

Hagar and the Promise of a Son (III)

TRUTH VS. ERROR

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As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly..." (Gen. 17:20). We proceed with the question of Hagar and Ishmael on the basis and thesis that when God says "blessed" He means "blessed" and when He says "loved" He means "loved". This implies, of course, that neither God's blessings nor His love can ever ultimately be denied, frustrated or fail. To go on, then, in Genesis 16, there is a note of interest in connection with the Angel of the Lord promising Hagar the birth of a son and prescribing his name. "And the Angel of the Lord said unto her, 'Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael...'" (vs. 11). This is kindly speech which the Lord directs to Hagar, continuing with assurance of more than the mere providential gift of many descendants, but also proceeding to predict the birth and prescribe the name of the son. There are at least four other real parallels of this predicting the birth and prescribing the name of a son in Scripture, as in the instances of Isaac (17:19), Solomon (I Chron. 22:9), John (Luke 1:13) and Jesus (Matt. 1:21). Cf. also Josiah (I Kings 13:2). (Cyrus, mentioned in Isa. 44:28; 45:1, 3, 4, 5, 13, is not a case in point, since there is no foretelling of his birth and, although there is a predicting, there is no prescribing of his name). The point we would make here is that Scripture does not reveal the Lord foretelling to parent(s) the birth of and prescribing the name to be given to a reprobate. Invariably such instances are only in reference to the elect. Then, too, we know that names in Scripture have spiritual meaning. The name *Ishmael* has significance spiritually, and for good, in connection with his mother, his father and himself. The name, "God-shall-hear", indicates answered prayer, first the answer to his mother's prayer. For Ishmael became a living symbol that the Lord had heard and would continue to hear her affliction. Then there was the answer of his father's prayer, "As for Ishmael ("God-shall-hear"), I have heard thee." Finally, God heard the lad himself (21:17).

Then we have the reason for those comforting words to Hagar. "...because the Lord hath heard thy affliction." Here is given fuller implication of the name Ishmael, "God hath heard thy affliction." Affliction is the experience of the elect; punishment that of the reprobate. Take your Bible concordance (preferably an "exhaustive") and trace the word "affliction". See in Ex. 2:23-25 how "the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried (it doesn't say 'they prayed'—RCH), and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And *God heard* their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. And God looked upon the Children of Israel, and God had respect unto them." "And the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people, which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry'" (3:7). In II Sam. 22:26-28 we read, "With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful, and with the upright man Thou wilt show Thyself upright. With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself unsavory. And *the afflicted people Thou wilt save....*" Elihu reminded Job that wicked men "cause the cry of the poor to come unto Him, and *He heareth the cry of the afflicted*" (Job 34:28). David says, "For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid his face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard" (Ps. 22:24). But God does despise the workers of iniquity (cf. Ps. 5:5 with 53:4, 5) and abhors (5:6; 10:3) them. When "*they call upon Me,*" the Lord says, "I will *not* answer" (Prov. 1:28)! There is no specific mention that Hagar prayed and

called upon the Lord, but that the Lord heard her *affliction*, her cry and groaning.

Where we read the Angel of the Lord's description of Ishmael's life, v. 12, in the words "He will be a wild ass of a man" (Heb.), it is not necessary to understand the words in a derogatory sense. They simply indicate he would have a desert-man nature, be characterized by love of great outdoor freedom (Job 39:5, 6-8) and desire to live away from civilization (Dan. 5:21). It was his determination to be "alone by himself" (Hos. 8:9). That is why we read, "his hand against all, and hand of all against him". He was like a man who always has his hand out at arm's length as though to say to everyone, "Stay away from me; I want to be alone, and left alone." It is with difficulty that any one, or any people, may live an isolated life in the midst of this world, especially "in the visible presence of" his fellow men. To the rest of the world, they seem strange who prefer to dwell by themselves away from the settlements of society. The curious, stereotyped citizenry does not seem to be able to tolerate the intellect, the temperament or the manner of life of those different from them.

When we read that "before the faces of all his brethren he shall dwell," it is unnecessary to interpret this to mean or to imply that he chose absolute independence of the covenant family, in this way rejecting the covenant. For we find throughout the Old Testament dispensation remnants of God's people who, here and there, lived outside the established, instituted body of Israel. There were Melchizedek, Lot, the Ninevites who repented at the preaching of Jonah, the elect Egyptians (Isa. 19:19-25), the Ethiopian eunuch and the saints in Caesar's household. These all dwelt *before* their brethren, but not *among* the greater body of them.

