

### The Lord Saw the Obedience of Abraham

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the difference between the promises made to the descendants of Abraham and the promises that God has given to the church. The promises that God made to the Jews of national blessing will still be fulfilled in the future. In this topic, we will see that God changed the name of Sarai and promised her a son.

Genesis 17:15-18 says, “Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. 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.’ 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*?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’” “Sarai” means *my princess*, while “Sarah” means *princess or noblewoman*. Instead of just being the princess of one nation, the promise of God to Abraham meant that she would be the mother and princess of many nations.

God promised to bless Sarah and give Abraham a son by Sarah. This blessing included the fact that she would become a mother of nations and that kings of nations would come from her. This promise came as a shock to Abraham because he had been married to Sarah for many years and Sarah had not had any children. Now, God promised that she would have a son in her old age and that nations would come from this son. We see that this was such a shock to Abraham that he fell on his face and laughed. God had promised him twice before that he would be a father, but God had never said that Sarah would be a mother. The reason why Abraham fell on his face and laughed was due to the fact of the age of Abraham and Sarah. At that time, Abraham was ninety-nine years old and Sarah was eighty-nine years old. That meant that he would be a hundred years old and Sarah would be ninety years old when the son would be born. That sounded like something impossible to Abraham.

As a result, Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” At first, it was an idea beyond his imagination that Sarah would give birth to a son. However, Romans 4:16-22 says, “Therefore *it is* of faith that it *might* be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness.’” This is the event that was placed to the account of Abraham as righteousness. Abraham believed what God had promised.

God promised to bless the descendants of both Isaac and Ishmael. Genesis 17:19-22 says, “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 afterhim. 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. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.’ Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.”God told Abraham about the son that Sarah would bear first. God said that they were to name that son “Isaac,” which means *he laughs*. This was to remind Abraham that he had laughed inhis heart.

God went on to say that He would establish His everlasting covenant with Isaac and the descendants of Isaac. Later, God told Abraham again, in Genesis 21:12-13, “But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed.’” In this promise to Abraham, God again told him that Isaac was the one who would carry on the blessing regarding the seed (Christ). At the same time, God also reminded Abraham that He would make a nation of the son of the bondwoman. God had a promise for each of the sons thatHe was going to keep.

Then, God said that He had heard the statement of Abraham when he said, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” God gave Abraham several promises about Ishmael. God said that Hehad blessed Ishmael. God said that as a result of that blessing, He would make Ishmael very fruitful. In fact, God said that He would cause the descendants of Ishmael to multiply exceedingly. God also said that Ishmael would beget twelve princes. Ishmael later had twelve sons and God said here that each of them would be a prince. God did choose to honor the request of Abraham that He would bless Ishmael.

At the same time, God made it clear that Isaac would be the one with whom God would fulfillHis covenant. That meant the blessing that God had given to Abraham would be passed on to the family of Isaac. That blessing included the land, personal blessing, blessing of the nation ofIsrael, and the fact that the Christ who would bring blessing to all families on the earth would come through the family of Isaac. God also said that the birth of Isaac would happen at the appointed time the next year. God had finished talking with Abraham and telling him what He was planning to do. After God had finished talking, He went up from Abraham.

We go on to read, in Genesis 17:23-27, “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. Abraham *was* ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son *was* thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh ofhis foreskin. That very same day, Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; and all themen of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcisedwith him.” Here, we see that Abraham was obedient that very same day to the command Godhad given him to circumcise all of the males of his household.

We read that Abraham circumcised Ishmael and all of his male servants, including both those who had been born in his house and those who had been bought with money. He was also circumcised

that very day. Here, we see that the obedience of Abraham was immediate. He did not wait for a period of time to carry out the instructions of the Lord. Instead, he acted immediately. We see that Abraham showed this same immediate obedience at a later time. Genesis 22:1-3 says, “Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’ So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.” In this case, Abraham got up early the next morning and obeyed immediately.

Abraham was ninety-nine years old at the time that he and all of the men of his household were circumcised. This became a sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham. Genesis 14:14 says, “Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained *servants* who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.” In this earlier verse, we see that Abraham had three hundred and eighteen male servants. That meant that they and all of their sons were circumcised that day. As a result, there were several hundred males circumcised that day.

That circumcision also included Ishmael, the thirteen-year-old son of Abraham and Hagar. That meant that circumcision became a part of the descendants of Ishmael, as well as the descendants of Isaac. That is why it is so important that Genesis 17:21 says, “‘But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.’” Even though many of the descendants of Ishmael practice circumcision, God made it clear, even before Ishmael was circumcised, that the covenant would be carried on through the family of Isaac. This is important to understand because it means that the covenant God made with Abraham will be fulfilled through the family of Isaac. That is why Romans 11:26-27 will be fulfilled in a day that is still in the future. Those verses say, “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’” That is a part of fulfilling this covenant.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the Bible teaches that there is still a future for Israel and the Jews because God is going to fulfill all of the promises made in that covenant to Abraham. It is important to help our children learn to explain why God made some promises to Israel and other promises to the church. God will continue to work to fulfill all of those promises, both those made to Israel and those made to the church. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.