

# REAL PEOPLE, REAL GOD:

## Abraham's Sign of the Covenant

### REAL PEOPLE Make a Plan

To begin part two of Abram's story, let's jump ahead about 10 years. Abram and Sarai have grown impatient in waiting for offspring, so Sarai gives her maidservant, Hagar, to Abram in hopes of beginning a family through her. Because it was Sarai's plan, and not God's, it blows up in their faces.

### Our REAL GOD Sees and Hears

Here's the new part. After Hagar flees Sarai and is wandering in the wilderness, Yahweh finds her there. Yep! God singles out this Egyptian maidservant — not even the main character in our story — carrying this child of impatience — not the Covenant Promise child — who is alone and frightened in the desert.

“The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert...And he said, ‘Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?’” **Genesis 16:7-8**

She proceeds to tell him where she's been but has no idea where she's going. So our REAL GOD instructs her.

“Then the angel of the LORD told her, ‘Go back to your mistress and submit to her.’ The angel added, ‘I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.’” **Genesis 16:9-10**

The “submitting” part—not great. But perhaps it was the “increase your descendants” part that gave her hope enough to return to Abram and Sarai.

God also tells her the name for the son she is carrying — a name that means “God hears” — *Ishmael*. In return, Hagar gives this REAL GOD a name — The God Who *Sees* Me. What a sweet and intimate moment between Hagar and this God of Abram, who has now become her God.

### Child of Impatience. Child of Hostility.

Eventually, Hagar bears Abram's son, and *Abram* names him Ishmael – WHICH MEANS Hagar must have told him about her conversation with God in the desert.

Can you imagine how Sarai felt, knowing that Hagar has borne Abram's son AND met PERSONALLY with Abram's God?

Think of the constant tension in this household between Abram, Sarai, and Hagar — and now baby Ishmael. Is it any wonder God promised Ishmael would be “a wild donkey of a man whose hand would be against everyone and everyone's hand against him”?

## **Our REAL GOD *Relates* to REAL PEOPLE**

Now our story jumps ahead THIRTEEN YEARS to when Abram is 99 years old and Ishmael is 13. Imagine how much Abraham dotes on his long-awaited son because—remember—Abram, Sarai, and Hagar think this is the plan! Ishmael is the son God promised, right? (They haven't read the rest of the story like we have.)

We don't know what else happened during the thirteen years of God's silence, but when He finally speaks again to this REAL GUY, Abram, He's got A LOT to say.

## **Our REAL GOD Means What He Says**

### **Reaffirms His Covenant**

“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.” **Genesis 17:7-8**

### **New Names**

“No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.” **Genesis 17:5-7**

“As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely *give you a son by her*. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.” **Genesis 17:15-16**

For the first time EVER, the promise of offspring is specifically extended to Sarah, not just Abraham.

Abraham's reaction? He LAUGHS! Can you imagine the shock? Remember, for thirteen years, they thought Ishmael was the son God had promised.

“Abraham said to God, ‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!’” **Genesis 17:18**

## **Our REAL GOD Makes a Distinction**

Our REAL GOD hears Abraham (watch for that subtle reference to Ishmael’s name—“God hears”). But God has His own perfect plan for Abraham’s two sons.

“Then God said, ‘Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And *as for Ishmael, I have heard you*: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.’” **Genesis 17:19-21**  
(*emphasis* added)

Blessing for one son. But extending the covenant through another.

### **A New Sign of the Covenant...For ALL**

Just in case Abraham’s world isn’t topsy-turvy enough, our REAL GOD adds one more surprise: a new sign of the covenant for Abraham and for **ALL** of his descendants.

“This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised...For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.”  
**Genesis 17:10-12**

Remember last time when God established HIS side of the covenant while Abram was sleeping? God’s presence passed through the corridor of blood in the form of the smoking pot and blazing torch. The “cutting” of that covenant was a tangible sign for Abram individually, between him and God. Abram cut the animals in half, and God walked through them.

Now, our REAL GOD is establishing a tangible sign, a new “cutting” of the covenant, for **ALL** who will be a part of this covenant — all of Abraham’s descendants.

### **Circumcision — What does it REALLY MEAN?**

The sign of circumcision is about our REAL GOD asking Abraham and all of his descendants to “keep this covenant” — to make God his God and be loyal in faith and obedience.

“My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” **Genesis 17:13-14**

It was the physical sign of a spiritual commitment, like saying: “If I am not loyal in faith and obedience to Abraham’s God, may the sword of the Lord cut off (circumcise) me and my offspring as I have cut off my foreskin.”

