

(Genesis) - Part 16

by Zac Poonen

The story of Abraham and Hagar teaches us the importance of trusting God alone and submitting to His will, rather than relying on human understanding and strength.

Duration: 1:00:24

Scripture: Genesis 16:16 - 17:1, Matthew 6:33, John 15:5, Hebrews 12:5, Revelation 3:1-2

Topics: "Ishmael"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of coming to a point of brokenness before God. He uses the example of Jacob's journey, where Jacob initially relied on his own cleverness and worldly pursuits. However, after 20 years, God breaks Jacob and humbles him, allowing him to become a prince of God. The speaker highlights the lesson that when we are broken and humble ourselves, God can do a mighty work through us. The sermon encourages listeners to seek this brokenness and surrender to God's will.

Transcript

After sixteen, in our last study, we considered how God had promised Abraham that He would give him a child. This is the first time that Abraham understood, as we read in Genesis fifteen-four, that he would have a son through his own body, who would be his heir. Of course, earlier on, even in chapter twelve, He had said that through His seed, the nations would be blessed.

But it became more specific here, in Genesis fifteen, that it was not going to be an adopted child. It was going to be a child of His own. And then how God made a covenant with Abraham, as we read in Genesis fifteen-eighteen, with the symbol of death, of animals slain.

And then we come to chapter sixteen, verse one. You can imagine this man who was so delighted that he was going to have a son. God had made a promise, and it says, He said, Amen, to that promise.

And then he thought, now it's difficult for Sarah to have a son. She's old, we haven't had children for many years. So he thought the only way was to take another wife.

And then we have a picture of how, when man gets a promise from God, his first step is usually to say, now how can I help God fulfil His promise? It's a picture of leaning upon the arm of flesh, instead of leaning upon God. You know that wonderful verse which says, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean

not to your own understanding. That teaches us that one of the greatest enemies of faith is our own understanding.

And that's why the cleverer we are, the more difficult it is to have faith. We're not saying that if you're clever you can't have faith. We're all saying it's more difficult.

Just like it's more difficult for those who are self-righteous to be saved, and it's easier for sinners to be saved. Just like that, it's more difficult for the intellectual person to have faith. It's good for the intellectual people to realise that.

But Paul is an example of one who poured out his intellect to death and came to faith. But Paul, like Abraham, first went the way of the law, of speaking by one's own effort. So that's the picture here in chapter 16.

God has made a promise in chapter 15, and Abraham tries to help God fulfil that promise in chapter 16. That's the picture of man under law. We read in chapter 16, verse 1, Abraham, Sarah, Abraham's wife, had borne him no children.

And she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. This is the other problem that came out of Egypt. The first one was riches that caused Abraham and Lot to separate.

The second problem that came out of their journey into Egypt was that they got an Egyptian maid servant. And because of this Egyptian maid servant, we find a problem came here, which has lasted even till today. Sarah said to Abraham, now listen carefully, this is exactly like Eve suggesting something to Adam.

We read that Sarah suggested something to her husband. Behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go into my maid.

Perhaps I shall obtain children through her. And Abraham listened to the voice of Sarah. Adam listened to the voice of Eve.

Abraham listened to the voice of Sarah. A similar circumstance. And after Abraham had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abraham's wife, Sarah, took Hagar, the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband, Abraham, as his wife, a second wife.

And he went to Hagar, and she conceived, and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. Now, we can say that in Genesis 15, verse 6, it says, Abraham said, Amen to the Lord. And in Genesis 16, verse 2, Abraham said, Amen to Sarah.

And that's where the problem came. If he had only said, Amen to the Lord, and stopped, that would have been all right. But when he took the suggestion, of a good suggestion, it wasn't an evil one.

In those days, it was all right to have a second wife. There wasn't any law there in those days. But it wasn't so much the sin of taking a second wife.

It would be a sin today. It wasn't that. But that, he thought that he's going to fulfill God's promise in this way.

To lean upon our own understanding. And yet, we can say that the history of seeking victory over sin is about the same for all of us. We hear God's promise, sin shall not have dominion over you.

We take it. But then we think, just like Abraham, how can I help God to fulfill this promise? This is the promise of God. I believe it.

How can I now help God to give me victory over sin? And invariably, I think with every single person, we go this way. And we, what we call victory first, is actually only an ishmael. It's not real victory.

We think it is victory. We hold on to it for a while. Until a time comes when some terrific provocation.

And we sin and we discover that we didn't have any victory at all. It was just an ishmael. So we all go this way.

So it's no use blaming Abraham. But we can learn a lesson from them. From the situation here.

We can say this was a test, just like Abraham was taken through many other tests. Here was another test God gave him to see whether he would trust in the Lord. Every test God takes us through is a test of faith.

Can you trust God alone? Or do you feel that you must also depend on some man? There's another verse in Jeremiah 17, verse 5 to 8, which says, Cursed is the man who leans upon the arm of flesh. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord. For the man who leans upon the arm of flesh will be like a withered, barren tree.

