

GENESIS 16-17

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Genesis chapter 16 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

As we have seen in our previous studies, God has called a man by the name of Abram, and he will be the father of the Jewish people.

Now not many people think of Abram or Abraham like this, but he was an idol worshiping Gentile before God called him and so were we!

And God promised Abram that he would be a great nation. (Genesis 12:1-2)

God promised Abram that he would inherit lots of land. (Genesis 15:18-21)

Now, keep in mind that Abram has no children, and he does not own any land in the Promise Land. All he had were the promises of God!

Keep in mind that Abram is some eighty-five years old now and he has been walking with the Lord for some ten years.

But, as we will see this evening, Abram is going to help God out on this one and that is never a good thing. Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth does not need our help and Abram will find that out because there are consequences when we act in the flesh.

And here's the thing. What we are seeing is God trying to stretch the faith of Abram, helping him to grow in the Lord, and it is not always easy to be patient, to wait upon God, to allow His will to be done instead of ours!

Faith is so important because what true Biblical faith does is it takes things out of our hands and places them in the hands of God. He has a perfect plan and perfect timing, even though we don't always think so.

Here are some things that speak of what true Biblical faith is all about.

Are you – ***WILLING TO WAIT?***

That is not always easy and that is what Abram is going to find out. But it is what we need to do, not get ahead of the Lord, that does not work.

Are you – ***CONCERNED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD?***

What I mean by that is are you doing what you are doing to bring glory to God or yourself? Be careful, it is God who enables us to do all things and not our ability or strength.

Are you – ***OBEYING GOD'S WORD?***

That is important. Are you doing something that God has forbid or trying to accomplish something in an unbiblical way? Be careful.

Are you – ***FILLED WITH GOD'S JOY AND PEACE?***

As you wait upon the Lord. As you desire to bring glory and honor to God. As you obey God's Word. Then you should have His joy and peace in that situation you are dealing with. When I came up here to Manitowoc to be the pastor of this church, I had joy and peace even though it was the craziest thing I had ever done. That is what we should have as we serve the Lord and God is stretching our faith!

For Abram, something happens that causes him to put his faith on hold, his faith in the promises of God and to try and help God accomplish His plan for his life. Again, never a good thing.

And here's the thing, as Barnhouse wrote regarding faith, ***“No perfect feet walk the path of faith.”***

How true that is. And here is the encouraging thing. That work that God began in us, our salvation, He will complete! (Philippians 1:6)

There is a precious promise to us. That God will finish the work that He started in our lives, even though we blow it, we fall far short of what we want to do, our faith waxes and wanes. He will finish that work in us, just as He will do with Abram, and praise God for that!

With that as our introduction, let's begin reading in Genesis chapter 16 beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word this evening.

GENESIS 16

VERSES 1-2

Here was this problem for Abram and Sarai. He was eighty-five years old, and she was seventy-five years old and the promise that God made some ten years earlier, that they would bring forth a great nation, was not happening!

And for Sarai, she felt that God had done this to her and because of that she is coming up with a plan to help God out. And when she tells Abram the plan, he is all for it. We will deal more with that in a minute.

Let's first deal with this maidservant, when did they get her?

Remember their time down in Egypt, or I should say in the world, as Egypt is a type of the world, it is there in the world that Pharaoh probably gave Hagar to them as a maidservant!

And what Sarai wants to do is give Hagar to Abram to conceive and bear a child for them. Now that is very strange to us, but it was a common practice in that culture.

If a woman was barren, she could give her maid to her husband to bring forth a child and that child would be the firstborn.

Again, why did they do this?

Because God promised that their descendants would be as the stars in the sky, they were to be a great nation and thus, they needed to help God out!

Like we have talked about, that is never a good idea!

And make no mistake about it, Abram and Sarai did not realize at the time how this young woman would impact their lives and their family. In fact, it is something that continues to impact the Jewish people, some 4,000 years later, since this event took place.

And the problem for Sarai is that she is past the time of childbearing and thus, this was the best solution to the problem.

