

## Chapter V

### LESSONS FROM THE TWO SONS OF ABRAHAM

We have observed that the order of the births of certain sons in the Bible, like Cain and Abel and Ishmael and Isaac, has set forth in allegorical terms that which is natural and that which is spiritual. According to this premise Cain and Ishmael represent the flesh, with its view to thinking according to *a way which seemeth right unto a man*; while Abel and Isaac represent the spiritual man, who is deemed such through the judicial reckoning of God because of his faith in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As the lives of these sons unfolded there came to be a natural enmity in the firstborn towards the second-born. This enmity arose between Cain and Abel because God accepted the offering of Abel and rejected Cain's offering. Abel's offering reflected his faith in God's promise of salvation through the seed of the woman but Cain's offering did not. Cain's offering was bloodless. Thus it denied the promise of the seed of the woman and revealed his trust in the lie of the devil. Nevertheless God extended His grace to Cain (Genesis 4:7), but he refused it. He

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then showed his disdain for God's grace by slaying his brother (Genesis 4:8).

With Ishmael and Isaac, Ishmael did not receive the inheritance according to the natural scheme of things. Rather God promised it to Isaac. This is another expression of the typology that second-born sons in Scripture often represent those who are born again. The enmity expressed by Cain and Ishmael towards Abel and Isaac, respectively, reflects the enmity the world has towards the redeemed. This enmity is almost always exhibited when the redeemed express the truth of the gospel: that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from human effort. Thus our Lord said:

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. (John 15:18-19)

We have also observed that the birth of Ishmael was the result of Sarah's scheme, using Abraham and Hagar in a natural liaison, to try to produce the son of God's promise by fleshly efforts. We then observed the birth of Isaac by the power of God. This was an initial step in the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham: that of his Seed all of the families of the earth would be blessed. The birth of Isaac was accomplished when Abraham was impotent because of his age, and Sarah, after being barren all of her normal child-bearing years, had passed through menopause.

These events and circumstances provide us with a Scriptural principle: God uses men to proclaim the message of salvation, but those who give forth this message are powerless to produce a single birth into the family of God except as God gives the increase. He does this by the Spirit of God quickening the Word of God to the hearts of those whom He has chosen in Christ before

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the foundation of the world. In this regard, our Lord said, *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* This principle is inexorable and was reinforced by our Lord when He said to His disciples, *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing* (John 15:5). The Lord also said, *It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life* (John 6:63).

In keeping with this principle, the church of Jesus Christ is not idle, but has been given certain works to perform. We are to be obedient to the command of our Lord to see that the gospel is preached in all of the world (because God has chosen to save the lost by the foolishness of preaching). We are to baptize in water those who were baptized by the Spirit at the moment of their salvation, and we are to teach them the Word of God. We are, by the enabling power of the Spirit of God, to function within the church, the body of Christ, in the spiritual gifts which God has given us. In this capacity we are to *Trust in the Lord with all of [our] hearts and lean not unto [our] own understanding*, knowing that the Lord will keep His Word, in His time and by His methods. Thus our lives are lived in expectancy and thanksgiving.

Under no circumstances are we to become impatient with God's increase and resort to fleshly means, like Abraham and Hagar, to try to produce what only God can produce. All that can be produced by the flesh is the flesh: and the flesh is at war with the Spirit, so that *we cannot do the things that we would*. This lesson must be learned from the relationships which we have been considering in the lives of the patriarchs we have viewed thus far. Through these, as well as our own personal relationships, it is clear that God is faithful. He cannot lie. Let us then be

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faithful to what He has committed to our trust.

