***The Age of the Jews, No. 2

DS3B***

The second dispensation that we are studying is the dispensation of the Jews. As we have indicated, this is divided into three phases. Phase one we call promise. This was the period of the patriarchs, and it goes from Abraham to Moses. Phase two we call law, and it is the period of the Mosaic Law. It extends from Moses to Christ. Phase 3 we call the tribulation, and it's the period of divine judgment upon the antichrist's world. It extends from the rapture to the Second Coming of Christ. The church age, of course, is interspersed between phases 2 and 3.

We found that there was a man named Abram (Abraham) who lived here in the land of the Chaldeans on the south side of the Tigris River in a town called Ur. This is referred to in Scripture as Ur of the Chaldees. This man was confronted, providentially and supernaturally by God with the gospel, and Abram the unbeliever, the idol worshiper, believed God and became a born again person. The family that he came from, of course, were all idolaters. In Joshua 24:2, Joshua refers to the family background of the Jewish people from their father Abraham. He says, "Thus said the Lord God of Israel, 'Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the river of old (that is, the Euphrates River), even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.'" They were idolaters.

So this man Abram, by the simple act of believing the gospel, became the gentile who became a Jew. Up to this point, Abram was a gentile. By believing in the Lord Jesus Christ; the gospel which was presented to him; and, the sacrifice which was to be made for sins, he changed his status from gentile and became the first Jew. He is the father of this special nation which is in charge of the second dispensation that we are studying. He is called a Hebrew because he is the one who crossed over. That's what Hebrew meant. It meant that he crossed over the Euphrates River and followed what was called the Fertile Crescent route. The area to the south is all desert, but you can follow the bed of the river which created a fertile valley.

Abram followed this Fertile Crescent right up to Heron. The first stage of his journey was a distance of six hundred miles. He went up to Heron. He stayed there for about five years because he did not do entirely what God said. God said, "Get out of Ur--you and Sarai, and that's it. Be on your way." He was 70. She was 60. He did leave, but he took his father Terah and his nephew Lot with him. They came as far as Heron. They were still not in the place a blessing which was down in Canaan, and they stayed there for five years. When Terah died, they covered the last 400 miles of this 1,000-thousand mile journey along the Fertile Crescent route into the land of Canaan.

**The Abrahamic Covenant**

Now all of this was made on the basis of what we call the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant gave certain specific detailed promises, and that's why we call phase one of the dispensation of the Jews the phase (or the stage) of promise. This promise had three factors to it. One was land; the second was seed; and, the third was blessing. We won't go over this again, but just to point out to you, the promise of the land was amplified in Deuteronomy 30:1-10 in the Palestinian covenant. What God meant in promising seed (descendants) was amplified in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 in the Davidic covenant. The blessing that was to come to Abram, and through Abram, was amplified in the New Covenant Jeremiah 31:31-34. All the rest of Scripture is the unfolding of these covenants, all of which are based upon that Abrahamic Covenant.

Remember that we must stress once more certain factors concerning this covenant. It has certain qualities. The first of these factors is that this covenant and all the covenants are to be interpreted literally. That is very important. The amillennialist goes astray because he is forever taking promises which were made to the earthly people of Israel (the Jewish people), and he is applying these promises to the church today. The person who is an amillennialist believes that all these promises that were made to Abram are being fulfilled in the church. When he comes up against something like land, he's got a real problem. How is he going to have fulfillment to the Church of the land called Palestine today? These is no way because God is literally talking about a piece of earth (a piece of real estate) called Palestine. That's what he has promised to the Jews forever. This in no way applies to the church.

It is also eternal in its extent. In other words, God spoke to Abram and said, "Abram, I am going to give you this land which the Canaanites possess. This will be to such a degree that you will find that it will extend from the Euphrates River all the way down to the Nile River. This vast fantastic area of land will one day belong to you, and it will belong to you forever." You and I know that the Jew does not own anything but a little scattered small piece of real estate on the west side of the Jordan River. However, he certainly has, at best, nothing compared to the vast area that God has promised. What we're up against is that God either is telling the truth, or he was kidding Abram. This is because the Jew has never possessed this land to this extent.