David Guzik gives us this insight as he wrote, *“Ginzberg quotes a Jewish tradition, saying that before they came to live in the Promised Land, Abram and Sarai regarded their childlessness as punishment for not living in the land. But now they were in the land for ten years, and they still had no children. Sarai probably felt it was time to do something. Perhaps she thought along the lines of an old (unbiblical) proverb, ‘God helps those who help themselves.’”*

Let me say this. God does not need our help, He is God!

So Sarai tells her husband to conceive a child through Hagar, their maidservant and he has no problem obeying his wife!

Remember what the Lord told Adam after he sinned? In Genesis 3:17 we are told, **“Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’ . . .’”**

Now, ladies, before you start sending me nasty e-mails because you think I am saying that husbands are not to listen to their wives, hold off. That is not what I am saying!

First of all, the man is the spiritual leader in the family. But that does not mean we are not to listen to our wives.

Over the years I have been so blessed from the wisdom of my wife!

Then what does God mean in Genesis 3:17?

When your wife tells you something that is contrary to the Word of God, then you are not to listen to your wife. God told Adam not to partake of the fruit, and he disobeyed God and listened to his wife!

For Abram, he should have told her, ***“Honey, that is not what the Lord told us to do. Yes, it is lawful, but we are to wait upon God. He made a promise to us, and He is more than able to bring it to pass!”***

But he did not say that. And, as we will see, Abram has a child with Hagar!

VERSES 3-4a

Have you ever had to wait long periods of time for God to fulfill what He had promised you? I have and it is not easy, but it is what is best.

For Abram and Sarai, it was 10 years of waiting and nothing was happening. Since God’s plan, plan A did not work, let’s try plan B! Hagar would be the one who would conceive a child with Abram!

Barnhouse gives us this insight as he applies this to Christian work. He wrote,

Those who are truly zealous for God frequently reach for fruit without first dying. Unfortunately much Christian work is done in this way, and while there is conception, the child that is born can never be the heir. Christian work that is done merely through the zeal of human effort without counting the body as dead, and Sarai as good as dead, may produce great revival campaigns with but a few genuinely saved, large church memberships with many tares among the wheat.

- Donald Grey Barnhouse

Folks, it is always better to wait upon the Lord than to try and help Him out. We just get in the way of what He wants to do many times and make a mess of things.

And there are examples in the Scriptures of people who had the call of God upon their life but were impatient to wait upon Him to bring it to pass. They tried to do it on their own and they failed miserably!

Remember the story of Jacob, he had to live as an exile for 20 years because he thought he had to arrange the fulfillment of God's promise to get his father's blessing.

Then there is Moses who had to tend sheep for 40 years in the desert after he tried to arrange the fulfillment of God's promise by murdering an Egyptian.

Make no mistake about it, when we try to help God out in the flesh, it will get results but the results that we do get we may not like!

The bottom line is this, and I have said it already, but it is good to be reminded. I think that the creator of heaven and earth can do it without our help, don't you?

And when He wants to use us as vessels from which He can work through, may we be willing to walk as He leads and not as we want!

VERSES 4b-5

Hagar is now flaunting her pregnancy before Sarai. You see, her status changed among the other servants once she was placed in this position as a surrogate mother.

And thus, contentions began to grow and Sarai blames Abram for this mess.

That is a common response to those who do things that are wrong and then suffer the consequences of their actions, they blame God or others for their problems. We saw Adam and Eve do that and here we see Sarai do that as well. She needed to repent and get right for her actions!

Now let me also say this. She was partially right, it was Abram's fault as well.

Now wait a minute, who told Abram to do this?

Sarai told Abram to do this!

So, wasn't he only doing what he was told? It really wasn't his fault too, was it?

It was Sarai's sin but also Abram is responsible as the spiritual leader in the family and instead of doing that, he felt it was easier to let Sarai handle it, no use fighting with her over this issue.

That was and it still is wrong folks! And what we are going to see is Abram giving in to the demands of his wife as we read on, instead of being the spiritual leader in the family.

VERSE 6

Notice how Abram handles this situation. She tells his wife to do whatever she wants!

Maybe he felt, *“Happy wife, happy life!”*

That is not Scriptural in the sense that doing something wrong to please your spouse is not going to benefit you, not at all.

Men, do you feel it is better to give in to your wife instead of doing what is right?

If so, then you are acting like Abram did here, *“Do whatever you want, I don’t care”* attitude?