From the outset the patriarchs, Israel and the church, have been at war against *the world, the flesh and the devil*. Our Lord and the apostles warned of *grievous wolves* who would enter in, *not sparing the flock*. They also warned of perverse individuals who would arise and draw away disciples after themselves. It is incumbent, then, upon those of us who know and preach the truth, to fight against the errors that would subvert the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Paul did this in all of his epistles and specifically in the book of Galatians, where he wrote:

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Hagar. For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the Scripture? 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. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (Galatians 4:19-5:1)

Given the allegorical interpretation of the historical events in the life of Abraham, Abraham, like all of us at times, desired to exalt the flesh. He did this when God came to him to reconfirm His promise to him *that of his seed all of the families of the earth would be blessed*. This was to be through Isaac *at this set time in the next year*, but Abraham cried, *O that Ishmael might live before thee*. In other words, Abraham desired the works of his flesh to have precedent

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over the promise and power of God, but God said, *Behold, I have blessed [Ishmael], and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac*, which Sarah shalt bear unto thee at this set time in the next year (Genesis 17:20-21, emphasis mine).

God, indeed, blessed Ishmael simply because he was related to Abraham, but he was not the son of God's promise. He could not be. He had been produced by a fleshly scheme, a scheme that did not wait for God to give the increase. Consequently Ishmael and his posterity have been at war with the people of Isaac, through whom the Christ was to come, and have ever twisted and perverted the Word of God to give credence to Ishmael's claim.

In contrast, the birth of Isaac was a miraculous birth. Abraham and Sarah had come to a place in their lives where they were incapable of producing a child. They were simply too old. Even so God *called those things that are not as though they are* and Isaac was born. This compares to the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ that in *the fulness of the time*, He would become a man; and through His Person and work in our behalf would have the spiritual right to change us completely unto Himself as objects of His grace.

The birth of Isaac not only relates to the birth of Christ, but also to the new birth of believers. Paul quoted Isaiah, *Rejoice thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband*. This, too, relates to an increase. The flesh always produces more children (spiritual *bastards and not sons*) than the Spirit produces children of God. Consequently there are many more people who think they have an inheritance in the things of God than there are those who actually have an

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inheritance. This has been the result of those who were not content with faithfully preaching the Word and allowing the Spirit of God to do His work. Consequently they have devised fleshly methods to obtain *confessions* and have called it *revival*.

The spiritual lesson is constant: it is God who gives the increase of the salvation of souls and the spiritual growth of believers. Despite this, churches and pastors are always looking for some scheme whereby they may obtain an increase, not realizing or caring that the children of the bondwoman are greater in number than the children of promise. Thus we should recognize that just because a work is large and enjoys great wealth and prominence, this is not necessarily evidence that it is of God. Paul made this clear in his letter to Timothy. He warned him of those who claimed, *Gain is godliness*. This was an error in the thinking of the Jews, which did not take long to manifest itself in the church. Paul instructed Timothy to separate himself from those who made such claims, because in order to get the wealth they desired, they willingly corrupted the truth of the gospel and preached messages which appealed to the masses. Obviously anyone who could do this was merely giving lip service to the truth. Thus our Lord said:

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6:22-26, emphasis mine)

Given this information, whence cometh the persecution of believers? Most often it comes from those who are called *brothers*, just as the persecution of Isaac came from Ishmael. Persecution does not necessarily take the form of pogroms and inquisitions, though historically

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there was much of that throughout the church age (with *brother* persecuting *brother* and particularly during the middle ages). Even so it comes daily from those who call themselves *brothers*, who want to lay *the commandments and doctrines of men* upon believers and verbally abuse those who do not live up to their standards, as the Judaizers did with the Galatians.

The key is found in the meaning of Paul's statement to Timothy, *Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution* (II Timothy 3:12). Some perceive that *godliness* is a manner of life subject to *the commandments and doctrines of men*: a life of *touch not; taste not; handle not* regimens; a life that requires strict adherence to ritual and the law of Moses; but in his letter to the Galatians Paul called that *another gospel, which is not another* and those who preached such a message, *accursed*. These claim to be our brothers, but they are not. Thus the true brother knows that *Salvation is of the Lord* by God's grace through faith.