But the man who leans upon the Lord will be like a fruitful tree. So we can say this is what Abraham did. And God has promised to do something for us.

To wait for the Lord to do it for us, without being impatient, is a real test of faith. And when you turn to Galatians chapter 4, I just want you to see there, how the Holy Spirit comments on the birth of Ishmael. Galatians 4.21. This is how we know that this passage has got great relevance for us in the New Testament.

Galatians 4.21. Tell me, you who want to be under law, that means you who want to try and please God by your own strength and ability, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman Hagar and the other by the free woman Sarah. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, according to the understanding of man. And the son by the free woman, through the promise.

That was through God's promise. This contains an allegory. That means it's a parable.

There is a meaning, a deeper meaning there in Genesis 16. For these women are two covenants. And so we see this, this is the one place, as far as I can see, the only place in the entire Old Testament, where the old covenant is contrasted with the new covenant, and it's specifically said so in the New Testament here in Galatians.

This is, Paul is saying here is a contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant. Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, a contrast. And these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai, Hagar representing the law, bearing children who are to be slaves.

In other words, through the law also we can come to a certain standard of righteousness. There is a righteousness which is called the righteousness of the law. And it's not to be despised.

The righteousness of the law can make a man very upright. But it tends to bondage and slavery. This is Hagar.

Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, where the law was given, the Ten Commandments. And corresponds to the present earthly Jerusalem, which is the Jewish people, for she's in slavery with her children, the Jews, who haven't gone out of the law. But we belong to the bride.

The bride is one who is freed from the law. The Jerusalem which is above is free. She is our mother, for it is written, rejoice.

This is Isaiah 54, 1. It's important. When does Isaiah 54, 1 come? Immediately after Isaiah 53. That is the cross.

Isaiah 53 is the chapter of the cross, of death. Immediately after that comes the new covenant promise. Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear.

That is Sarah, and that is the bride of Christ. What are we to bear? Romans 7, 6 says, we are to bear fruit unto God. The barren woman who has got no victory over sin, can bear fruit unto God.

Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor yet, for more are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband. That husband is the law. And that is for those who have understood Isaiah 53.

If we have not understood Isaiah 53, we can't come to this quotation from Isaiah 54, verse 1. And Isaiah 53, if you read it carefully, speaks about Christ manifest in the flesh. He shall grow up before him as a root out of a dry ground. That dry ground, Isaiah 53, refers to the flesh of man in which dwells nothing good.

And you, brethren, like Isaac, are children of the promise. But as at that time he was born according to the flesh, persecuted the one who was born according to the spirit, so it is now also. What does the scripture say? Cast out the barren woman and her son.

We'll come to that later. But notice that the New Testament makes it very clear that what we are studying here in Genesis 16 is a picture of the old covenant life. We get a promise from God and then we try to help him to fulfill that promise.

And we try. We are sincere. Abraham was 100% sincere.

And we can be 100% sincere in seeking victory over sin and not come into it because we haven't understood God's way. When the psalmist says, teach me thy way, O Lord, it's a tremendous prayer. Teach me thy way.

Not only let me know thy promise, but teach me thy way to fulfillment of that promise. And so we see Ishmael is a picture of our own wisdom and our own strength. Because Ishmael was born through Abraham's wisdom, human wisdom, Sarah's wisdom and Abraham's strength.

That which I accomplish through my cleverness and my ability is Ishmael. Maybe a healthy child in my eyes, but not acceptable to God. It's very important.

And if you want to meditate further on this thought, I'd like to share with you a verse from Matthew 15. That's very profitable to think about it, what Jesus said. In Matthew 15, verse 13, Jesus made this statement.

An amazing statement. We need to understand it. Jesus answered and said, every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up.

The question is not whether it's a good plant or not. The question is, did God plant it? You see, you can do so many good things in life. But the question is, is that what God wanted you to do? If that's not what God wanted you to do, it may be a good thing, but it's going to be rooted up finally.

And Abraham, there was nothing wrong with Ishmael. There was no sickness in him. He was a healthy child.

But God said no. It was not planted by God. It was not according to God's will.

It's a very simple thing here. It also comes into the matter of dividing between soul and spirit. Here is a soulish life.

That which is my own idea of how I can do God's work. For example, parents who dedicate their children to be full-time workers. How can you do that? If God doesn't call your son to serve Him, you can dedicate him 10,000 times.

He can't serve God as a full-time Christian worker. No, we cannot dedicate our children saying, here I dedicate my child for full-time Christian work. We must dedicate our children to do God's will.

Whether God's will is that that person should be a peon or a sweeper or a nurse or a full-time Christian worker or anything. To do God's will. There can be a lot of good things.

I believe more than 90% of full-time Christian workers are in this Ishmael condition. That's why there's no fruit. God hasn't called them.

