

ONE in the word

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me (Jesus).” (John 5:39)

January 9

TODAY’S READING: Genesis 16-18

OVERVIEW: Birth of Ishmael of Hagar; Abram’s name changed; the covenant of circumcision; Sarai’s name changed; Isaac promised to Abraham and Sarah; Abraham’s prayer for Sodom.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS: God had already promised Abram a son (15:4), but ten long years had passed and Abram and Sarai were still childless, and neither of them were, at this point, spring chickens. Abram was 85 and Sarai was 76!

Rather than trust the word of God by faith, Sarai turned to the world for help and sought to fulfill God’s will in the power of the flesh. (Sound familiar?) Sarai offered Abram her personal Egyptian maid, Hagar, to be assured of a seed for Abraham. (Note: The Hurrian laws from that period describe this as a custom of the day. If a son was born of that union, it would be regarded as the wife’s.) At the age of 86, Abram did receive a son, Ishmael, by Hagar.

Sarai’s dreadful decision points to one of the most difficult lessons of the Christian life: learning to wait upon the Lord (Isaiah 28:16). Sometimes God places us in a position of testing our faith, and we may have to wait two weeks, two years, or as in Abram’s case, 25 years for our prayers to be answered.

The product of Abram and Sarai’s decision to run ahead of God, attempting to carry out God’s will through carnal means should teach us that there are painful consequences of trusting the power of the flesh. To this day, Ishmael (the Arabs) and Isaac (the Jews) are at war with each other and the conflict will continue until the second coming of Christ. (“The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other...” Galatians 5:17) What prayer are you trusting God to answer, or what promise are you trusting God to fulfill in which you might be tempted to get ahead of God and try to bring about in the power of the flesh?

In chapter 17, note that Abram was 99 years old and Sarai was 90. It is humanly impossible for Sarai to give birth to a child. But God revealed to Abram in 17:1, “I *am* the Almighty God...” In chapter 18 and verse 14 God asked him, “Is any thing too hard for the LORD?” Remember that today with what you trust God to fulfill. What is impossible with men is possible with God! (Matthew 19:26)

Note that through Ishmael and Isaac, God is already pointing to the fact that He rejects the first birth (that which is born of the flesh), and accepts the second birth, (that which is impossible with men but is possible only with God – the spiritual birth). See John 3:3-6.

Some interesting things to note:

- ← God gives Abram a seal of His covenant with him (circumcision). God gives to those who are children of Abraham by faith in Christ, a seal of His covenant with us (the Holy Spirit – Ephesians 1:13).
- ← God changed the name of Abram and Sarai. Abram, which means “high father” is changed to Abraham, meaning “father of many nations,” reflecting his new relationship to God, as well as his new identity based on God’s promise of seed. Sarai, which means “my princess,” is changed to Sarah, which simply means “princess.” The limiting personal pronoun “my” is dropped from the meaning of her name since she would be the ancestress of the promised nations and kings. As the seed of Abraham (Romans 4:11), God changed our name the moment we placed our faith in Christ (Acts 11:26; Revelation 3:12) to reflect our new relationship with Him, and our new identity in Him!
- ← God enters into an everlasting, unconditional covenant with Abraham (17:7-8). The promise was not dependent upon Abraham’s faithfulness to God but the faithfulness of God to his own name, and His faithfulness to the promise of His word to Abraham. As Abraham’s children (Galatians 3:6-7), God entered into an everlasting, unconditional covenant with us (John 3:16; Romans 3:6-7). God’s promise of salvation to us is not dependent upon our faithfulness to God (or we would all lose it!) but upon God’s faithfulness to His own name, and His faithfulness to the promise of His word to us (praise the Lord!)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

- As the ANGEL OF THE LORD – Genesis 16:7
- As the SEED OF ISAAC – Genesis 17:19 (Hebrews 11:18; Luke 2:23-24)

Note: The angel of the LORD is a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those, like Hagar in this passage, who had an encounter with the Angel of the LORD recognized that in seeing this Angel, they had seen God (Genesis 22:11-18; 31:11-13; Exodus 3:2-5; Numbers 22:22-35; Judges 6:11-23; 13:2-5; 1 Kings 19:5-7). Interestingly, the Angel of the LORD does not appear at any time after the birth of Christ.