

Peace be with you, listening friends. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

Two lessons ago, in our study in the Holy Scriptures, we began to explore the story of the prophet Abraham. At first, Abraham's name was not Abraham, but *Abram*. But in our program today, we will discover **why God changed Abram's name to Abraham**.

The first part of today's lesson is **a sad story** that reveals something that Abram did that was not pleasing to God. Some think that God's prophets never sinned. But the Word of God declares: *"There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* and *"If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."*

We have already seen how Adam's sin spread to all people-young and old, men and women, pagan and prophet. Only one Person was not stained by the sin of Adam. That One is **the holy Redeemer** whom God sent to earth to save sinners. He was not stained by sin, because He came from above-from the presence of God the Holy One.

In our last two lessons, we saw how **God promised to make of Abram the father of a great nation**, from which the Redeemer would arise. Both Abram and his wife were elderly and had no children, yet that did not cause Abram to doubt the word of God. However, today we will see that, ten years after God first promised to give Abram a posterity, **Abram tried to "help" God fulfil His**

promise. However, what Abram did, in his impatience, produced many problems.

Now then, let us continue in the Torah to see how Abram and Sarai arranged things in an effort to have the son that God promised. In chapter sixteen of the book of Genesis, the Scriptures say:

*Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named **Hagar**; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me." "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai ill-treated Hagar; so she fled from her.*

Thus we see how the sin of Abram produced bitterness and conflict in his household. Sarai was jealous because Hagar was pregnant; Hagar was upset with Sarai who was mistreating her. Thus, Hagar ran away from Sarai.

Next, the Scriptures say:

The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert... And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. Then the

*angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be **too numerous to count**." The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him **Ishmael**, for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and **he will live in hostility toward all his brothers**."*

So Hagar returned to Sarai, her mistress, as the angel of God had said. *"So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael."*

Thus, **Ishmael**, *Ishma il* in Arabic, was born, the one who is the father of all the Arabs. As we will see, God cared for Ishmael and had a plan for him, but Ishmael was **not** the son that God had promised Abram. God's wonderful plan to make a new nation of Abram had not changed. God is not in a hurry as was Abram. God always does what He promises, even if it seems to us that He is slow. Thus, the Scripture tells us that for thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God remained silent, saying nothing to Abram. But one day God spoke again to Abram.

Let us read in chapter seventeen, and hear what God said to Abram after thirteen long years of silence. What we are going to read is very wonderful.

The Scriptures say:

*When Abram was **ninety-nine years old**, the Lord appeared to him and said, "**I am God Almighty**; walk before me and be blameless. **I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers**."*

*Abram fell face down and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram **your name will be Abraham**, for I have made you a **father of many nations**. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."*

*Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be **the sign of the covenant** between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised..."*

*God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be **Sarah**. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be **the mother of nations**; kings of peoples will come from her." Abraham fell face down; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him **Isaac**. **I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him**. And as for **Ishmael**, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and*

will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."

This is where we must stop today in reading the Scriptures. We have seen how Abram listened to the counsel of his wife and went to bed with Hagar her servant. What Abram did was wrong. Ishmael, the son born to Abram and Hagar, was not part of God's plan to create a new nation that would bring blessing to all the nations of the world. However, **the unfaithfulness of men cannot thwart the faithfulness of God**. Thus, as we just read, when Abram was ninety-nine years old, God reappeared to him to confirm the promise He had made to him so long ago. He said, *"I am God Almighty... You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations."* In keeping with His perfect plan, God changed Abram's name to *Abraham*, which means **the father of many**. God also changed Sarai's name to **Sarah**, which means **princess**.

Here is something very wonderful. We are looking at an elderly couple who have never had a child of their own: Abram and Sarai. Now God is giving them new names in order to announce what is to take place. Abram is renamed *Abraham*, **the father of many**, and Sarai is called *Sarah*, meaning **princess**. God was going to give Abraham and Sarah **a son**, and from that son, **a nation**. Through that nation **many kings and prophets** would arise, and, finally, **the Savior of the world!** Truly, the Lord is great and worthy of praise forever! He did not forget what He had promised to Abraham long before.

So what did Abraham do after God confirmed His promise to give him a child in his old age? The Scriptures say: *"Abraham fell face down; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?'"* **Abraham laughed!** But he did not laugh because of unbelief, but because of happiness.

Thus, the Scriptures say:

*"Against all hope, Abraham in hope **believed** and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. **Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.**"*

Nevertheless, Abraham wanted to know what would happen to Ishmael, the child of his servant, Hagar. God replied,

*"As for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him...**I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you...I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.**"*

Thus, God confirmed His purpose to bring forth the prophets and, at last, the Redeemer Himself through the descendants of Isaac. In the next lesson, God willing, we will see how the Lord gave Abraham and Sarah the son of the promise—Isaac.

Truly, **God is faithful**. God does what He promises. Nothing is too difficult for Him! Listen to these beautiful verses from the holy Gospel *{Injil}*:

*"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay Him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. **To Him be the glory forever! Amen.**"*

Thank you for listening...May God bless you as you consider the meaning of this verse found in the Holy Scriptures:

"If we are [unfaithful to God], He will remain faithful, for he cannot disown Himself."

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