They're doing a good thing, but it's Ishmael. It's not planted by the father, so it'll be rooted up one day. The same thing can apply to a lot of us and a lot of other things.

We can do so many good things and never seek to know what is God's will here. So, brothers and sisters, let's learn here one very important thing. That it's not enough to seek to do something for God.

We must do it in God's way. God's way is also important. Abraham was trying to do something for God.

What was that? Trying to get a child for God. So that God's promise can be fulfilled, but it was not God's way. He was sincere, but it was not God's way.

And that is how Babylon is built today. So many Christians, maybe they're sincere, but they're not doing it God's way. For example, the way people raise money for Christian work.

It may be raised for Christian work. It may be raised for God, but is it being done in God's way? Here is the foolishness of so many Christian organizations. They say, we are not getting this money for ourselves.

We're getting it for God. Abraham could have said, I'm not getting this son for myself. I'm getting it for God, so that God's promise can be fulfilled.

Yes, Abraham, but that's not God's way. And that's what we have to tell a lot of these people. Yes, you may be raising money for God's work, but that's not God's way.

That's an Ishmael. And here is where so many Christians just don't have light. So many.

They don't understand that God's work must be done in God's way. You can do something. You say, this is for the glory of God.

I'm doing it. Good. But are you doing it God's way? Otherwise, you're wasting your time.

Very, very important that what we do for God must be done in God's way. And that's why we need to have an understanding of God's will. That is what the New Testament calls wisdom.

To grow in wisdom is to have a greater understanding of God's ways. I can do something, for example, in my home. Which I say, I'm going to do this for the glory of God.

But you may not be doing it God's way. God's way of disciplining our children. God's way of running our home.

We can do so many things with sincerity. But if it's not God's way, there's a lack of wisdom there. And it'll be an Ishmael.

It is with sincerity that we produce Ishmael. Ishmaels are not produced by insincere people. We can't say Abraham was insincere.

Ishmaels are produced by those who want to do something for God. Do something for God, but not according to God's will. And then we have an Ishmael.

So when we understand that, we see that the New Covenant means a lot more than what many people have understood by it. And then we find Sarah in verse 5, after she's given the suggestion. And the fruit of the suggestion is that Hagar, her slave, has a child.

And Sarah says this to Abraham. May the wrong done me be upon you. In other words, you're to blame for all this.

It's typical that you tell somebody to do something, and then afterwards some problem is caused by it, and you blame the other person for it. We are such experts at putting the blame on other people, even when the fault is upon ourselves. You are to be blamed for all this problem that is caused.

Just like Adam blamed Eve. Sarah blames her husband. How difficult it is for a person to judge himself or herself.

I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceded, I was despised in her sight. May the Lord judge. You bring God's name into it also.

Now God will judge you for this thing. It's amazing how blind we can be to our own faults. In such an obvious case, Abraham could have turned around and told her, listen, you're the one who told me to marry her, and now you're yelling at me and asking the Lord to judge me.

He didn't say that. I think he was a fantastic man, Abraham. But think of Sarah there.

She didn't. It's when the pressure came that she got tempted. And when the pressure comes, and I say to sisters particularly, it's more difficult for sisters.

Sarah was a woman. It's very easy for you to develop the habit of blaming others. The Bible says women are the weakest sex.

And if only you sisters can realize that, that you have a tremendous tendency to blame others for things in which you need to blame yourself. Of course, it's true for men too. Adam did it.

But here we see a sister doing it. She was a good sister. She was a God-fearing sister who, 1 Peter 3 says, had an inner beauty of heart, and yet she blamed her husband.

Can you be delivered from that habit permanently? Never to blame anyone. If we judge ourselves, we'll find sanctification. And to bring the Lord's name into it, that's even worse.

May the Lord judge. If the Lord were to judge, He'd have to judge Sarah first. Abraham said to Sarah, Behold, your maid is in your path.

Do to her what's good in your sight. So Sarah didn't tell Hagar to go. She just made life miserable for her.

Treated her harshly. And Hagar fled from her presence. She had power over her maidservant to torture her and trouble her and make life so difficult for her that she just, the first opportunity, she ran away.

The angel of the Lord, see God's mercy upon that poor maidservant. The angel of the Lord didn't go looking for Sarah. He went looking for the maidservant.

There's no partiality with God. God's grace meets Hagar. The angel of the Lord is an Old Testament phrase.

We know that the Hebrew word for angel can also mean messenger. And it's the same word used in Malachi 3.1. The messenger of the Lord will come suddenly into the temple. That was Jesus.

And here it's referring to the messenger of the Lord. This phrase, the, not an angel. We read of angels of the Lord in the Old Testament.

But when it speaks about the, the one messenger of the Lord, it's referring to the Son of God manifesting Himself in some way. And as far as we can see, this is the first instance in the Bible where we see the Son of God manifesting Himself to a person. And it was to despised, persecuted Hagar.