That is wrong.

You are a family, and you are the spiritual leader in the family, thus, you need to fulfill the role that God has given you in the family.

Paul put it like this in Ephesians 5:25-28, **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.”**

You see, love them, watch over them, protect them, keep them clean as you share the Word of God with them!

That was something that Abram was not doing.

So as Sarai hears these words from her husband, as he basically told her to do whatever she wants, and thus, she deals harshly with Hagar. In fact, she makes her life miserable for her and Hagar flees for her life! She is probably heading back to Egypt, where else could she go?

One other point here and many don’t pick up on this. Hagar is bearing Abram’s child and yet, he seems not to care. That too is not a good thing, and we see that so often today with men.

Fatherless homes have been a plague on our society, and we are reaping what we have sown!

VERSES 7-9

Hagar is heading back to Egypt and on her way the pre-incarnate Christ appears to her!

How can I be so sure that this is the pre-incarnate Christ?

This is the pre-incarnate Christ because in Genesis 16:13 we see Hagar call this person God and if it wasn't the Lord, they would have corrected her. But it was the Lord!

How can I be so sure she was going to Egypt?

Because Shur is the name of the desert in northwestern Sinai, next to Egypt.

And what does the Lord ask her?

“Where have you come from, and where are you going?”

I don't believe the Lord is simply asking Hagar some basic information, He knew where she had come from and that she was headed back to Egypt.

Then why did He ask her those questions?

Because He wants her to think about where she is going.

You see, she came out of Egypt or the world.

And the Lord is asking her, ***“Do you really want to go back to the world? I know there were problems back in Canaan but why do you want to go back to where you started from?”***

And when we get off track, are leaving a situation because the situation is tough, we don't like what has happened, I think the Lord asks us those same questions. We are not to run from difficulty and that is what Hagar was doing and she was looking for her help from the world, from Egypt!

Now, in the situation that Hagar found herself in with Sarai, what do you think counselors might tell her?

Probably, keep on going, don't come back, run away from this situation after what she did to you and-so-on.

What is interesting here and like I have said, that is not what the Lord tells her to do.

What does He tell her?

She is to **RETURN** and **SUBMIT!**

That would be a very difficult thing to do especially in the situation she was in, but she obeyed the Lord and did just that!

Again, what are you running away from?

Is the Lord telling you to return and submit?

You need to listen and obey!

But the reality is, it is easier to run away from a situation than face it!

But there is no growth in doing that, but there is in returning and submitting!

VERSES 10-12

God makes a promise to Hagar that this child, Ishmael, which means "**God hears,**" will become a great nation through his descendants, and that has come to pass.

Not only that but they will be wild.

Who are these people?

They are the Arabic people! And look at the conflict we see today because Abram tried to help God out, the turmoil between the Arabs and the Jews!

One writer put it like this as he wrote, *“Little did Abram and Sarai imagine that their shortcut would originate a conflict that would run for millennia and that oceans of blood would be spilt. Abram, the father of the faithful, had begotten a wild man instead of a child of grace. How tragic was Abram’s expediency.”*

How true that is. We need to pray for them, especially today where we see such violence against those Muslims that come to saving faith!

Now let me deal with this issue of the child of this bondwoman, Ishmael, and the child of promise, Isaac.

Paul tells us in Galatians 4:21-31, **“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar - for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children - but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: ‘Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband.’ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”** Galatians 4:21-31.

He is contrasting the Law or works of the flesh, which only leads to bondage to that of grace, the gift that God has given to us, where there is freedom.

The two don't work together; you are not saved by the Law and Grace but by Grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

Thus, cast out the bondwoman and her son!

VERSES 13-16

Hagar did return and she submitted to Abram and Sarai.

And when her son is born, she calls him Ishmael, just as the Lord instructed her to do.

Thus, every time Abram saw Ishmael he was reminded, "***God hears.***" That was something that Abram needed to be reminded of. Instead of acting on his own, he needs to bring it to God in prayer because God does hear!

What a great lesson for us to learn and apply to our lives!

I don't think we realize how Hagar had to humble herself before Abram and Sarai.

Think about the situation Hagar was in and how she would explain what happened to her, why she had to leave in the first place, which Abram was aware. The thing is, it was the truth, she fled because of what Sarai did to her.