So the amillennialist, because he is rejecting and resisting the idea that the Jew is yet going to possess this land, has to come up with a solution. He says, "We'll spiritualize it. When God says that He's going to give us that land forever, He's talking about heaven. He's talking about something else. He's talking about the nation that you live in."

So all four of these covenants are literal, and they are eternal. Furthermore, they are unconditional as to their fulfillment. In other words, they do not depend upon whether the Jew behaves himself or not. There is a difference between ownership of the land and possession of the land. God says, "If you will obey me, you will not only own the land, but you will possess it. You will be in it, and you will be blessed." This is because the Jew can only be blessed when he is within the confines of the land of Palestine. His promises all depend on that. However, God says, "If you disobey me, I will remove you from possession of your land, though you still own it." That's what God has done to the Jewish people today. They are scattered all over the earth. They are not in possession of the land that God promised Abram. Yet, they do own it. Other peoples in the form of the Arabs have moved into that territory, but they're only there by squatter's rights. However, the Jew is the rightful owner of that land. As long as he is in the land, he is in the place of blessing.

Somebody as illustrated it this way. Suppose that there was a beautiful piece of property with a very lovely house in some section of the city. You know the man who owns it. The man who owns it says, "I'm going to give you this house. I'm going to let you own this house. I'm going to let you enjoy it. You have ownership of it forever. I'm going to sign a legal contract with you that you have this property forever--with no ands, ifs, or buts. I don't care how you act, how you behave, or anything else. It's your property. You own it. However, I'm going to put a small stipulation here in fine print at the bottom of the contract that you will only be able to possess this house providing you always own a Chevrolet Impala. If you own a Chevrolet Impala, and that's all you drive, you may have this land. You say, "Beautiful. I drive a Chevrolet Impala. I'm in."

So you move into this beautiful mansion-like house, and you enjoy it. Of course, the taxes are high because you moved into such a fancy dude house. Pretty soon the car runs down and you have to get a new car. So you shop around, and you discover that the Ford dealer has a pretty good sale on, and he makes you a better deal than the Chevrolet dealer. So you buy a Ford; you drive it home and park it in your driveway; and, it really looks good up against this beautiful house that you live in.

Now your friend drives down the street and he notices that your Chevrolet Impala is gone, and you have put a Ford Maverick in there. He screeches to a halt, and he runs up the driveway. He says, "What's this Ford Maverick doing here? Is this yours?" You say, "Yes." He says, "You broke your contract, didn't you?" You say, "Well, it's a better buy. The Chevrolet dealer didn't come through." He says, "That's all. Start moving out." He walks in the house and he starts throwing out your furniture. He's throwing the clothes out. Stuff is flying out the window. He's piling it up. And you can't do a thing about it because he's legally right. He's got the contract. If you don't drive a Chevrolet Impala, you don't possess that house. So out you go. So what do you do? You hop into that Ford Maverick and you go screeching down the street. You make a trade with the Chevrolet dealer, and you come driving back in your Chevrolet Impala. You pull it into the driveway. Your friend looks at it and he says, "Okay, that's better. I'll help you move the stuff back in."

You still owned the house all along. However, as long as you did not meet the stipulation of the contract, and as long as you were disobedient to the clause, you could not possess it. That was the Jew. No matter how many centuries he's out of it, it is always his title. He's got the title deed. Possession depends upon obedience, but these covenants do not depend upon the Jews' obedience for fulfillment. Only his blessing depends upon obedience, and nothing else. The time is going to come when the Lord is going to put some screws upon the Jews, and that obedience will come. They will return to the land, and they will also come into their place of blessing.

So this is the picture that we have. We have covenants which must be interpreted literally. They are eternal in their extent. They're unconditional in their fulfillment. There is one thing more. Please remember they were only made to the Jewish people. They were never made to gentiles, and they were never made to Christians. You and I are blessed, incidentally, from what God promised Abram, but we do not enter into the promises that have been made to Abram and to his descendants.