I've discovered one thing through these years. That God is usually on the side of the underdog. You know the meaning of the phrase underdog? Underdog means the one who is opposed by everyone.

The one who is persecuted by everyone. The one who is despised by everyone. The one who is looked down upon by everyone.

The one who doesn't have any power. The one over whom everybody else has got power. God is invariably on that side.

Very dangerous to fight against the underdogs of the world. Because you may find that you're fighting God. Just keep that in mind.

The angel of the Lord went to Hagar. And of course, the angel of the Lord doesn't do anything unrighteous. Jesus is full of grace, but He's also full of truth.

He's gracious to Hagar, but He also said to her truth. That is, submit to authority. It's very interesting to see that.

That He doesn't come and sympathize with her and say, Yes, I know how difficult it is. That woman is so bad, treats you so badly. No, Hagar, submit to authority.

Way back there in the beginning of the Bible, we have this statement. Submit to earthly authority that God places over you. If you run away and you find yourself in some wilderness, God will love you.

He'll come after you. But He will tell you, go back and submit to authority. Sure.

It's very important for us to understand that. God doesn't give us an easy way. He calls us to the difficult task.

Wasn't Sarai wrong in harshly treating Hagar? Of course. But the angel of the Lord doesn't discuss Sarai's weaknesses with Hagar. I've seen that folly even with mature believers sometimes, those who think they are mature anyway, discussing the weaknesses of an authority with the person who should submit to that authority.

Have you seen it in the world? We see it in schools, children discussing the weaknesses of their teachers, in colleges, in factories, and even in the church. But Jesus never does that. Sarai may be 100% wrong in treating Hagar harshly.

That's none of Hagar's business. And the messenger of the Lord will never discuss such things with her. Graciously meets her, but says, your duty is to submit to Sarai.

You can't run away like that. What a tremendous respect God has for human authority. If only we would understand that.

I believe that many, many believers do not make spiritual progress in their life because of this one reason. They have not understood submission to authority. I've seen that.

I believe that many people, their spiritual progress would have been so much greater if they had learned to submit to authority. Submit to authority, unless they ask you to do something ungodly. That's God's way.

Return to your mistress and submit yourself to her authority. And here is a gracious promise. I will greatly multiply your seed.

They shall also be too many to count. Similar promise like to Abraham. And you are with child and you shall bear a son, verse 11.

And you shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. Do you see there? The Lord has given heed to your affliction. He's gracious, but the grace leads you to righteousness.

Have you noticed this phrase in Romans 5, verse 21? Romans 5, 21. That as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign. How? That grace might reign through righteousness.

Grace reigns through righteousness. A grace that does not reign through righteousness or appears... Of course, you cannot reign if there is no righteousness, but a grace without righteousness will never make you a king. And besides, it's a counterfeit grace.

In fact, this is the way to identify a false grace. It's a grace without righteousness. But true grace reigns through righteousness.

It will meet the underdog, comfort her, and say, I'll take care of you at your time of your delivery. I will listen to your cry. I'll care for you.

But now righteousness, go and submit to your authority. But it is hard, Lord. No, you must submit to authority.

If we can learn this lesson, instead of making complaints to God, I believe things would go much better. Learn, brothers and sisters, to submit to authority. The Bible says a wife must submit even to an ungodly husband and show her submission.

I believe that many sisters would have made much more progress in their lives if they had learned submission to their husbands more completely and more thoroughly. I believe that with all my heart. I believe that many young people would have made much more spiritual progress in their lives if they had learned to submit to the authority of those who were older in the Lord, who had been placed over them in the Lord.

And there we can be critical. But who suffers? You suffer yourself. There you can think that you know more and you suffer yourself.

The other person doesn't suffer, you suffer. So it's foolish. It says about Jesus that he grew in wisdom because he submitted to the authority of imperfect Joseph and Mary for 30 years.

Tremendous lesson, this message of authority, submitting to authority at the beginning of the Bible and at the end of the Bible. I remember years ago when I was a very young man, very young in the Lord. I used to be in an assembly where I used to share the Word occasionally.

And it was obvious that there were at least one of the elders who was jealous of the ministry I had and wouldn't give me any opportunity to minister. And it was clear to me what I had to do. I had to just sit quiet in that meeting.

Sit month after month after month. I had to just sit there. And for years, God taught me that lesson.

It's not a question of being gifted. Whatever gift you may have, as I felt the Lord was saying to me, you've got to learn submission to authority first. And if you learn that first when you're young, then you'll be able to handle it when you're older.

And I've seen it is so important to respect whatever authority God places over you and submit to it. Our salvation lies there. Not only our salvation, our whole life and ministry, everything that God has for us in the future lies in a humble submission to authority.

There can be a submission to authority which is reluctant and which is with an ulterior motive. All right, I'll submit if that is the way to become a great man myself. Garbage! Throw that in the garbage bin.