She could have come to Abram and Sarai and said, "***Look, I fled for my life because of how I was being treated by Sarai, the miserable conditions I faced day in and day out. I just could not take it any longer, I couldn't stay any longer! So I left! I hope it is going to be better this time around!***"

But that is not what she said. She said to Abram and Sarai, *“As I fled the Lord met me and told me it would be okay, He would see me through it all. He is the one who told me to return and submit and I am obeying Him!”*

Wouldn't it have been easier for her to stay away?

You bet it would. But she obeyed the Lord's call and returned and submitted!

Barnhouse sums it up like this as he tells us,

If we seek to change our circumstances, we will jump from the frying pan into the fire. We must be triumphant exactly where we are. It is not a change of climate we need, but a change of heart. The flesh wants to run away, but God wants to demonstrate His power exactly where we have known our greatest chagrin [sorrow].

- Donald Grey Barnhouse

Thus, don't run away but run to the Lord and then listen to His instructions.

Then what?

Then obey His words to you. Yes, it may be difficult, it may be hard, but it is what is best!

Hagar was teaching Abram some important lessons of trusting in the Lord!

May we not only believe but apply these truths to our lives! You see, He is our *El Roi* or *You are the God who sees!*

Thus, look to Him and listen to Him and then obey Him and see the blessing that God has for you as you walk by faith!

I also want you to notice how this chapter ends. We are told that Abram was now 86 years old, and it would be another 13 years for God to fulfill His promise to both Abram and Sarai!

Can you imagine, Abram will be 99 and Sarai 89 when she becomes pregnant!

And what we see once again is that between God's promise and the fulfillment of that promise there is patience and trust.

What does that mean to us?

Hang in there, don't give up, God is working according to His plans and purposes!

Now as we move into Genesis chapter 17 tonight, we are going to see that God is not going to recognize Ishmael as the son of promise, as the son of Abram.

You see, he was the result of the works of the flesh and not a son of faith.

That is an important lesson for Abram and for us to learn!

GENESIS 17

VERSES 1-2

I don't think we realize that the last time God spoke directly to Abram was in Genesis chapter 15, some twenty-four years have now passed by!

Why did God wait so long?

First of all, I believe Abram had a normal fellowship with God but there was not that direct revelation to him.

Secondly, God made a promise to Abram and now Abram had to wait. God was going to stretch his faith and He will help Abram to see through the eyes of faith and not the flesh!

You see, our faith grows not only as we hear God's Word but also then as we apply it to our lives or as we walk by faith and that is what we are seeing here.

And here's the thing. God will speak to you through His Word by His Spirit and yes, there will be those times when God will speak to you directly, as He did with Abram here, but again, it is through His Word by His Spirit that He mostly speaks to us today!

We are told here that Abram is ninety-nine years old at this point, Sarai is eighty-nine years old and as the Lord speaks to him, he says, "**I am Almighty God.**" Genesis 17:1.

The Hebrew words are *EL SHADDAI*, (shad-dah'ee) and the idea here is that Abram may have come to the end of his resources, but God is just beginning, He is Almighty God!

In fact, the Septuagint translation of this word, "**Almighty**" or the way the Jewish scholars translated it into Greek was with the word PANTOKRATOR, which means, "***One who has his hand on everything.***"

I like that because that is our God, actively involved in our lives. You see, with that perspective you should never be discouraged, you should never doubt God, He is our *EL SHADDAI!*

God also tells Abram to "**walk before Me and be blameless.**" Genesis 17:1.

Doesn't that sound like a works salvation, that Abram had to attain some standard of being good and then he would enter in? Not at all!

The Hebrew word for "**blameless**" or "**perfect**" can mean "***whole.***"

In other words, God wants Abram to commit his whole life to Him, not just part of it!

God wants nothing less from us. He wants all of us! And if you are going to walk with the Lord, don't take one step forward and then one step backward, that is not walking. Keep moving forward, walk by faith!

VERSES 3-8

As Abram worshiped the Lord, bowed down before Him, God speaks to him regarding the covenant He has given to Abram and his descendants.

Now the name “**Abram**” means “*father of many*” or “*exalted father*” which must have been a burden for him. You see, he is ninety-nine years old at this time and has only one son through his wife’s maidservant, Hagar.