Well, Abram believed God. He moved out. He made the 1,000-mile journey in two stages, and he finally arrived in the land of Canaan. The system of government that Abram set up, and which evolved over a period of years, was called a patriarchy. A patriarchy simply means a system of government where the father rules. In this case, the first patriarch was Abram. He was the final authority. Then he passed his authority on to the male heir that he selected. Usually this was the oldest son. That son then became the patriarch. He became ruler of the family, or of the extended tribe. For the period of promise (the first stage of the dispensation of the Jews), the governmental system was a patriarchy. It was a series of patriarchs. First there was Abram. Then there was Isaac. Then there was Jacob. Then there were the twelve sons of Jacob, all of which are declared to have been patriarchs or family heads--heads of the tribes. They operated under this system of government until they came back out of slavery. Then they were 1.5 to 2 million in population. They were a nation, and they entered a different system of government.

**Abram**

The first patriarch, Abram, is the man we want to look at now. Abram's spiritual progress is something very fascinating to note in the Word of God. He is the background of this whole dispensation. He left Ur when he was 70 years of age on the basis of this Abrahamic Covenant. His wife Sarai was 65 after they left Heron and came into the land of Canaan. She was a woman of such attraction and beauty, even at that age, that the Egyptian Pharaoh took her into his household. He prepared to make her one of his wives, and to incorporate her into his harem (Genesis 12:14-15). She was obviously something very spectacular as a woman, even at that age. However, the one thing that grieved her heart, as well as Abram's, was that she had no children. Terah, the father that they buried at Heron, meant "delay," and they delayed perhaps on his account. Heron means "a dried up place." However, finally Abram moves out of Heron and he comes to the place of blessing in Canaan.

Abram was obviously building spiritual maturity within his soul. That spiritual maturity gradually deepened his trust and his confidence in the Lord. When he got to Canaan, he was confronted very quickly with a test of his spiritual maturity to show him how far he had to go, and how little progress he had made spiritually. Those were sort of spiritually unprofitable desert years that he spent up in Heron, and now he had to recoup some ground.

This came in the form of a crisis in the land of Canaan. The crisis was a famine. Abram was faced with two alternatives: one, I stay in the land and I trust God to; and, two, I go to someplace where there is food, which happened to be Egypt. Genesis 12:10 tells us that he deserted the place of blessing in Canaan, and he went to Egypt. Now he was out of fellowship, so he was functioning on human viewpoint. He had a fear for his life, which is one of the first signs that you're functioning on human viewpoint. He had a fear for his life because he was out of the plan of God.

Since Sarai was such a very beautiful attractive woman, Abram said, "When we get down there, I'm going to say that you're my sister. This is because I know how these Egyptian pharaohs like to play around with their harems, and I'm afraid they may kill me in order to take you if I tell them you're my wife" (Genesis 12:11-13. Now this was a half-truth because she was his half-sister, as we find from Genesis 20:12. However, his point was deception. Sure enough, when he got to Egypt, Pharaoh's attention was called to Sarai, the 65 year-old woman. Pharaoh sent and had her brought into his household as his newest concubine (Genesis 12:15). Pharaoh heaped gifts upon Abram whom he thought was Sarai's brother. But you may be sure that Abram was anything but happy with all the things that he was receiving on his birthday and on the anniversaries and other things that the Pharaoh was sending him.

Finally, Pharaoh was informed by God of the device and of the trickery that Abram exercised over him. He sent Sarai away, and he severely rebuked Abram (Genesis 12:18-20). In other words, he really humiliated Abram for what he had done, and for the hazard into which he had placed Pharaoh in his household. This was because it brought several plagues upon them.

Well, Abram confessed and he went back to Canaan (Genesis 13"1). He started developing his spiritual maturity again. His development was revealed by the resolving of a conflict that he had with his nephew Lot. You may read about this in Genesis 13:8-9 and 12ff. His herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen were in conflict. So Abram revealed that he had developed a certain grace orientation and a mastery of the details of life. He told Lot, "You just take whatever area of the land you want for yourself; for your family; and, for your herds. What you don't take, I will take." Now this was quite a step forward for a man who was willing to run off to Egypt because of a famine, and to carry on deception concerning his wife Sarai.

So Lot moved, and finally Abram was left in the position that God originally told him to place himself: "You, Sarai, and I. Just the three of us--God, Sarai, and Abram. We are moving out together." Finally, with Lot gone, he's in that position, and the road to blessing has now been opened. He pitched his tent on a plain called Mamre which means "prosperity." This was near a city a place called Hebron which means "fellowship" (Genesis 13:18). During this time, he now prospered considerably--materially and spiritually. He had great wealth, cattle, gold, and silver.

