

### “...a covenant”

In this chapter we see two separate accounts: one of Abraham getting rid of his son, Ishmael, and the other of promise-making to effect peace. But, the separate accounts are really of similar substance.

We are now in days of Islamic terror and we should remember that this terror is rooted in a people that hold Ishmael as their father, through Abraham. Christians hold Abraham to be their ‘father’, as do Jews, because of the ‘Christ-line’, but have no affiliation to Ishmael. The enmity between Jews and Muslims is historic as well as Biblical (please see Article A-161. Note that this enmity is not between Arabs *per se*, who are the stock of Ishmael, but between *Muslims* and Jews/Christians; the original Muslims being Arabs).

Yet, despite this, we must strive to always live together as common men and women, whose ultimate mother and father, Adam and Eve, are the parents of all peoples. Though we all go different ways, we are all kinsmen. We all owe each other common courtesy and common love, and a willingness to help and comfort, as far as we are able; there is no place for xeno-hatred in society.

This is not the same as ecumenism, where men join with unholy beliefs and religions. Against such we must always be vigilant and outspoken. The God of the Bible is the One True (triune) God. No other religion worships the one true God (Who is a trinity), not even Islam or Judaism.

Today, we should not appease Islamic terrorists by giving in to their demands. Their demands are greater than you might suppose: they want the total eradication of Israel (and Jews), and the obliteration of Christians. It is ironic that, throughout the world, foolish and mistaken Christians are fighting to uphold the ‘rights’ of Palestinian terrorists against Israel. They are wonderfully oblivious to the threat that will overcome *themselves*! If ever Palestinian terrorists finally eradicated the Jews, they would then turn their guns on the very Christians who had helped them! Open your eyes!

*Satan*

, not God, is the face behind the PLO!

Be aware, but also be Christians. Act properly and with care. Show common love for your fellow

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men, but do not reward their sins, with money, other help, or words of comfort. To warrant help, they must show the same courtesy.

A vital flaw runs through many churches; they help those whom God has declared to be beyond His help. To put it bluntly, it does not matter if people are starving and children are dying... if they are opposed to God and deny Him, they are not to be helped. That is God's own command. Such folk suffer because of their own denial of Almighty God, and their suffering is a judgement upon their lives. For such, there is no help and if we dare to help, we commit sin. Act out of compliance to God's commands, not out of emotion.

### Verses 1-5

1.

“And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

2.

For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

3.

And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

4.

And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

5.

And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.”

Whatever God determines to do, He does. Whatever He promises. He gives. Whatever judgement He makes, good or ill, *will* come to pass. These things *must* be, because of Who He

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is. The benevolent old man in the sky idea so cherished by the nations and even encouraged by many reformed theologies, is a myth.

God is all-powerful and supreme. He is Almighty God, King of kings, Maker of heaven and earth. He raises men up and dashes men down. His actions amongst men include the horror of death and destruction, as well as the beauty of salvation and wondrous gifts. We must never make God to be anything less.

God promised that Sarah would conceive, and even gave a time-scale. This promise was made good and Sarah conceived, as promised. Christians receive many promises but fail to see them as of God. They do not recognise when a promise has been made to them, and therefore do not see the promise come to pass. Instead, they accept a lesser thing, and call God's gifts psychological, medical, social or governmental, or, self-made!

As we see from this text God "did unto Sarah as he had spoken". He had spoken directly to her, in a conversation (*dabar* – to converse, to speak with someone). Many charismatics today pretend that God has spoken to them. That is why they have to 'interpret' the words! In reality, God has not spoken to them, and never has. They invent words from God, and try to impress others with their 'revelations'. But, when God truly speaks, we are left in no doubt whatever that it is God! And whatever He says is ALWAYS found in scripture in some form. It is *never* extra-biblical.

Sarah became pregnant, *hareth*, and bore, *yalad*, Abraham a son. He already had a son, but by a concubine. Now, God had given him a legitimate son, the one who would be in Christ's line. In our lives we all obtain and get many benefits and do many things. But, the line of God is not in them all. The path of God is a narrow one, and we often stray from it, sometimes far away. Yet, God's path is always there.

(A man who drives as part of his living is more likely to have an accident than a man who only drives occasionally, simply because he is on the road more often. Yet, relatively, he is probably the safer driver. In the same way a man who has a public ministry is more likely to be criticised for his mistakes, than the man who does not have a public ministry. This is not necessarily because he makes more errors or has a worse character; it is just that his movements and speech are always open to the public gaze, and everything he says and does is noticed. I know this from my own experience! The man who does not have such a ministry, however, is a

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'hidden quantity' and he can sin or make mistakes at will, almost with impunity from public censure, because his activities are relatively secret and not made known. So, do not be so quick to censure a minister for a single error or perceived mistake).