"And she called upon the name of the Lord who spoke unto her, 'Thou God seest me'" (vv. 13, 14). From the heart Hagar could not say, Thou *God* seest *me*, without *her* seeing *God*. Here revealed is her knowledge of God, that she saw Him as omnipresent, omniscient, the God of providence and mercy. Hagar was one of the many servant of Abram (he having at least 318) who were *trained*, i.e., *dedicated* to the Lord (14:14), or *instructed* in the knowledge of God. For it was Abram's policy to command his entire "household after him" to "keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (18:19). These servants worshiped the Lord (24:48), knew how to pray (v. 12), and how to use God's name without taking it in vain (v. 9). Hagar, numbered among this sanctified company, must have given evidence of regeneration and conversion, or Sarai would never have thought to make her the mother of the promised seed; nor would Abram have consciously taken a mere heathen (Egyptian) woman with a view to producing covenant seed. This expression of hers is evidence that Hagar rejoiced in the promise of a son just given her, and proves that grace was shown her. Rev. Geo. M. Ophoff says the Lord "knew her down-sitting and her uprising, understood her thoughts afar off, compassed her path and her lying down, was acquainted with all her ways...her wandering, put her tears in His bottle, and kept them in His book. This she knew now. "Thou God seest me" (*The Standard Bearer*, VI, 370).

"For she said, 'Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me!'" Here is Hagar's wonder that she should have been favored with a vision of God, which contains the latent idea that the sight of God brings deliverance (cf. the serpent of brass, Nu. 21:8, 9; Isa. 45:22). "Have I?" I, so unworthy! A mere run-away slave! A sinner! "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house that Thou hast brought me hitherto?" (II Sam. 7:18). "Have I *here*...?" i.e., (lit.) "in this place?" (as though tapping with the foot to indicate a spot); have I *here* seen Him? Here in this wild desert, far from the center of God's people, and out of my real calling? "Have I here *looked* after Him?" No, I was careless and unmindful of Him. But He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. He saw me in my sin, in my contempt for my mistress, in my

unheeding flight; He saw me by the well, He saw me in the wilderness, saw all things about me! Then Hagar saw *Him* as the living God as is evident in her naming the well, “the well of Him that liveth and seeth me.” Here is an early instance of “I am sought of them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not” (Isa. 65:1). Then we read, “And Hagar bare Abram a son, and Abram called his son’s name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael”. Abram in this manner confirmed the truth of Hagar’s vision of God. The fulfillment of the promised birth reveals that she was saved in child-bearing (I Tim. 2:15), and that not merely by providence, but by promise.

Now let us consider Abraham’s touching prayer for Ishmael as found at Gen. 17:18. “And Abraham said unto God, ‘O that Ishmael might live before Thee!’” These words do not imply that Abraham was content enough with Ishmael, wanting the son he already had to be the child of promise. For this would imply not only doubt in the promise of Isaac, but also a mental rejection of Isaac in the burning wish that he would never be born. This would mean that Abraham not only *did* stagger over the promises, but that he flew in the face of them! The meaning rather is that Ishmael, who is not destined to be the means of transmitting the blessings of the covenant to its future generations, nevertheless, may be *in* the covenant and *share* its blessings. The reiteration of v. 19, “Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed” does not imply by emphasis on “indeed” that Abraham suffered a doubt as to whether Sarah should bear, but is rather God’s taking note of the fact that Abraham believes she *would* bear, and yet this would not cause his beloved son Ishmael to be excluded from the blessing. So, while Abraham is praying and talking with God about one of his children, he hastens to include the other in his petitions, and would have the Lord remember him. Parents must show a spiritual concern for all their children. How this prayer for Ishmael, the deep expression of his soul, is to be understood is that Ishmael personally be granted life. The words must be understood in the full force of the term “live,” which means life in the largest sense of the term—eternal life; and understood in connection with “before Thee,” which means “before Thy face,” *coram Deo*, in the beatific presence of God. See Hosea 6:2, “We shall live *in His sight*.” Abraham desired nothing less than eternal salvation for his son Ishmael.

(To be continued, D.V.)

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