It is a unilateral—one-sided—covenant on the part of Abraham and his family like the corridor of blood, smoking pots, and blazing torch was one-sided on God’s part. Abraham and his family are promising loyalty regardless of God’s actions—unconditional allegiance. And it’s a sign that can’t be rescinded — it’s inescapable.

## **Our REAL GUY Takes a Difficult Step of Obedience**

“On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him.” **Genesis 17:23**

Wow!!! Can you imagine what trust and faith our REAL GUY Abraham must have had — at 99 years old — to obey God like this? Can you imagine a teenager (Ishmael) WILLINGLY agreeing to circumcision? What about the others in Abraham’s household? This is not easy obedience!

## **Our REAL GOD Extends the Blessing**

But — here’s a thought that reveals our REAL GOD’s tender heart. He could have waited to initiate the sign of the covenant (circumcision) until AFTER Ishmael was sent away and Isaac was the only son in the household (a part of the story we’ll get to next time).

But He didn’t. He **included Ishmael in the sign of the covenant even after the distinction had been made** between the two sons.

Even though Isaac would be the child of Covenant *promise*—receiving the promised land—our REAL GOD includes Ishmael and makes him a child of Covenant *blessing*—the blessing that comes through Abraham to the whole world.

## **Our REAL GOD Reveals Himself...Unexpectedly**

Our story then takes a little twist — a strange encounter with God. Three “visitors” show up in Abraham’s camp soon after the circumcisions, and I always wondered how Abraham knew they were “the Lord.”

“Abraham *looked up and saw three men standing nearby*. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.”  
**Genesis 18:2** (*emphasis* added)

I suppose if he “looked up” and three visitors appeared out of nowhere, he would know they were the REAL GOD, huh?

So he leaps up and invites them to stay for a meal! He gets Sarah involved, baking bread. Abraham picks out a choice calf and brings some curds and milk.

But...why are they here?

“While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. ‘*Where is your wife Sarah?*’ they asked him. ‘There, in the tent,’ he said. Then one of them said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.’” **Genesis 18:8-10**  
(*emphasis* added)

Maybe they came to give the timeline for the promised offspring: one year. But I think they came for much more than that. Remember their question — “Where is your wife Sarah?”

“Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him...So *Sarah laughed* to herself as she thought, ‘After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?’” **Genesis 18:10, 12** (*emphasis* added)

I think our REAL GOD came for Sarah. He’d appeared to Abram at the beginning of their journey and to Hagar in her time of need.

But Sarah needed hope. She needed the assurance of a personal God. Our REAL GOD—the God who sees and hears—saw her heart and knew she needed to see/hear His personal love and reassurance.

## **REAL PEOPLE Stumble Into a Being a Blessing**

After the encounter with Sarah, the three visitors inform Abraham of the coming doom of Sodom and Gomorrah (a story that Lyndsey will detail in next week’s blog). After the destruction, Abraham moves his camp to the area of Gerar.

“...and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, ‘She is my sister.’ Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.” **Genesis 20:2**

Deja vu, right? They told this same lie over twenty years ago in Egypt (when they likely acquired Hagar as a maidservant).

But this time, our REAL GOD does something a little bit different when the king plans to take Sarah as his wife.

“But ***God came to Abimelech in a dream*** one night and said to him, ‘You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman...I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and ***he will pray for you and you will live***. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die.’” **Genesis 20:3, 6-7** (***emphasis*** added)

Though our REAL GOD had closed the wombs of all the women in Abimelech’s household to protect Sarah, but He REVEALS Himself to Abimelech in a dream. And He tells Abimelech to have Abraham pray for him.

“Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again...” **Genesis 20:17**

Our REAL GUY, Abraham, gets to be a part of our REAL GOD *relating* and *revealing Himself* to someone else and fulfills God’s calling, “you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Very cool!

## **REAL GOD Gives Life. REAL PEOPLE Laugh.**

After our REAL GOD opens the wombs of Abimelech’s household, He opens Sarah’s womb “***at the very time God had promised him.***” At 90 years old, Sarah bears a son to her 100-year-old husband, and Abraham names him Isaac—meaning “LAUGHTER.” (Perfect, since both he and Sarai laughed when God told them she’d conceive in her old age.)

Abraham circumcises his newborn son on the 8th day, following our REAL GOD’s command for this new covenant sign. The journey of Abraham’s descendants has begun. Whew! 🙌

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