I don’t know about you, but according to my math, one is not many!

And what does God do here? God changes his name from “**Abram**” to “**Abraham**” or from “*father of many*” to “*father of many nations*” or “*father of a multitude.*”

Can you imagine him telling his friends and family that God has changed his name to Abraham! The laughter, it seemed so preposterous to be called that and yet, God saw what would come from Abraham and the Lord would make him a father of many nations!

Now this covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants, how long does it last?

God told Abraham that it is an *everlasting covenant*, and it means just what it says, it is everlasting!

God not only will bless and multiply the Jewish people, but they will have the Promise Land, the land of Canaan!

Now I know some would argue and say that the Jewish people blew it, they not only forfeited their relationship with God because of their rejection of Jesus, but they also forfeited the land God had given to them and it has now been given to the church.

We call this replacement theology where the church now replaces Israel and all the promises that God made to her.

Foolishness! Eternal means just that; He gave the land to them, and it was an unconditional covenant that He made with them. The land is theirs, not the United Nations, not the Palestinians, not the Pope, not anyone else but the Jews!

Let's put this into perspective for us, how the Jews are even around today.

Queen Victoria said to her prime minister one day, "***Show me one thing that proves the Bible is absolutely true.***"

His response was interesting and right on the money. He told her, "***The Jew madam, the Jew.***"

So the land that God gave to Israel is part of the everlasting covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants and can never be forfeited!

But what about those that say this is not true?

If what they are saying is right, and this is not an everlasting covenant, then we are in trouble because God made with us an everlasting covenant. And if one everlasting covenant is not everlasting, neither is the other!

You see, Paul tells us in Hebrews 13:20-21, "**Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.**"

Again, if the New Covenant is called an "**everlasting covenant**" and if it does not mean eternal as some say it doesn't in Genesis chapter 17, then we can forfeit it, we can lose it and we are doomed!

But the eternal covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants, and the eternal covenant that He has made with us, is just that, it is eternal, it is everlasting, it is based on the faithfulness of God and not man!

VERSES 9-14

What we see here is God instituting the sign of this covenant He made with Abraham and his descendants – circumcision.

And remember that a sign points to something, that is all it can do and that is what circumcision does. Keep in mind that this was not a new practice, various people practiced circumcision, but for Abraham and his descendants it would show their faith, it was new for them.

Now besides hygienic reasons, circumcision is a cutting away of the flesh and it was symbolic of a separation from the world, it spoke of purity.

It is as Moses tells us in Deuteronomy 30:6, **“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”**

The problem that occurred with the Jews is that over the years they began to look at circumcision as necessary and sufficient for salvation. Instead of looking to the God of the covenant for salvation, they looked to the sign of the covenant, circumcision, for their salvation.

Paul, in Galatians picks up on this as he tells us in chapter 5, starting in verse 1, **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”** Galatians 5:1-6.

Please understand that circumcision was an outward sign of an inward reality. Their salvation was based upon their faith in God and the evidence for their salvation was seen in circumcision.

In other words, it is a matter of the heart, and we see this in Jeremiah 9:26 where we are told, **“Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all who are in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.”**

Again, it was a matter of the heart that is the issue here and not the act of circumcision!

How does this relate to us today?

Many believe that you must be baptized in order to be saved. Folks, baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality, a relationship with the Lord. Why look to the sign of the covenant, baptism, when we should be looking at the God of the covenant - ***JESUS!***

Let me give you a few examples to show you what I mean, that baptism doesn't save a person.

Remember when Paul and Silas were placed in the Philippian jail for preaching Christ and after a series of events the Philippian jailer asks them, “**. . . ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’**” Acts 16:30.

Listen carefully to how they responded to this question regarding how he can be saved. They said, “**. . . ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’**” Acts 16:31.

Did you see that, there is nothing about baptism and if that were needed, Paul would have said it!

Not only that, but in I Corinthians 1:14-17 Paul is dealing with division in the church there in Corinth, carnality, and he says, “**I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.**”

If baptism were needed for salvation Paul would have had a portable dunk tank and everyone that was saved, he would have baptized, but he didn't.

