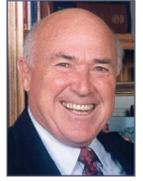


THE LOOK OF FAITH—PART 3

SIMPLY TEACHING THE WORD SIMPLY—PASTOR CHUCK SMITH

This article was edited by permission and taken from the book *Faith* by the late Pastor Chuck Smith of CC Costa Mesa, CA.



In the past two issues, we examined how Abram stepped out in faith to follow God and believed God's promise to bring the Messiah through his descendants. However, Genesis 16 tells the story of one of Abram's greatest missteps.

THIRTEEN YEARS OF SILENCE

Though Abram had God's promise that his wife would bear a son, as the years passed, doubts began to grow. Sarai convinced him to have a son with Hagar, her Egyptian servant. But a son brought into the world through such fleshly means could never be God's "son of promise."

When Ishmael was born—the son of Abram and Hagar—Abram was about 86 years old. God was silent at Ishmael's birth, and did not speak to Abram again for 13 long years. When God finally broke His silence, it was to inform Abram that Ishmael was not the child of His promise.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless." GENESIS 17:1

The word translated "Almighty" is the Hebrew term El Shaddai. This term *shad* means "breast" in Hebrew, the place of life and nourishment. God is essentially saying to Abram, "I am the place of your life and your nourishment. It all comes from Me. I am God Almighty. I am El Shaddai, and you must look to Me for life." The living promises of God can only be fulfilled by the living God Himself, not by human effort.

"Walk before Me and be blameless." Walking before God means walking in His presence, conscious that God is watching you and caring for you. How are you to walk? In a blameless or perfect way. God's ideal requirement for us is perfection; I'm not surprised. In fact, I would be shocked if God said, "Hey, go ahead and be slipshod and cruddy." That would not be in keeping

with the holy and perfect nature of God. The apostle Paul wrote, "***Be perfect,***" or aim for perfection (2 Corinthians 13:11, KJV).

WALK IN THE SPIRIT

Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham."

GENESIS 17:3–5a

How could anything be too hard for the One who created the universe and everything in it?

Then God also made a new covenant with Abram—the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17:10). In effect He said, "Abraham, in order to become a spiritual man, I want you to cut off the flesh. From this time forward, I want you to walk in holiness, being led by My Holy Spirit."

In fact, if any Jews refused the rite of circumcision, they were no longer considered God's people. Why was circumcision so important? He wanted to remind His people that they were to live by faith, not by the flesh. Both then and now, no one can be a man or woman of God and walk after the flesh. You can only be a disciple of the Lord as you continually walk in the Spirit by faith.

Remember, circumcision was meant as a symbol. In Romans 2:25–29, Paul explains that circumcision doesn't benefit anyone who does not also walk after the Spirit

through faith. In fact, even uncircumcised Gentiles who walk after the Spirit and not the flesh are also children of God. "***But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit***" (Romans 2:29a).

MIRACULOUS LIFE

When Paul refers to this incident in Romans 4:19, he calls Abraham's body "already dead" (since he was about 100 years old), and speaks of "the deadness of Sarah's womb." In other words, both were too old to have children. God waited to act until Abraham could do absolutely nothing to fulfill the promise by himself. The Lord allowed Abraham to get to the place of absolute human impossibility—it would clearly take a miracle of God.

Do you know that God often allows us to come to this place—the end of ourselves, our resources, our ideas—before He works? You throw your hands up in desperation and say, "That's it. There is no way." Then God steps in—and when He does, there's no way that you or I may boast.

When Abraham heard that he and Sarah would have a son, he laughed—not the laugh of doubt or unbelief, but a laugh of astonishment (Genesis 17:17). If it were the laugh of unbelief, then God would have rebuked him as He did later with Sarah (Genesis 18:12–15). He instructed Abraham to call the child Isaac, which means "laughter" (Genesis 17:19). To have a baby at their advanced age, how could they call the little boy anything but Laughter?

When God announced Isaac would arrive the following year, Sarah overheard and laughed in unbelief. God immediately responded, "***Is anything too hard for the LORD?***" (Genesis 18:14a). How could anything be too hard for the One who created the universe and everything in it? We need to remember this when we pray, and as we walk in faith before God, following the leading of His Holy Spirit. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. 🙌