No, I submit to authority because it's the right thing to do. That's all. I remember when I submitted to authority, I wasn't thinking of some great ministry in the future.

I never had any such idea. I just knew this. God wants me to submit to the authority here.

That's all. So it's not a question of getting any reward for it, but just because it's the right thing to do. That is the sin of Lucifer.

Not submitting to authority. Further, verse 12, God says about Ishmael, he'll be a wild ass of a man. His hand will be against everyone.

Everyone's hand will be against him. He lived to the east of all his brothers. It's exactly fulfilled in the case of the Arabs today, living to the east of the Jews.

And their hand is against everyone and everyone's hand is against them. A picture of terrorism. Verse 13, then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her.

Thou art a God who sees. For she said, have I even remained alive here after seeing him? It was not only Abraham who got a vision of God. Hagar.

There is no record in the Bible that Sarai ever got a vision of God or ever met with God personally. But Hagar did. It's interesting, isn't it? God met with Hagar.

There's no instance that God met with Sarai. And Hagar said, thou God does see me. Now, it's a question of how we interpret that verse, that phrase.

I think it means something very similar to what Job said in Job 23, 15. He knows every detail of what is happening to me. God, you're a God who sees me and who knows every detail of what is happening to me.

You know the affliction I'm going through under Sarah. And yet you've told me to go and submit to her. I go.

You saw me in the wilderness when I was helpless. You know everything I'm going through. Do you have that faith? He knows every detail of what's happening to me.

Thou God sees me. Therefore, the well was called Bir Lahai Roi, the well of the living one who sees me. It's between Kedesh and Bered.

And so Hagar bore a son and Abraham called the name of his son whom Hagar bore Ishmael. And Abraham was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him. Now this is the product of the law.

And as we have seen before, what is the next verse? Abraham was 99 years old and the Lord appeared to him. Notice that. What is the gap between those two verses? Chapter 17, 1 and chapter 16, 16.

Thirteen years of silence. Thirteen years of Abraham's confidence in himself being broken down. Thirteen years of thinking that Ishmael is the promised seed.

Thirteen years of living in an imaginary victory and discovering finally that it's not the real thing. Thirteen years of living under the law, struggling, determining. Long period.

God kept the Jews under the law for 1500 years before Jesus came. 1500 years and then the new covenant was established. And in all of our experience, God takes us through this old covenant period to teach us one very important lesson.

And that is, you can do nothing by yourself. What Jesus said in John 15, 5, without me you can do nothing. It is easy to quote that verse, easy to put it up on a wall, but it can take 13 years to learn it.

A little less, perhaps, if you are more wholehearted. And a little longer if you are less wholehearted. And if you are not so wholehearted, perhaps never in our whole life.

That we can live and die under the law. Never having an Isaac, only an Ishmael. A form of godliness.

Ishmael is the form of godliness. Without the power, without the reality, only a form. The law looks good, impresses others.

Abraham can take his little boy and say, this is the promised seed, I've got victory. Romans 6, 14 is fulfilled in my life, and yet it's an Ishmael. And you know that, in your secret life, in your thought life, in your private life, it's not too good.

And those are all little whispers of God, little indications that you haven't got Isaac yet. Listen to that voice. Let God break you.

Very important. That takes time. And the mark of a broken man is that he doesn't get offended, that he never is proud of any victory he has.

If you get victory over anger and you are proud of it, my brother, sister, you can be 100, 200% certain that that is an Ishmael. If you get victory over sexual lust or love of money or anything and you are proud of it, you can be 1000% sure that that's an Ishmael. Or if you can gloat over the fact that you are superior to another brother, you can be sure whatever you've got, it's an Ishmael.

A broken man is just not like that. We can call this the Genesis 16 verse 17 period of Abraham's life. Genesis 16 verse 17 is a blank verse, 13 empty years.

And we need to go through this Genesis 16 verse 17 period in our life, where all our confidence in ourself is shattered, where all our pride over the little victories we have got is shattered, where all our gloating over how superior we are to somebody else is shattered, where all our confidence in our discernment, other people don't have discernment like I have, is shattered. Sometimes I've seen that also, that a brother can think, yeah, I've got some discernment here, not like some of these other dumb people in our church. I've got some discernment.

It goes pretty slow with such brothers, usually pretty slow. They are good brothers, but it could have gone much better if they had been a little humbler. But they are in Genesis 16 verse 17.

May they come out of it quickly. May we all come out of it quickly till the Lord can appear to us and say, I'll give you the real victory now. But we have to be broken.

Someone has said that there are three stages in any work that God does. The first stage is difficult. The second stage, it is impossible.

And then the third stage, it is done. Difficult, impossible and done. We understood that? That's foolishness to the natural mind.

In the world, it is difficult, impossible, then it can never be done. But God doesn't go from difficult to done because man can get the glory. I did it.

It was difficult, but I managed it. But God has to lead man from the difficult to the impossible stage. Then only he can do it so that the man doesn't glory.