Abraham could not wait for God to act, so he took a concubine to himself. This was an error, though we have no record of God rebuking him for it. It was an error that brought forth the mighty Arab nations, from whom came the Islamic religion (though, of course, not all Arabs are of this ilk). And from this arose the people of terror, who kill in the name of their 'Allah'... some sins go quietly unnoticed. Others have a disastrous effect, not just on the individual who sinned, but on many others.

Sarah's son was born to Abraham in his old age, or *zaqun*, extreme old age (aged 100), and exactly followed the time-scale given originally by God, nine months before, when Christ and the two angels visited Abraham's tent in the wilderness. Many momentous things had happened since that revelation! The son born to Sarah was named *Yitschaq*, or Isaac, meaning 'he laughs'.

Note that this is not a reference to Sarah laughing in derision nine months before, or to Isaac laughing. The 'he' who laughs in this word is God, and it is used in a happy sense, in the same way that we may 'laugh at fate' or laugh in the face of adversity. When Isaac was just eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, in obedience to God's command. This was the outward sign of being a Jew, a son of God; and it is when 'Jews' began as a nation-in-waiting. Today, the sign of belonging to God (through and in Christ) is inward, in the heart and soul.

### Verses 6-8

1.

"And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

2.

And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.

3.

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And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.”

Previously, Sarah had laughed in derision at God’s suggestion that she should bare a son in her old age. Now, her laugh is turned to delight. The word used is derived from *tsachaq*, a form of laughter Sarah used when first told she would become pregnant – scorn. Now, the word is *ts@choq*; it can mean to be a laughing stock, but it can also mean, simply, to laugh.

This latter meaning applies in this text, for Sarah is alive with joy. She is talking about a pure laughter, a laughter that is shared with God, Who has gloriously upturned His own laws of nature so that she could be blessed and, through her, the whole world! Those who heard about her pregnancy did not, then, laugh in derision, but in wonder. Except, that is, for Hagar...

Who would have dreamt that Sarah should have had a son in her old age? Who would have thought that Abraham would have a natural heir? Sarah weaned Isaac as a baby, and when he came off his mother’s milk, Abraham “made a great feast” or banquet, *mishteh*, in celebration. At last, Abraham had been given a son by God, exactly 25 years after leaving his home in Haran.

Isaac (a name chosen by God), was circumcised in accordance with God’s divine command. The coming expulsion of his half-brother, Ishmael, underlined the role Isaac was to play. Other than this, relatively little is written of this second patriarch of the Jews.

### Verses 9-13

1.

“And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

2.

Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

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3.

And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

4.

And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

5.

And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.”

Some years before, Hagar, the Egyptian concubine, had mocked Sarah because she had a son and Sarah did not. This resulted in her being cast into the desert, where, if it were not for God, she would have died.

Now, at the feast celebrating Isaac's end of infancy, the young lad, Ishmael, mocked Sarah. This time, it was not the laughter of joy, but of scorn and mockery, *tsachaq*. In any family, no son should mock his parent. But, in this instance, the mockery was an extension of the mockery his mother gave, that had previously caused Sarah so much misery. Sarah spoke to Abraham and demanded a final solution – he must get rid of both Hagar and Ishmael, for Ishmael would never be heir to Abraham's name or wealth.

Abraham loved Ishmael, but the boy had no family connection with Sarah, so she had no blood-bond with him. Indeed, he was a constant reminder of her folly and her pain. We are not told if Abraham went to God with a heavy heart, or if God came to him in comfort without prompting. Nevertheless, God spoke to Abraham: 'Do not be anxious about Ishmael, but listen to Sarah, for she is right – Isaac is your heir and he will, like you, be patriarch to a nation. But, also, I will make a great nation of Ishmael, because he, too, is your seed.'

Much later, Paul was to have a 'thorn in his side' that would never leave him. In a sense Ishmael and the Arabic nations who spawned Islam, are a thorn in the side of Israel, even

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today. Paul's thorn constantly reminded him of his human frailty and turned him back to God... is this what happens with Israel, when the sons of Islam constantly cast their darts? (Remember: While God blessed the Arab *nation* that came from Ishmael, He did not thereby bless the corruption of Arabs who invented a false *religion*, Islam, to replace Judaism/Christianity).

Notice that Abraham was very unhappy about all this. Often in our lives what we consider to be important to us, even members of family, means something else to God. His priorities are usually very different, so our unhappiness is misplaced.

### Verses 14-21

1.

"And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

2.

And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

3.

And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

4.

And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

5.

Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

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And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

7.

And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

8.

And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.”

Next day, Abraham got up early and gathered together some bread and water. He put the containers over the shoulders of Hagar and Ishmael, and sent them away. Once again, Hagar had to roam the wilderness, this time the desert of Beersheba ('wall of the seventh oath'), south of what was to become Israel.

It was not long before the water ran out, and Hagar placed her son under some bushes for protection against the sun. As she had done some years before, she then went and sat some distance away from him, so as not to watch his final hours or to hear his last words. As she sat she cried bitterly.

