

## Abraham - Part Eight

*by Charles E. Wigg*

### **The Covenant Renewed:**

On that same day, God renewed His covenant with Abraham, and even expanded the detail of it. Not only did He promise again to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's seed, but also He defined its boundaries. The boundaries were very great, and they take in much of what today is Syria, and all of Lebanon. Though Abraham did not possess a single square foot of that territory, yet he lived in it, and enjoyed it day by day.

### **Sarah's Plan:**

In chapter 16, we are confronted with another form of unbelief. Sarah was still barren, in spite of trying to have children all their married life, so she devised a plan whereby they could help God to fulfill His promises. Perhaps she thought that God had overlooked the fact that she was barren; this is what the human mind would reason. God has so many things to attend to, the whole creation to supply and care for. It would seem to be quite possible that He had overlooked the fact that she was barren.

Her object was to help God out of His difficulty, to provide Him with a way of fulfilling His promises. They would leave the ground of faith, and resort to their own works. It has been said that unbelief, is the reasonable alternative to faith. This is a very subtle form of unbelief; because it does not oppose the will of God, neither does it oppose the promises of God, it simply presumes to help Him fulfill those promises.

### **Attractive to the flesh:**

The plan was also attractive to Abraham's flesh: After all what would be nicer than to sleep with his pretty Egyptian slave girl; with his wife's consent and encouragement? The flesh in us is just the same; it has a perverted desire to accomplish righteousness. To produce something in which it can glory; saying "see what I have achieved!"

Sarah reasoned that as Hagar was her possession, bought with their money; then the child that she would bear, of whom her husband would be the father, would in almost every sense, be hers. Thus the problem would be solved! However the problem was only compounded.

When a person is saved, Satan is quick to remind that person of what God has done for them, and to emphasize to them that they now have an obligation to do something; to repay the debt that they owe to God. Satan does this, to get the person to leave the ground of faith, and to put themselves once again on the ground of works, to put themselves under a kind of law. The enemy knows fully that the saved one cannot in their own strength, please God, and when they try, they fail miserably. He then returns as the accuser of the brethren, to condemn the conscience of the believer, to press upon them the wretchedness of their failure. He will even try to get the person to doubt their salvation.

Let us never forget the words of the Lord Jesus, "without **ME**, you can do nothing", (John 15; 5). Let us heed Paul's exhortation in Colossians 2; 7, that as we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so now we must walk in Him. How did we receive Christ Jesus the Lord? **By faith!** How are we to walk in Him? **By faith!**

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### **The result:**

The execution of Sarah's plan solved nothing, but resulted in the birth of Ishmael, who became the father of the Arab peoples, who have been the inveterate enemies of the promised seed, even to this day. It resulted in endless sorrow! What a warning this is to us.

As soon as Hagar knew that she had conceived, she despised her mistress and owner; as a result she was driven away. However God was watching her, and found her by a spring. He commanded her to return, and to submit to Sarah. God still had lessons to teach Abraham in the sorrowful years that were to follow. Thus it was; when Abraham was 86 years old, Ishmael was born. However he was not born according to the promise, but according to the flesh.

Much of a chapter in the N.T. (Gal. 4; 22-31), is devoted to explaining the spiritual significance of this mistake of Sarah's. There the teaching is unfolded, and it is applied to us. Let us learn the lesson!

### **The Covenant of Circumcision:**

Four years after Ishmael's birth, God appeared again to Abraham, and reminded him of His Omnipotence. He was not as Sarah reasoned, absent minded; nor did he overlook the problems that stood in the way of His fulfilling the promises that He had made. He did not make promises that He was not able to fulfill. He exhorts Abraham to walk before him, and to be perfect. This word, perfect, does not mean to be personally perfect, that is without fault: it means to be grown up, to be mature. Abraham was to abandon these demeaning thoughts about God, and to return to the simple trust of God and His word. He was, (and is), as good and as great as His word.

God now expands His promises, and tells Abraham that he would make him the father of many nations. He then made another covenant with Abraham, after changing his name. But this time Abraham was to do something, he was to obey the command of God; he was to be circumcised, and all the males in his extended family.

Circumcision was thereafter to be the distinguishing mark; that which set apart the descendants from all others. It was a painful operation, something that the flesh does not like, which even today Doctors rebel against; its spiritual meaning is brought out in Philippians chapter 3; 2 & 3. There are three things that mark those of the true circumcision; 1), they worship God in the spirit; (they refuse human excitement, and entertainment); 2), they boast in Christ Jesus, (not in themselves, or their experiences): 3), they have **no confidence in the flesh!**

It is this latter that marks out true Christians from every other religion even from nominal Christianity. Every human religion, relies on the works of man, there is no salvation for man, except that which he can earn for himself, by his own "good" works.

Isaiah saw the futility of all this, he said in chapter 64; 6 to 8, that we are all as an unclean thing; all our good deeds are like filthy rags; we are just helpless, like clay in the hands of the potter.

The result, the outworking of all this, is a clean life, a humble life, and a dependant life: A life that brings honor and glory to God. May God grant to us to live such a life!

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### **Clinging to the Old:**

Sarah's name was then changed; she was given a name, which means Princess. Her former name, Sarai, means My Princess, so that there is a very much-expanded situation in view in this name change. She has become, "the mother of us all," according to Paul, the "free woman," a type of "Jerusalem which is above", (see Galatians ch. 4.)

However Abraham still clung to the hope that God may change His mind, and that He would accept the one "born according to the flesh", as the promised son and heir. But God could never do this; He must fulfill His own promises in His own way, and in His own time. The Lord Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh, **is flesh.**" It cannot be altered, it is essentially bad, it can never be improved, and it cannot please God. Still Abraham pleaded; "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" God had a plan for Ishmael; He would use Him and his descendants, as a rod to punish the disobedient descendants of Isaac.

Isaac is here named, and his name means "Laughter." An indication that true joy can only come into the believer's life, when faith is honoured; when the promises and purposes of God are fulfilled.

### **Obedience:**

Though Abraham was now in his hundredth year, yet he did not hesitate to obey the command of God, regarding circumcision, and as a result of that obedience, he entered into a closer relationship with God. This is important for us to see; we sometimes are given light from God through His word, as to what we should do: But we hesitate to obey. We see this often in people who come from a nominal Christian background. They have been christened, or baptized as infants; when still in a lost estate. Once they are saved, they discover from the word of God, that baptism is only for those who have a genuine salvation experience; that it is an act of obedience. However, because of the stigma associated with baptism, and the offence that it gives to their family members; or perhaps the opposition from the clergy of their former denominational Church, they hesitate to obey. This is a mistake, and once we have the light from the word of God, as to what the path of obedience for us is; we will receive no further light until we obey. On the other hand, simple obedience, (whatever the cost to us), will bring us into a richer experience of communion with God.