Furthermore, he bore a good witness among three friends that we have mentioned in Scripture: Mamre; Eschol; and, Aner. They apparently became converts, and they certainly were his allies (Genesis 14:13). With them, he rescued his nephew Lot when he had been captured by some invading kings. At that time, again, Abram revealed his dependence now upon God in that he refused any of the plunder (Genesis 14:22-24). However he was grace-oriented enough that he did not restrain his young men and his three friends from helping themselves to the plunder of warfare, though he himself refused to accept any.

**A Son**

However, there was one thing that was a great distress to Abram, and that was still the question of a son. He understood the promise of God. He understood the covenant. However, he also understood that this had to come through a child. You can't be a great nation unless you have a son. He was now well over 75 years old, and still he had no son (Genesis 16:3). He was worried as to what he was going to do about this now. This in itself was a sin. So we come to Genesis 15 in which we have some instruction to Abram which is very fruitful to you and me relative to the business of handling worry, concern, and the things that disturb us. Here he was--85 years old, and still with no son. He had experienced great victories with God such as the rescue of Lot. Yet, even in spite of that victory and in spite of how God had blessed and cared for him, there was a certain disturbing quality that kept nagging at him. You don't have a son.

So the problem, as we begin here in Genesis 15, is that Abram is in a blue mood. Consequently, he is bringing up this subject once more of his son to the Lord. Genesis 15:1: "After these things, the Word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision saying, 'Fear not, Abram. I am your shield and your exceedingly great reward.' And Abram said, 'Lord God, what will you give me, seeing that I go childless, and the heir of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?'" The steward of his household was a man named Eliezer. He had apparently been made the heir of Abram. God commanded Abram upon this occasion not to worry and not to fear. "I am your shield," meaning "I will protect." "There is no need to fear anything, even the reaction of these kings that you have just defeated." And he said, "I am your exceedingly great reward. There is no need for you to worry about material things. I am going to provide and care for you." But the question is: what about this son?

*You cannot worry and believe the Word of God at the same time.* Abram was still complaining about the son. Verse 3: "And Abram said, 'Behold, to me you have given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is my heir.'" This Eliezer was going to be the one who was to be the heir. So the question was for Abram to either believe what God had promised or to worry about what God had promised relative to seed. He continued to worry about it and bring it up. He wanted a son to fulfill the promise. So God renewed the promise to him in verse 4: "Behold, the Word of the Lord came unto him saying, 'This shall not be your heir (this Eliezer), but he that shall come forth out of thine own loins shall be your heir." God says, "No. Relax. Don't worry. You still are going to have your own son."

The situation seemed hopeless. It's been ten years. He's 85. Furthermore, even if at this point, he says, "Yes Lord, I really should trust you. OK," it's going to be another 15 years before this child begins to appear on the scene. Now, Abram finally did believe, we are told in Romans 4:20-21. He did believe the Word of the Lord, and he did accept the promise that God had given him.

**Worry**

So this gives us our first clue as to how to handle worry. A Christian who worries is a Christian who is sinning. The way to solve that sin, after you confess it, is, first of all, to alert yourself to the promises of the Word of God. This is because behind every promise is a person who makes the promise. The promise, of course, is of no greater value than the one who makes it. If there's anything a pastor in a local church soon finds out, it's that the promises among his members vary. Some people will promise to do something, and it's as good as gold. Others will promise, and he has to keep egging them on, and he has to keep pushing, checking, and hoping that it will get resolved.

Now, God does not need our pushing; our encouragement; or, for us to be checking on Him. When He promises something, you may depend upon it. Once you understand this principle, that God's promises are as good as His Word because of His essence, then you have many things in the Word of God--literally thousands of promises in the Word of God--that you may read and that you may now accept. Not one of these promises--some 7,000 of them--will be good to you in heaven. They are only good on this earth. Every one of them are for you to use now.

So this is what God gave to Abram. In verse 5, it says, "And He brought him forth abroad and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to number them.' And He said unto him, 'And so shall your seed be.' And he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness. And He said unto him, 'I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to inherit it.'" God took him out and said, "Abram, I am going to make a nation of you. There will come a time when there'll be as many descendants from you as there are the stars in the sky. Look up there." Now God is able to do the magnificent thing of putting all those stars up there.