You see, at the age of 86, Abraham could still have a son, but Sarah couldn't. At the age of 99, neither Abraham nor Sarah could have. Abraham couldn't have a son even if he wanted, even if he married 10 more wives.

And then when it was impossible, at 86 it was difficult, but at 99 it was impossible. God said, now you're ready. See, this is the principle in God's dealings with all of his servants.

Moses, at the age of 40, he was like Abraham at 86. I'm capable. I have been trained in the military academy in Egypt.

And I have got the highest education. And Egypt, by the way, was the most advanced country in the world in those days. Like people talk about going to America nowadays, people just talk about going to Egypt to get higher education.

The best education in the world. And living in Pharaoh's palace at the age of 40, the smartest young man in the whole of Egypt. He says, if there's a man who can deliver God's people, it's me.

And he saw an Egyptian hitting an Israelite, and he smote that Egyptian and buried him under the sand. That was his power. And he had to run away.

And then God took him into another university. It's quite different from the universities of Egypt. It was a university in the wilderness, looking after sheep, living in his father-in-law's house.

That can be a problem when you have to live in your father-in-law's house. And broke him and broke him and broke him. This proud prince of Egypt, living as a helpless son-in-law in his father-in-law's house, looking after sheep.

Broke him, broke him, broke him. Till at the age of 80, he says, Lord, I'm not the man. I can't do this job.

And he's broken now. Now it has become impossible. Now God says, you're ready.

Moses, you're ready. At the age of 40, you were not ready. You were too full of yourself and your discernment.

Your sharpness and your cleverness. Now you're ready. You are really broken.

Now I can take you and do something through you that I could never do through you when you were 40 years old. And there's a lesson there. We learn exactly the same with Abraham and with Moses and with all of God's people.

Think of proud Saul of Tarsus, how God had to break him, blind his eyes. And it's very significant that he got a brother called Ananias to come and lay his hands on Paul so that he could be healed and be filled with the spirit. It was not some apostle like Peter or James, just an ordinary brother.

We'd like an apostle to come and lay hands on our head. God says, you humble yourself. I'll send an ordinary brother to you called Ananias.

He'll come and do the job. You're just a nobody, Paul. Ananias is good enough for you.

No need to send Peter for somebody like you. Ananias is good enough. Peter is sent for people like Cornelius, humble people, but for proud, arrogant Saul's Ananias.

Put them down. Put them down. Make them small in their own eyes.

And then he was sent away for three years to the wilderness. It says he was in Arabia, Paul, Galatians chapter one. And there he was broken, broken, broken, broken in three years.

And got out of his head all the garbage he accumulated from Professor Gemaliel in the Bible school. He'd spent three years with Gemaliel in the Bible school and he had to spend three years in Arabia to unlearn all that. And whatever number of years he spent the Bible school, he had to go to Arabia and unlearn all that before he could be useful.

All that has to be taken out. All that human cleverness and wisdom till you are broken, broken, broken, that you don't despise anyone. You don't think you're so sharp and so discerning and despise the other gullible people in the assembly or any such thing.

And then God can do a mighty work through you. And we know that in Moses case when he was 40, he could bury only one Egyptian under the sand. And when he was 80, broken man, weak, he could bury the whole Egyptian army under the Red Sea.

Not in his strength now. One man was with his muscles, but the whole Egyptian army was with God's power. And there is a lesson.

There's a lesson. We can learn all these beautiful illustrations. And as we have often seen, illustrations don't bring us to reality.

They show us that there is a principle in God's dealings with us. If we can learn that and say, Lord, do that work in me, then we have achieved something. Has God broken you, brother, sister? You know it very well if you don't despise anybody anymore.

If you despise people, you can be pretty sure you're still in Genesis 16, 17. If you're proud of some victory you got, you're still in Genesis 16, 17. If you think you're capable to do this, that and the other, you're still in Genesis 16, 17.

If you think you can do things better than the way that brother does it, you are very much in Genesis 16, 17. You can speak better than that brother and you can organize things better than this brother. You can do this, that and the other.

Yeah, you can keep on like that. May you come out of Genesis 16, 17 soon. There is so much of this which prevents God's people from going on.

And I believe in the judgment seat of Christ, we shall discover how many Christians were stuck in Genesis 16, 17 all their lives, even though many who heard about the new and living way, because they never allowed God to break them. Every defeat you have, let God humble you through it. Every time you see you slip up and fall in your private life, let God humble you through it.

When you have a dirty dream, what's your reaction to it? Oh God, how filthy the flesh is. Let God humble you when you have a dirty dream to show you that you are really nothing, instead of being so puffed up and thinking that you are somebody. My brothers and sisters, I emphasize this because I've come to see

through the years that this is the number one reason why many, many believers never make spiritual progress in their life and why God cannot accomplish anything through them.