Why didn't Paul do that? Because baptism was not necessary for salvation, that is not what the Lord called him to do. The Lord called him to preach the Gospel message and see people saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

There is nothing about baptism saving a person but plenty that speak against it!

And in Colossians 2:11-12 Paul is dealing with circumcision and he tells us, **“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”**

Who is doing the circumcising here?

God is and it is done on our hearts, to cut away the hardness and make us more sensitive to the Lord.

Then should we as Christians even be baptized? I believe we should for the Lord said, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”**

Matthew 28:19-20.

You see, we should be baptized out of obedience, out of love for the Lord and not for salvation but for the evidence of our salvation. An outward sign of an inward reality!

Then what about what Genesis 17:14 says, **“And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”**

If circumcision was not necessary, why were they cut off?

By reading this it seems that circumcision is necessary and thus, is baptism necessary?

No, it is not and here is why. By rejecting the sign of the covenant, circumcision, they were rejecting the covenant or the God of the covenant.

It is as Jesus said in John 14:15, **“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”** Love equals obedience and I think that is the point here with those that refused to be circumcised!

One more point before we move on and that is this. Why did God say that the male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day?

Listen carefully to this.

In his book, *In Defense Of The Bible’s Inspiration*, Bert Thompson tells us,

. . . In humans, blood clotting is dependent upon three factors: (a) platelets; (b) vitamin K; and (c) prothrombin. In 1935, professor H. Dam proposed the name “vitamin K” for the factor that helped prevent hemorrhaging in chicks. We now realize that vitamin K is responsible for the production (by the liver) of prothrombin. If the quantity of vitamin K is deficient, there will be a prothrombin deficiency and hemorrhaging may occur.

Interestingly, it is only on the fifth to seventh days of a newborn’s life that vitamin K (produced by the action of bacteria in the intestinal tract) is present in adequate quantities. Vitamin K – coupled with prothrombin – causes blood coagulation, which is important in any surgical procedure. One classic medical text, Holt Pediatrics, corroborates the fact that a newborn infant has

. . . peculiar susceptibility to bleeding between the second and fifth days of life. . . . Hemorrhages at this time, though often inconsequential, are sometimes extensive; they may produce serious damage to internal organs, especially to the brain, and cause death from shock and exsanguinations (1953, pp. 125-126).

Obviously, then if vitamin K is not produced in sufficient quantities until days five through seven, it would be wise to postpone any surgery until sometime after that. But why did God specify **eight**?

On the eighth day, the amount of prothrombin present actually is **elevated above 100 percent of normal**.

In fact, day eight is the only day in the male's life in which this will be the case under normal conditions. If surgery is to be performed, day eight is the perfect day to do it.

S. I. McMillen, the renowned medical doctor who wrote *None of These Diseases*, stated concerning this information:

. . . as we congratulate medical science for this recent finding, we can almost hear the leaves of the Bible rustling. They would like to remind us that four thousand years ago, when God initiated circumcision with Abraham, He said "And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised. . . ." Abraham did not pick the eighth day after many centuries of trial-and-error experiments. Neither he nor any of his company from the ancient city of Ur in the Chaldees had ever been circumcised. It was a day picked by the Creator of vitamin K (1963, p. 21, emp. In orig.).

The medical information employed by Abraham, and confirmed by Moses, was accurate scientifically then, and remains so to this very day. No culture around the Israelites possessed such scientific acumen [insight], which, by the way, was years ahead of its time. How, then, did Abraham and Moses come to know the best time for circumcision, unless, of course, this particular fact was revealed to them by God, and recorded in His Word through inspiration?

- Bert Thompson, Ph.D., In Defense Of The Bible's Inspiration, pp. 54-56

Exactly!

VERSES 15-16

As we can see, not only did God change Abram's name to Abraham, but now He changes Sarai, which means *"lady"* or *"princess"* to Sarah, which is almost the same, there is only a subtle difference.

So why did God do it?

Because the name "**Sarah**" speaks of a lady or princess of a multitude, there is no restriction.

Again, she has been barren for 89 years now, long past the age of childbearing, and yet God says she was to be "**a mother of nations**"!

Hagar, the surrogate mother, was not to be the one, but Sarah herself would have a son!