Once in a while, it depends on where you are, you can enter into what Abram saw. Abram, no doubt, was probably in some place that was really dark. This summer, one night when I was in the Northwest, we stopped the car by the side of the road. I stepped out to check something, and I happened to look up. We were in Crater National Park, and I looked up and it was the most magnificent sight of the heavens that I have seen in a long time. Once in a while before I've seen this. But it was one of those places where it was really dark, and the sky was absolutely ablaze. You thought somebody had put up a bunch of neon signs up there. You could see the Milky Way, and you could just see everything. You didn't even have to squint or strain. Now that's the kind of a picture that Abram saw. As I looked at it, I thought about Abram here. God says, "Okay, look up there." That's a breathtaking sight because you could just see the splash of the stars. It was staggering to Abram to think that my descendants are going to be like that sky someday.

Well, if God can keep these stars on course, which He does, He can also fulfill this kind of a promise to Abram. We're told that Abram had believed God back in Ur of the Chaldees. Abram had been saved when he was just an enemy of God and when he was spiritually dead. If God could provide that, He can provide the son that He had promised him. We have no problems over which God does not control and over which God does not have a solution. Verse 7 points out that God said, "I'm going to bring you from here. I'm going to make you a nation, and I intend to do it." Now if God promised something, that precludes any ground for worry. So point number one is that if you have a worry about something, first of all, check out and see whether God has promised you something about that matter. If He has made a promise, then claim it, and start acting upon it.

**The Blood Covenant**

Secondly, in verses 8-11, we're told that Abram again said, "Lord, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" So God now proceeds to teach him in another way; that is, with doctrine. Doctrine is a second way to handle your worries. In this case, He does it in the form of a blood covenant. In ancient days, a person could make an agreement between two people, and he could seal that agreement by exchanging a bag of salt, or by swapping sandals so that they walked in each other's shoes, and you did this before witnesses. Now that was like a signature on the dotted line. Another way was a blood covenant, and that is the one which God now proceeds to make with Abram. God said, "Alright Abram, I'm going to exercise patience with you. I'm going to now make a sealing of this covenant that I've made with you, and I'm going to do it in the way of a blood covenant. The covenant itself will tell you something about the promises that I've made to you."

Here's the way a blood covenant was made. You took an animal, and in this case, Abram, first of all, was told to take a heifer. He was told to cut this heifer in half. He separated the two halves. He just laid out the parts one against another, and he left a pathway between them. Now the heifer in Scripture stands for confession of sin to restore temporal fellowship. You find this in Numbers 19. Abram had worried about this son. He had questioned whether God would fulfill His promise. The act of worry was a sin that Abram needed to confess. He says, "Whereby shall I know?" The answer should have been to Abram, "The way I know is because God promised it." He's saying, "How am I going to know it?" Because God promised it--that's how you'll know it. But that wasn't enough. So God now tells him in symbolic form, "I'm going to handle your worry, first of all, with some doctoral information.

Point number one is the heifer, and you are to thereby confess sin--the sin of doubting and questioning God. So you and I have all these expressions of worry: our tantrums; our anxieties; our nervous breakdowns; our neuroses; our psychoses; our instability; our unforgiving spirit of vindictiveness; our temper; and, our screaming. All of these are evidences of worry. That's why you do those things. Those are sin. We are to confess those in order to restore our place of fellowship with the Lord.

Then Abram was directed to bring a she-goat. Again, he cut it in half and separated the two halves. In Scripture, the she-goat represents reconciliation. The Lord Jesus Christ has provided reconciliation eternally. He has reconciled us to God. Therefore, there's no problem between us and God, so quit worrying. The next thing he was told was to bring a ram. Again this was to be cut in half with the halves separated. The ram in Scripture, in the Levitical system, stood for propitiation. On the cross, Jesus Christ satisfied the justice of God. God is satisfied relative to His righteousness and justice. Therefore He can handle all of our problems. There is no difficulty between us and God.