It is a fact that both Hagar and Ishmael had brought this sorry state upon themselves, yet God showed them compassion. He heard Ishmael calling in distress, and an angel called out to Hagar, 'What is wrong? Don't be afraid, for God has heard Ishmael crying out. Get up and hold your son's hand to get him to stand, for he is to become the father of a great nation.'

Then, Hagar's eyes were drawn to a well in the desert. It seems likely from the narrative that it did not exist beforehand, but was placed there miraculously by God. With great relief, Hagar went to the well, drew water into her skin bottle, and gave it to Ishmael.

Remarkably, given the enmity between Israel and Arabic nations, we see that "God was with the

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lad...". Ishmael continued to live in the desert of Paran ('place of caverns', in southern 'Palestine') with his mother, and became an archer. His mother later found a wife for her son, from her native land, Egypt.

This compassion by God must be remembered, especially at a time when Islamic terror is being spread. Those who are Muslim, are so by rote; their Islamism has nothing to do with their national root - Arab. That is, they have usually been born into Muslim families and are taught their religion constantly (as happens with Roman Catholics). They know no other way. In this, they are just like any other sinner who needs the grace of God. We must, then, loathe their religion but keep our hearts open to the persons, as far as we are able.

### Verses 22-24

1.

"And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest:

2.

Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.

3.

And Abraham said, I will swear."

We are then directed to a separate account that occurred about the same time. The king of the Philistine city of Gerar, Abimelech, along with his general, Phicol ('strong'), visited Abraham. They acknowledged that God was with him. After all, they had heard of his battle exploits, and knew he had several hundreds of servants who acted as soldiers, and knew first-hand of what God could do. They also knew that God favoured Abraham as his prophet. Therefore, they thought it prudent to be on his side.

The king urged Abraham not to deal falsely with him (probably with reference to his earlier

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claim, that Sarah was his sister), or with his future generations of family. He reminded Abraham that he had shown him kindness, though he had been deceived, so he wanted Abraham to promise to show kindness in return, to himself and his land, in which Abraham lived.

In the text, we can read between the lines... we see that Abraham was considered to be a considerable force in the land, both spiritually and politically. He obviously had battle-prowess. The last thing this Philistine king wanted was for a warrior backed by a divine, powerful, God to overrun his kingdom! Abraham listened, and he agreed, swearing an oath in God's name.

Genuine Christians must always be aware that they are in a position of immense strength. They have the power of God within them and in everything they do in God's name (if what they do is from God and in His will, that is). This is why, no matter what the circumstances, we can rejoice and stand firm against the enemies of God. Most times in our lives we tend not to notice this power, because we rarely think about it or practice it. Yet, simply stating God's word alone is often an invigorating sign of this power. Ours is a divine, dynamic relationship with the Lord – use it!

### Verses 25-34

1.

“And Abraham reprov'd Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away.

2.

And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day.

3.

And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant.

4.

And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

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5.

And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves?

6.

And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well.

7.

Wherefore he called that place Beer-sheba; because there they sware both of them.

8.

Thus they made a covenant at Beer-sheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines.

9.

And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.

10.

And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days."

We cannot be sure if the rest of the narrative in this text was uttered at the same time as the above agreement, but it seems most likely that it followed on from Abraham's agreement not to attack or harm anyone connected with this king.

Abraham then chided Abimelech, because some of his men had taken a vital water-well from Abraham's men by force. The king expressed surprise and denied knowledge of what his men had done. No doubt his surprise was genuine, for no king can know what every one of his men

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is doing at any one time. He replied, 'This is the first I have heard of it – neither my men or you told me about it until now.'

In recognition of this admission, Abraham gave Abimelech sheep and oxen as a gift and as a sign of their promise together. Then, Abraham put seven male lambs in a group on their own. Curious, Abimelech asked Abraham why he had done this.

Abraham told him that the male lambs represented the truth of the fact that he and his men had personally dug out the well at the centre of the dispute. He then called it Beersheba ('well of the sevenfold oath') because it was where he and the king had sworn an oath of friendship. After this, the king and his general left Abraham and returned to their city.

Following this, Abraham planted a grove on the site, calling on the name of the Lord (Jehovah), Who is the 'everlasting God', *owlam*, 'for ever', 'perpetual', 'continuous existence'; and *el*, the one true God. Often, mention of groves in scripture refers to groups of trees marking a pagan worship site, but in this text 'grove' is another name for a single tamarisk tree. It was, then, a simple sign to mark the place where a promise had been made. Because of this promise, Abraham was able to live at peace in the land of the Philistines for a very long time.

There is nothing wrong with living at peace with our neighbours, even when such people are pagan. We may call this a social peace. We would be unable to live by their ways if they were pagan, but we can still live in harmony with all races and creeds. At the same time we should courteously proclaim the Gospel, whilst maintaining social peace. After all, the unbelievers we live amongst are the same as ourselves, for we, too, were unbelievers, until God made our spirits alive! And some who are now Believers were once Muslims, and Romanists, and other kinds of cultists. Thus, we must hate their beliefs but not their persons.

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