Why their lives are so dried up, their ministries so dried up, because God's never been able to break them. They are too proud, too high up in their own thinking with all their outward manifestation of humility, which is all a counterfeit. Inwardly, they are not broken.

They've got high thoughts about themselves, covered with a cloak of humility. Counterfeit hypocrisy. May God penetrate through all that and show us that we need to be broken, and then He can do something for us.

I want you to turn to a verse in Psalm 107. Psalm 107, we read, verse 12 and 13. Therefore God humbled their heart with labor.

They stumbled, and there was none to help. You see, they come to the place where there's nobody to help them. We can say they came to a zero point.

Then, notice the then. Then they cried out to the Lord, and He saved them out of their distress. Verse 18, verse 17.

Fools, because of their rebellious way, because of their iniquities, are afflicted with sickness. Their soul abhorred all kinds of food. They can't eat food properly, and they drew near to the gates of death.

Then, when they are humbled sufficiently, they come almost to death. Then they cried out to the Lord. He saved them out of their distresses.

Verse 27, speaking about those who are out at sea, they reeled and staggered like a drunken man. And look at this phrase. They were at their wit's end.

They came to the end of themselves, not knowing what to do. Then, they cried to the Lord, and He brought them out. What is the message in all this? We have to come to our wit's end.

We usually don't learn to turn to the Lord before that. Till then, we depend on other people, or on our own cleverness. And God allows that 13 years to go by.

Blank. Genesis 16, 17. Blank verse.

What's going on? God's humbling us. But it's not God's will that we should be there so long. We should come out quickly.

We have to go. All of us have to go through it for a period, but not for so long. Time is so short.

We have to come out of it quickly. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God in such situations. And don't despise His dealings.

Now, Genesis 17, 1. When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, Finally, the work is done. We pray that that day will come in every one of our lives. Where we shall graduate to Genesis 17, verse 1. Where the Lord can appear and say, I am God Almighty.

You don't have to help me produce a son. I am God Almighty. I don't need Hagar's help.

I don't need Sarah's suggestions. I don't need your wisdom. I am Almighty God.

That is the revelation we need. That our Father is the Almighty God. Who is sovereign.

Who can do all things. Who can control all our circumstances. All the people who come across our way.

All everything in our life. And who is Almighty to strengthen us to come to victory. What do you have to do? Struggle? Think up new ideas? New ideas to do something for me? No, you don't have to do any such thing.

Walk before my face. The thing that we always preach in the church. Live before God's face, brother.

Not before the face of man. Come inside the veil where God dwells and walk before me. And then you will be blameless.

The only way to be blameless is to walk before God's face. That is to walk in the light. As we read in 1 John 1 7, if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.

To live before God's face, walk before me. Don't be happy that all the other people around you think that you've got a nice son in Ishmael. Don't be happy that people around you think that you're a victorious brother, victorious sister.

Forget their opinion. Walk before me. What do I think about you? Be blameless.

That's what the leader of the church of Sardis did not have. We read in Revelation 3 verse 1, that I have not found your works perfect in my sight, God said. You notice that? Revelation 3 verse 2, I have not found your deeds perfect or complete in the sight of my God.

It's good in the sight of men, pretty good testimony, good, healthy Ishmael that everybody's impressed with. But God says, I'm not impressed because I see your thought life. I see your private life.

I see how much you love money. I see how much you've got wrong attitudes towards other brothers and sisters. I'm not impressed with this Ishmael that you're going around displaying to the other people in the assembly.

Walk before me and be blameless. When will we take that seriously? Walk before his face. Very important.

Wonderful thing. I am God Almighty. I don't need you to do anything unlawful to further my work.

You don't have to adopt business methods to promote God's work. No, to have lotteries in the church, to raise my funds for God's work or to hold auctions. How many people, what will you bid for this thing, auctions, to make money for God's work? Like charismatics doing it these days.

Asking for money in the newspapers. Believers and unbelievers all can come and give, we'll pray for you. God says, you don't have to do any of these methods for my work.

I'm Almighty God. Do you think I lack money for my work? Do you think I'm such a beggar? Do you think God is such a beggar that he has to beg people, please, please give me some money for my work. Please give me some money for my work.

Can you imagine Jesus standing up and saying, please give me some money. I have to do God's work. You people are not giving enough money.

I'm not able to do God's work. That is a misrepresentation of Christ. That is another Jesus.

And multitudes of undiscerning Christians follow this other Jesus. No, in no area do we ever need to do anything un-Christlike for the furtherance of God's work. We don't have to give bribes for the furtherance of God's work.

No, I am God Almighty. You don't have to try and think up any schemes. Or you and your wife sit at home and think up some schemes like Abraham and Sarai.

No need, trust in me and you won't need to do so much thinking up of your clever schemes. But I'll tell you something, which I've discovered from my own experience. This is not a lesson that we learn once for all.

I can learn it and then after some time I can unlearn it. Because I become confident again. And then God has to teach me all over again at a deeper level.