VERSES 17-18

Now was this a laugh of joy or just a laughter of unbelief?

I think Abraham believed that God could bring this to pass, but he had a son, Ishmael and thus, no need to go any further.

One writer put it like this, *"In other words, Abraham is saying, 'I know I got ahead of You when Ishmael was conceived. I know that was not Your plan. I know I made a mess, but, Lord, bless my mess.'"*

Have you ever done that? Maybe your motives were sincere, your intentions were right. But you didn't wait on God or talk things over with Him. Instead, you just plunged into that relationship, that job opportunity, that ministry. And when it turned out to be a mess, you asked God to bless it anyway.

Look, God will forgive our mess, He will work around our mess, but He will never *ble*ss our mess!

Now why do I think that Abraham's laugh is different that the laugh of Sarah in Genesis chapter 18?

Because God does not rebuke the laugh of Abraham, but He does rebuke the laugh of unbelief for Sarah!

How can I be so sure?

Because of a commentary I read, the New Testament, which is the best commentary on the Old Testament!

Keep in mind that they both are past the age of childbearing! So if this happens, it is a miracle. They have to put their trust in the Lord and His promise to them.

And that is why Paul tells us in Romans 4:17-22 about Abraham and his faith, **“(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.’”**

You see, Abraham believed God, the promise that God made to him even though from a human perspective, it was impossible. That faith in the Lord was accounted to Abraham as righteousness, not his works, but his faith as it is with us, our faith in Jesus!

How about you, do you find it hard to trust God in areas that may seem unbelievable, unconceivable you might say!

God can take the impossible and make it very possible, and all we must do is trust in Him and walk by faith.

It is as the Lord said in Jeremiah 32:27, **“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?”** And we will see that next time in Genesis 18:14 as the Lord tells Abraham that very thing.

Let me ask you this. What do you think, is there anything too hard for the Lord?

Of course not, He is God and with God all things are possible!

That does not mean that God will do all things because He will only do those things that are holy, that are righteous, it is His will that will be done! May we not lose sight of that perspective!

VERSES 19-22

God tells Abraham that He will have a son through Sarah and his name will be called Isaac or ***“laughter.”***

I see two points that emerge from this name.

First of all, Abraham will be reminded of the joy that this child will bring as he laughed at the promise of God with joy.

Secondly, every time he sees Isaac it will remind Abraham of the faithfulness of God's promise to him, that what He promised He did bring to pass.

God also tells Abraham that Ishmael will be blessed, but he is not the son by which the covenant promises would come by, he is not the son of promise, Isaac is!

VERSES 23-27

So as God gave Abraham the command to be circumcised, what did he do?

Did he have to go and pray about it? ***“Lord, circumcision, are you sure? Really, circumcision?”***

No, he did not have to do that because God said it and he just believed it and was obedient to what God said.

I think many times God tells us to do something and just so people don't get the idea that we are not spiritual, we say things like, ***“I would like to, but let me pray about it!”***

In other words, at least what I have seen, it means, ***“No way am I going to do that!”***

Folks if God said it, then you need to do it!

For Abraham, his belief in the covenant was seen in his obedience to God's Word. You see, what we believe will be manifested in our lives, in our actions!

Also notice that Abraham's obedience was complete; he circumcised every male in his house.

His obedience was prompt, the very day God spoke to him he responded.

And his obedience was daring.

Think about it, all his fighting men have been circumcised and I can tell you, not from personal experience, but it is just obvious to me, these guys were not going to be able to fight for a while, they would be in too much pain!

What we see here is the faith of this man as He walks in obedience to God, trusting that God will provide all that He has promised him. And his men respected him to go through with this!

How about you, can you walk by faith trusting in the promises of God that He has for you?

He wants you to and walking is the only way your faith is going to grow, walking in accordance with God's Word!

May our faith continue to grow in Him as He leads us!

And I will close with these words from Ray Stedman. He wrote,

“Walk therefore before me, and be wholehearted, blameless.” That will be a life of fruitfulness and blessing, a life that is well-pleasing to God, for it all springs from the realization that the God who lives within is El Shaddai, the God who is sufficient.

- <https://bit.ly/3AMck00>

Never doubt God, He is our ***EL SHADDAI!***