Then he was told also to bring a turtle dove and a young pigeon. The turtle dove represented the deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is always true to His character. He is God. The essence of God will not permit Him to forsake His promises. He is truth. He is veracity. So one bird was put on one side and the other bird was put on the other side. The birds were not cut in half. The young pigeon stood for the resurrected humanity of Jesus Christ. Therefore, this represented the Lord interceding for us before the Father in heaven. You cannot put to death the deity of Christ on the one hand. That's why the bird wasn't cut in half. Nor can you put to death the resurrected humanity of Christ on the other hand. That's why that bird wasn't cut in half. But they replaced one on each side.

Now, on ordinary terms, the two parties to an agreement would now join arm in arm and they will proceed to walk down between these parts of the sacrifices (some of which had been cut in half and) laid out on the ground. By that act, they were making a vow that they would keep the agreement between them. This was a blood covenant and a blood agreement. All of these things were symbolizing some doctrinal point. Confess your sin, Abram. God has reconciled you. God's justice is satisfied. You are dealing with the God man Jesus Christ. On that basis of doctrine of what He is in His essence, I am going to speak to you.

At this point, we read that Abram is now in a deep sleep while all of this vision is taking place. He sees some birds of the air coming along seeking to attack the carcasses that are laid out on the ground. These represent agents of Satan. We find this in Matthew 13:4, 19, and 32. What he does is that he chases them away which is in keeping with how we handle the character of Satan. 1 Peter 5:7-11 tells us that he is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. However, James 4:7 tells us that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us. So these agents, these birds representing demonic agents, seeking to attack this offering in what is about to be sealed here, are chased away by Abram. In other words, he's standing on God's promises, and he is now applying doctrine.

Abram falls into a deep sleep, and in the process he sees a very fantastic thing taking place. He discovers that instead of him and God coming arm-in-arm and walking through this, God, in the form of a flaming torch, walks alone. Abram is out. It is only the Triune God Himself who passes through between the parts. Why? In order to demonstrate to Abram that this promise to him is unconditional. It's only dependent upon God. It is not dependent on what Abram does or what he doesn't do, or what he is.

Verse 12 tells us that Abram is in a deep sleep, and he has a nightmare. God comes now to give a third way for Abram to handle his worry. He's worried that the promise is not going to be fulfilled. God says, "First of all, I have made you a promise. Because I am God, you know that I am truthful. Believe it. Secondly, doctrine demonstrates that I have covered your sin and everything that separates us. Therefore, you can approach me. I can make promises to you, and I can fulfill them to you because I have taken care of your sin that once hindered me from fulfilling blessing to you." The third thing is prophecy, and God is going to remove Abram's worry by giving him some insights concerning the future of the Jewish people.

**Prophecy**

During this nightmare, it is revealed to him that the Jewish people will in the future enter slavery in Egypt. This is in verses 13 and 14. He is to know of a surety (which means with a certainty), and so with freedom from all worry in this matter, that they are going to be there for 400 years. Then he says that after the 400 years, they will be released. Verse 14 says they will come out with great substance after God has judged the nation which held them in slavery, namely Egypt. They would come out as a great nation with great wealth which, as you know, was exactly what happened. The plagues came upon Egypt in fulfillment of verse 14. These ten plagues are described in Exodus 8:12-30. Then the great substance we find fulfilled in Exodus 12:35-36 where they asked the Egyptians to grant them gold, silver, and gems the night before they were to leave after all of the plagues that had come upon them. The Egyptians were glad to fork over 400 years of wages to them in order to get rid of them.

Then he tells them one more thing. Incidentally, you see all the while that the Jewish people were in captivity in Egypt, they kept going back to this Scripture. They kept going back to this record of what God had promised Abram--that they would indeed be in slavery 400 years, but they were going to come out. Joseph believed that. That's why before Joseph died, he had stipulated that when the time came that their 400 years were up and they were to leave the land, they were to take his bones with them. This is what stood the Egyptian slaves in strength and what encouraged them in the years that they were slaves. This was prophecy because they knew where they were going.

