In both cases God did the same thing and inserted the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *HEH* (pronounced *hey*).

The significance of their name change goes even further as we see God tell them to cut-away, or incise, the flesh of the foreskin.

Paying close attention to what God *inserted* and to what was *incised*, I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Inserts Himself In Your Heart, and #2 God Incises 'Self' From Your Heart.

#1 God Inserts Himself In Your Heart
(v1-8 & 15-22)

I want to get right into this extra letter, the *HEH*, in their names. The first thing to note about it is that it is the second and last letter of the name of God we pronounce *Yaweh* but is represented by the letters YHWH.

According to one source, “*HEH* is often used to represent the name of God, as *HEH* stands for *Hashem*, which means ‘The Name,’ and is a way of saying God without actually saying the name of God. In print, *Hashem* is usually written as *HEH* with a geresh (an apostrophe-like sign placed after the letter).”

God took a letter from His name and inserted it in Abram's to make it AbraHam. He took a letter from His own name and inserted it in Sarai's to make it SarHa. He inserted His name into their names.

The letter is pronounced as a breath. Some Hebrew scholars say the letter itself represents the breath of God. In the Talmud (Menachot 29b) it is said that in Psalm 33:6 where you read, the "by the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth," *breath* refers to the sound of the letter *HEH*. Thus creation was breathed forth by God's Spirit.

We could accurately say, then, that when God inserted a letter from His name into the names of Abram and Sarai He was representing to them that He was inserting Himself into their hearts, giving them a sense of His presence and the powerful breath of the Spirit. God was telling them, "I will be in your life to accomplish by my Spirit what I've promised."

That's nothing short of awesome! Especially coming at the time God was promising them He would do the impossible, perform a miracle, by allowing Abraham to father a child with Sarah.

While your mind is blown, think about this. We know, do we not, that every Christian is indwelt by God the Holy Spirit?

If you are a believer, God has even more so inserted Himself into your heart, giving you a sense of His presence and the powerful breath of His Spirit.

Here's something more: You, too, have a *new name!* You don't know what it is yet, but in the Revelation of Jesus Christ you read,

Revelation 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone **a new name** written which no one knows except him who receives it."

I don't know about you, but I want to pay a lot more attention to Abraham and Sarah's name change than ever before!

Genesis 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.

Genesis 17:2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

Abraham was almost 25 years into his walk with the Lord but was still having amazing experiences of God. Maybe it's because I'm getting older, but I'd like to think the best revelations are yet to come.

When God said, "walk before Me and be blameless," what did He mean? He certainly didn't mean that Abraham was to be sinless; that's impossible. He might have meant that Abraham should live in such a way as to be "blameless" if an accusation were to be brought against him.

I rather think that what God meant was that, having justified Abraham, he could walk before God knowing he was not guilty of his sins and could never be condemned but had received eternal life. From God's perspective, Abraham **was** blameless!

You and I can still sin but Jesus Christ has born sin's punishment and penalty. We have been declared "Not guilty!" by God thanks to the Savior. There is *no* condemnation upon us or awaiting us.

This "covenant" God was stating started in chapter twelve. It was confirmed and enlarged in chapters thirteen and fifteen and again here in chapter seventeen.

Genesis 17:3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying:

Genesis 17:4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.

Genesis 17:5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.

Genesis 17:6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

Genesis 17:7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

Genesis 17:8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

The most notable features of God's covenant with Abraham are these three:

1. Abraham would be the father of a great nation.

2. The nation that descends from him is promised the permanent, literal, physical possession of the land of Canaan.
3. All the other nations of the world are to be blessed by this nation.

The nation that descended from Abraham is Israel. The land is the land of Canaan in the Middle East. The blessing of all the nations by Israel refers to a future time on earth when Jesus Christ will return to rule from His throne in Jerusalem.

History and prophecy show the unfolding of the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham to preserve, convert, and restore Israel before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

God's covenant with Abraham is unconditional; nothing he or his descendants do or don't do can alter it. God's covenant with Abraham is also literal; it is about the real, physical descendants of Abraham and the real, physical possession of the land of Canaan. It is **not** a spiritual allegory about the believer possessing the blessings of Heaven.

Drop to verse fifteen.

Genesis 17:15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.

Genesis 17:16 And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."

God was going to insert Himself, as it were, into Sarah's life, too, and by His Spirit do a miracle by allowing her to conceive a child with Abraham when it was humanly impossible.