Grace deals with our sin nature and should beget a life of thanksgiving, because *what God has promised, He is able also to perform*. This faith, which is *the faith* (the body of revealed truth), has enabled God to change us completely unto Himself. It is not something we have done for God, but what God has done for us. Thus the believer should live his life in the full realization that his life is *hid with Christ in God*. *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory* (Colossians 3:3-4).

Paul taught the Corinthians that *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned* (I Corinthians 2:14). Thus we preach a message that the world cannot understand. It is the Spirit of God, then, Who enables those whom He has elected to salvation to understand what

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we have preached. Therefore we know that we cannot argue anyone into the Kingdom of God. We can merely give forth the truth of the gospel and allow the Spirit of God to do His work.

When Ishmael mocked Isaac, Sarah said, *Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac* (Genesis 21:9). Abraham was grieved at the saying of Sarah. Nevertheless God said, ... *in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called*. Paul clarified the significance of those events in his allegory. He showed that all of the fleshly responsibilities the Judaizers were laying on the believers of Galatia were of the flesh and have no place in the life of one who has been saved by grace. However when the one who has been saved by grace refuses to submit to the regimen of the flesh, those of the flesh respond by persecuting him: not knowing that they are of the flesh and flesh has no inheritance in the things of God. Even so for those who are born of the promise of God, the reception of a spiritual inheritance is sure:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten [regenerated] us again unto a lively [living] hope by the resurrection from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (I Peter 1:3-5)

There is, then, a spiritual inheritance for those who have been born from above by faith in the promise of God. The believer's inheritance is held secure by the promise and power of God. However for those who are steeped in human effort and legalism there is no inheritance. They are the product of the flesh and the only *blessings* which they have are those pleasures which are their's during their lives on this earth.

Those who are steeped in law works could have a spiritual inheritance. Saul of Tarsus

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certainly changed from being a self-righteous Pharisee to a believer in the grace of God. However they would have to have a dramatic change of mind towards God. That kind of a change of mind is called repentance. Repentance is effected by the preaching of the Word of God and the convicting power of the Spirit of God. It is not self-deprecation and a promise to do better. That is simply another expression of a legalistic approach to God. Those who are of such a legalistic disposition must see the error of a self-improvement approach to God. They must, by the quickening power of the Spirit of God, embrace, by grace, the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in their behalf. If they would embrace God's grace, they would become children of promise, but as long as they remain children of the bondwoman, they have no inheritance in the things of God.

Paul confirmed the position of the Galatians in their relationship before God by saying, *So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.* That is, they were not born into the family of God by circumcision and law keeping. Those who were born into the family of God were born by the power of the Word of God and the Spirit of God, by God's grace. Therefore Paul exhorted the Galatians, *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage* (Galatians 5:1).

The observance of legalistic codes to gain favor with and access to God is born in the natural mind. It is a product of man's self-determination of good and evil, *a way which seemeth right unto a man.* The self-determination of good and evil is of the flesh. Our Lord said, *That which is born of the flesh is flesh.* Sarah said, *Cast out the flesh,* for she said, *Cast out the bondwoman and her son.* The casting out of the bondwoman and her son represents the casting

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away of all human effort to gain an inheritance with God. It is standing on the promises of God, rather than leaning on the arm of the flesh. It is abiding unentangled in the yoke of the law. It is standing totally in and for the grace of God.

Ishmael and Hagar have served their purpose in helping us to understand the flesh and law works. Periodically, as we move in our chronological and progressive view of the Bible, we will see the posterity of Ishmael. When we meet Ishmael, or his posterity, we must be reminded that they always represent the flesh, wherever we find them in Scripture. We must be alert to recognize the great spiritual lessons, which God has portrayed in the firstborn and in the second-born, as we study the Scriptures.

Ishmael was cast out after the incident at the weaning feast. He went into Egypt to Paran, where ... *his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.* Abraham continued to live in the south country at Beersheba. The Scripture says of him, *And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.* The many days were in fact many years. Perhaps as many as twenty-five or thirty years; so that the next time we see Abraham and Isaac, Isaac was an adult of thirty or more years of age.