And then I have to maybe unlearn it again. We are so weak. A little bit of success and it goes to our head and we get so puffed up.

We really think we are somebody now. And then God has to break and break and break and break and break and break and break again. So let's learn to live before God's face.

And I will establish my covenant between me and you. And I will multiply you exceedingly. And Abraham fell on his face.

This is typical of Abraham. He always fell down before God's face. He said, Lord, I'm nothing.

He came down to zero. And God talked with him saying, as for me, behold, my covenant is with you. And you shall be a father of a multitude of nations.

Now the promise comes. He didn't give him this till he was 99. He said, now you can change your name.

You were Abram, means exalted father. Now you'll be called Abraham, father of a multitude. We can say till now you had the form of godliness.

Now you'll have the power of godliness. Till now you are just a title, exalted father, right, reverend doctor, something or the other. You know, exalted father.

Like they say, holy father and all the rotten titles that men have taken upon themselves. Abram, exalted father. Oh, what a man.

What's your name? Exalted father. What's your name? Father so-and-so, reverend so-and-so, doctor so-and-so. And God says, you get rid of all that now.

Get down from your throne, you exalted father. You don't have any children. What are you talking? Just humble yourself and come down to the dust.

And now we make you a real father of a multitude. Change your name to Abraham. Just like God told Jacob when he was broken.

Your name is going to be changed now. You're going to be Israel. It's very interesting to read the story of Jacob because we'll come to that later in Genesis.

The same thing, same lesson. God met him in Genesis 28 in a place called Bethel. And God said, I'll do these wonderful things for you.

And Jacob said, well, Lord, just take care of me. Give me health and strength. Give me food and I'll pay you my tithes and we'll get along fine.

Typical response of a worldly person. And then 20 years he ran after women and money and accumulated both. And then finally, after 20 years, God meets him a second time at Peneo, Genesis 32.

And says, all right, now I'm going to break you. And he fractured one of his bones physically. God physically fractured one of Jacob's bones.

And this proud, upright man now had to walk with a staff broken. He says, all right, now you can be prince of God, Israel. What is the lesson we learn in all these things? It's when you're broken that you can become a prince.

Now you can be a real father, Abraham. Now you're ready. Till now you are not.

I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. Verse 6, I'll make you exceedingly fruitful. I'll make nations out of you.

Kings will come forth from you and establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land of your sojournings, to all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. And I will be their God.

God said further to Abraham, now as for you, you shall keep my covenant. You see, there is no covenant in which man doesn't have a part. Every covenant, there's God's part and man's part.

And he says, your part's pretty simple. You and your descendants, this is my covenant which you must keep. You and your descendants, every male must be circumcised.

Verse 10, verse 11. In the flesh of your foreskin, it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Every male who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations.

A servant born in the house or bought with money, a servant who is born or bought shall surely be circumcised. Verse 13, thus shall my covenant be in your flesh. Notice that phrase, in your flesh.

An everlasting covenant. But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised will be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant.

It is not automatic. That was man's part. And that circumcision symbolized a cutting off of the flesh.

And that has meaning for us in the New Testament. We read in Philippians 3.3, we are the true circumcision. Philippians 3.3, what is it? We have cut off confidence in the flesh.

Notice that, Philippians 3.3. Like the old covenant, in the Old Testament, God told Abraham, the mark of the covenant is everyone must be circumcised. In Philippians 3.3 it says, we are the true circumcision who

have cut off. What have we cut off in the New Testament? Not a physical skin, but confidence in the flesh.

Confidence in Sarah's suggestions. Confidence in my own wisdom. How to produce a son.

I have cut it off. That is the meaning of circumcision. Paul says in Romans 2.29, circumcision is of the heart, not an outward thing.

And that is the mark of the covenant even in the New Testament. I enter into the covenant with Jesus when I come to this place. I have no confidence in myself.

No confidence in the flesh, my flesh or other people's flesh. Only in God. Then we enter into the covenant.

That's what God told Abraham in Genesis chapter 17. The one who doesn't do this will be cut off from my people. Very clear.

The one who is not circumcised will be cut off. He has broken my covenant. And the same thing today.

The one who says he belongs to Jesus Christ, but he does not crucify the flesh with his affections and lusts, he is cut off. He is not really a part of Christ. He has not kept his part of the covenant.

He has broken the covenant. He has not entered into that circumcision of the flesh. You could not be a Jew there without circumcision physically.

You cannot be a part of the bride of Christ without that spiritual circumcision of the heart. And that is why we say in the church, we always have to speak about that circumcision. A total circumcision.

Total 360 degrees. Every aspect of the flesh. No confidence.

You know, that is how God entered into a covenant with Abraham. Twice we read. In both cases, it was death, death, the symbol of the covenant.

Twice God emphasized this, so that Abraham would get it very clear. Death to the flesh. May God help us to understand that.

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