Genesis 17:17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

So many things encourage me in this verse! Not the least of which is that Abraham "laughed" before God. Not some weird holy laughter. He just found this funny and let loose.

Then there's the fact he was doubting God. *I can identify with that!*

Finally, Abraham was just getting started at age 99. God wasn't through with him - not by a long shot.

Genesis 17:18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"

Genesis 17:19 Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.

Genesis 17:20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.

Genesis 17:21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year."

Genesis 17:22 Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

Abraham just couldn't see Sarah getting pregnant. Neither could she, having earlier suggested Abraham have a son with Hagar instead of her. She must have been past the change of life. God was going to do something powerful, something miraculous, by His Spirit.

The child would be Abraham's and Sarah's. But he would represent for all time a dependence upon the breath of God, upon the Spirit of God, to accomplish His purposes.

God has inserted Himself into your life, given you His Spirit, in order for you to accomplish His purposes. He's not interested in your plans and solutions. He doesn't mind your doubts as long as you submit to Him and don't let your doubts take the place of His doings.

I guess what I'm saying is that since God lives in you and in me, it ought to make a profound difference in the way we approach everything about life and living. There should absolutely be something supernatural about us.

One of the pastors I follow on Twitter posted this quote today:

When we rely on organization, we get what organization can do. When we rely upon education, we get what education can do. When we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. However when we rely on the Holy Spirit, we get what God can do!

Since God has inserted Himself into our hearts, then He has inserted Himself in all of our relationships, in all of our circumstances, everywhere we are, in order to reveal through us something beyond what we could hope to accomplish on our own.

#2 God Incises 'Self' From Your Heart
(v9-14 & 23-27)

There was something God asked Abraham to do. It was to be a "sign" that Abraham and his descendants consented to God's covenant. It was circumcision.

Genesis 17:9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

Genesis 17:10 This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;

Genesis 17:11 and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Genesis 17:12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant.

Genesis 17:13 He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Genesis 17:14 And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

There were two schools of thought among Jews regarding physical circumcision:

1. Some said that circumcision alone, the ritual, saved you since it was the sign of the covenant.
2. Others said that circumcision was simply an outward demonstration of the need for inward, spiritual renewal by God.

Abraham was saved before circumcision became the sign of God's covenant so it could not, it cannot, be necessary for salvation.

Besides, later in the Old Testament God Himself speaks of the circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4). It was an outward ritual to

represent a spiritual truth. The truth it represented was that every human being needs a spiritual circumcision of the heart.

Every Christian has received this spiritual circumcision! In Colossians 2:11 you read,

Colossians 2:11 In [Jesus] you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

The moment you were saved this spiritual surgery took place. The “body of the sins of the flesh” was circumcised, cut away, it was put off. This is a reference, I believe, to the sin nature we were born with, elsewhere called the “old man.” It’s been cut away, circumcised, by Jesus Christ.

Why, then, do I still struggle with and give-in to sin? Because I remain in my current physical body and within my unredeemed humanness resides a principle, an influence, a propensity, to sin called “the flesh.”

Nevertheless, this truth - that you have been spiritually circumcised - is something you are to reckon to be true and to act upon. You need not anymore yield yourself to the flesh, to its lusts, but can rather yield yourself to God, to serve Him.

Back to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac. What was God representing to Abraham by asking him to perform the rite of circumcision?

Ishmael was conceived *before* the cutting away of Abraham's foreskin through circumcision. Isaac would be conceived *after* the foreskin had been removed.

Ishmael, then, represents our best human efforts to please and serve God apart from His Spirit. Isaac represents God’s work through us by depending upon His Spirit.

It is possible for you as a believer to produce works that you desire God to bless. God wants you to look past the natural methods and resources and enjoy His supernatural working instead.

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Genesis 17:23 So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him.

Genesis 17:24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

Genesis 17:25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

Genesis 17:26 That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael;

Genesis 17:27 and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Abraham did it. He circumcised all the men.

In our case, Jesus has done it. God has incised 'self' from your heart. He's inserted Himself there.

Is it making a difference for you? Francis Chan said,

Given our talent set, experience, and education, many of us are fairly capable of living rather successfully (according to the world's standards) **without any strength from the Holy Spirit.**

What about me? What about you? Are you living rather successfully without the Spirit of God?

Or would someone look at your life and lifestyle and be forced to say, "Hey! What's going on? How are you doing that?"

In a very real way, our lives can cause others to 'say *HEH*' as they begin to understand there is something new, something more, something heavenly about us.