

OVERCOMING THE DYSFUNCTIONS OF ISRAEL'S PATRIARCHS

VI. Yielding To God's Will Regarding Our Children

(Genesis 17:15-22)

I. Introduction

- A. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Israel's patriarchs and their respective wives and families, though blessed of God, were imperfect people who at times made huge mistakes that led to serious marital and family dysfunction.
- B. Thankfully, Romans 15:4 states that we can learn from whatsoever things were written in the Old Testament for our edification, and that includes our learning how to overcome the dysfunctions of Israel's patriarchs.
- C. We view Genesis 17:15-22 on yielding to God's will regarding our children in handling family dysfunction:

II. Yielding To God's Will Regarding Our Children, Genesis 17:15-22.

- A. When the Lord instituted circumcision for Abram's descendants in Genesis 17:1-14, He changed Abram's name to Abraham – from a name meaning “exalted father” to a name meaning “father of a great number.” (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftns. to Gen. 17:5 and 11:27) The Apostle Paul's comment in Romans 4:17 reveals that this great number would involve people from all nations who would put their faith in Christ to be justified, being saved by faith as was Abraham in Genesis 15:6.
- B. In similar fashion, God changed Sarai's name to Sarah, from a name meaning “my princess” to a name meaning “princess,” showing that she would bear a son unto Abraham, that God would bless her, making her a mother of nations with kings of people coming from her, Genesis 17:15-16; *Ibid.*, ftn. to Gen. 17:15. Since only the nation Israel physically descended from Sarah, God's promise to make her a mother of nations meant that the children of Abraham would include all who like Abraham by faith become believers in Christ, making Abraham “heir of the world (Rom. 4:13),” H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, 1974, vol. I, p. 526-527.
- C. Abraham struggled with this divine announcement regarding Sarah, Genesis 17:17:
 - 1. In hearing that God predicted that Sarah who was barren would bear him a son when he was one hundred years old and she was ninety years of age (cf. Genesis 11:30), Abraham fell on his face and laughed in doubt “as he struggled to match his faith to his circumstances,” Ryrie, *op. cit.*, ftn. to Genesis 17:17.
 - 2. Abraham also noted that this promise completely bypassed any mention of Ishmael, Abraham's living and eldest son, so he sought a favor from God for Ishmael as well as for Sarah's son, that “he too might have God's good will directed toward him,” Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 527-528.
- D. God's attitude toward Ishmael as well as toward Sarah's son is very important for today's world: many Arab peoples today claim that they should be the heir of God's covenant to Abraham since Ishmael, their forefather, was Abraham's eldest son. Genesis 17:18-22 clearly presents God's view of this issue (as follows):
 - 1. Abraham asked God to bless his son Ishmael as well as the son promised to Sarah, Genesis 17:18.
 - 2. The Lord responded to Abraham's request, giving His sovereign edict on the matter, Genesis 17:19-22:
 - a. First, the Lord repeated His promise that Abraham's wife Sarah would bear Abraham a son, and that Abraham was to call him “Isaac,” meaning “he laughs” to be “a constant reminder that a word from God was laughed at” in doubt by Abraham! (Genesis 17:19a; Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 58)
 - b. Second, God asserted that He would establish His covenant as an everlasting covenant with Abraham through Isaac and with his seed after him, Genesis 17:19b.
 - c. Third, as for Ishmael, the Lord said that He had heard Abraham's request, so God would bless Ishmael and make him fruitful, multiplying him greatly to form a great nation with twelve princes, Genesis 17:20.
 - d. Fourth – and this fact is stated emphatically as the phrase “my covenant” (*we'et beriti*, Kittel, Biblia Hebraica, p. 22) starts the sentence in Genesis 17:21 in the emphatic position – God would establish His covenant with Isaac whom Sarah would bear unto Abraham a year later, Gen. 17:21. God's assertion of His elevating the younger Isaac over Ishmael was not unusual: legal codes of the era held that “the natural son became the heir, even though born after the son of a slave-wife,” *Ibid.*, Ryrie, ftn. to Gen. 17:21.
 - e. Fifth, and with great force, Genesis 17:22 states that God finished speaking with Abraham at that point and went up from him, indicating that God “definitely terminated” the interview without taking any more comments from Abraham. (Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 529-530) God would not accept any revision about the matter He had just stated: Abraham had to accept what God wanted both for Ishmael and for Isaac.

Lesson: *We parents need to yield to the will of God for our children, for they were created by Him and for Him.*

Application: *May we yield to God's will for our children, recalling that they really do not belong to us, but to Him.*