In verse 15, God gave Abram a prophecy concerning himself. He was told that he was going to live to good old age, and that God would give him dying grace for the moment when he was to die. God had predicted for him a long life, and told him, "Don't worry." In verse 16, He told him of the future return of his people to the land of Canaan--a land which the Amorites were in complete control of at that time. It didn't seem like they could ever be removed. Yet, the Abrahamic covenant was again re-established on this basis (verse 17 and 18), on the part of God himself going between the parts of these animals. God does not solve our problems by removing the pressures from life. However, He makes us promises; He explains doctrine; and, He gives us prophecy. The prophecy can be a blessing, or you can ignore it and it can be a great source of fear and concern.

So Abram had a very wonderful experience. What he has learned here is what God is teaching us. Do you have problems? Do you have fears? Do you have concern? Here's the answer for it: promises; doctrine; and, prophecy. You would think that this was great. However, after a while, again, Abram is worried about this son. So, in order to move the story of the dispensations along because we're not going to go in detail, finally his wife Sarai proposed a human viewpoint solution. That was for Abram to have another wife, namely the Egyptian servant Hagar. This argument was presented to Abram by Sarai with the idea, "God helps those who help themselves." Abram fell for that human viewpoint solution. So he married Hagar. However, these solutions never pay off. Yet, you and I are full of them. In spite of what God had shown this man, that His promise would be fulfilled, Abram was still not satisfied. God had given him promises, doctrines, and prophecy. Yet, he was still trying to solve the situation.

So he finally went along, and Ishmael was born. Abram is now 85 years old, and this brought more tragedy into the lives of everybody involved (Genesis 21:9-21). As you know to this day, the problem that Sarai created exists with us, for the descendants of Ishmael are the Arab people. The Jews came from Isaac. The friction and the problem are existing to this day.

Now why did Abram do this? He had this wonderful fantastic vision with God showing him that He's going to keep all these promises on His own--a blood covenant with God as the only signer. Why did he do this? Well, I expect that when you get to be 85 years old, a nagging wife becomes a real problem. In fact, it isn't much of a picnic even when you aren't 85 years old. I imagine that this is what poor poor Abram was hearing all the time. "When are we going to have the son? How are we going to have the promises?" You know what Sarai means. Sarai means "contentious" or "nagger." Abram means "father of winds" or "nothingness." So here she is nagging nagging nagging all the time. Finally she comes up with this human viewpoint solution, and he gives into it.

The right solution should have been the same as when he found famine in the land: "I trust God to come up with the needs that I have because He told me to come here. And on the basis of promises, doctrine, and prophecy, Sarai, I'm not going to marry your Egyptian servant girl." Yet, God took Abram's failure, and he rewove the pattern of his life into blessing. God's perfect solution was for an heir to come in time--not for 15 more years from this point of time, however. Abram matured spiritually as the result of this move. He actually entered into a faith rest spiritual condition that perhaps he had not had before (Romans 4:21). At this time, his name then was changed from Abram to Abraham which means "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5). Sarai's name was changed from "contentious" to Sarah, which means "princess." And the child of promise who was born, Isaac, in time was called "laughter."

Well finally indeed, the child of the promise was born. However, the parents, between them, were 190 years old. Remember that in the meantime, Ishmael has been around. He is now 13 years old, and still there is no heir through Sarah. Abraham has become very fond of Ishmael (Genesis 17:18, 21:11). Yet, when Abraham is 99 years old and his wife is 89 years old, and therefore dead as can be when it comes to child bearing, God repeats the promise of an heir. He says, "The time has come." In the process of the normal months which will pass, a period of nine months hence, your wife will bear you a son.

**Isaac**

Sarah was standing at the tent door, and she laughed. Abraham laughed. They laughed because of how old he was and how sad it was. It just struck him as very funny to see his doddering 90-year-old wife caring for a baby. Well, she probably wasn't doddering, but in any case, she probably wasn't as handsome as when the Egyptian Pharaoh was chasing her. But she laughed, and for this reason, God said, "Go ahead. You laugh, and I tell you what I'm going to name your boy. I'm going to name him Isaac--"laughter" (Genesis 17:19a). Sure enough, nine months later Isaac was born. He was a great joy to Sarah and Abraham, but highly resented by Hagar and Ishmael. Two years later, when Isaac is weaned, the hatred breaks out into the open. Hagar and Ishmael are sent away. However, God makes a divine pronouncement over them that they too would become a great nation, and the Arabs have descended from Ishmael.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971

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