

## **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

Genesis 17 tells the story about *'El Shaddai's* (God Almighty) granting enduring covenant promises to Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah and their descendants through Isaac. Abram is 99; Sarai is 89 (16:16; 17:1, 17, 25). They already have one child, Ishmael (by Hagar), who is 13 (v. 25). God's surprise announcement about their new baby elicited falling-on-the-floor laughter from Abraham (v. 17) and quiet laughter from Sarah (18:12). The Hebrew name *yitshaq* (Isaac; vv. 19, 21) means "he laughs" -- perhaps because God would get the last laugh.

God's enduring covenant-promises to his people are central to our Old Testament reading. The concept of covenant is central to the Bible. "Covenant" appears 13 times in Genesis 17 (vv. 2, 4, 7 [twice], 9, 10, 11, 13 [twice], 14, 19 [twice] and 21). The word has a variety of meanings, including formal agreement or arrangement, treaty, contract or mutually binding relationship. Many covenants were in what we would call the "secular" realm, but Genesis 17 speaks of a particular type of covenant, one we would call "religious."