

“...father of many nations.”

In this text we find, yet again, the basic truth of election. We also find that God marks out His people and demands obedience. For the Jews, this meant circumcision. For Christians, there are no physical signs. A physical sign, in terms of spirituality, is secondary and of lesser worth. As we come to see in these passages, the physical sign was not meant to be a sign of spiritual acceptance, but only of national brotherhood and membership.

The ‘sign’ of God’s promise to save is different, for whilst a sign of national identity does not confer upon the bearer spiritual salvation, the ‘sign’ of Christ upon a man *does* confer salvation. Thus we can say that salvation is not ‘proved’ by any kind of physical sign, such as belonging to a local church, to a denomination, or any other physical action (including spiritual manifestations that have physical evidences, e.g. tongues, healings, levitation, etc., which can all be produced by satanic means).

Though both periods (law and grace) were different, God still demanded obedience for both. As Christians we are not saved by our actions, whether good or bad. Rather, we were saved from eternity, and salvation has been given as a gift, obedience itself being a gift of God as well as a rational response on our part.

We can say, then, that whilst salvation itself is unconditional (that is, God gives it freely without any prerequisites), our saved lives *are* conditional, in that we must obey God and do His bidding. His love toward us can be held back if obedience is not forthcoming from us, and this fact is found in the text.

The sign of circumcision bound Jews together as a nation and as an outward mark of God’s special love toward them. For Christians this sign is love itself. In the earliest days, the sign most quoted by the unsaved was that of the love shown toward each other by Christians. Does this sign manifest itself today? Hardly! This has been my personal sad observation for decades, and it is often related to me by others who would dearly like to see love amongst the brethren. If anything, I see avoidance, not love. Thus, the sign of Christianity is not often found where it should be found.

That is why I say – do not cut the bond just because you disagree with each other! Show your

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love by accepting the fact of different views, even if you cannot accept the views themselves. If the Christian is displaying heresy, then shun him – but not otherwise. Let the sign of God be amongst us, and let it be supported by obedience and holiness.

Verses 1&2

1.

“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

2.

And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.”

Abram was 99 years of age when God came to him with a message. The wording might suggest that God did not come between the last recorded time and this, but that would be just an assumption. It is probable that God spoke to him many more times, but such times were not recorded.

Many Christians have a view of God that is very narrow; they think that God is only to be found in numbers, when gathered with other Christians, or in a formal ‘church’, etc., or even on a Sunday and other ‘church service’ day! In this way they compartmentalise their faith. In essence they believe they are without God at other times. Such folk have a long way to go before they realise the 100% nature of being a Christian!

Unless we turn tail and continually sin, God is always with us, through the Holy Spirit. We do not need to be with others, or in a church building, etc. We simply need to love God and walk in His ways, as He instructs Abram to do.

Again, we cannot be sure if God appeared in a vision, or in some spiritual but ‘real’ form (*ra’ah* can imply either). It does not matter, for a vision is just as real as an ‘actual’ appearance. A very poor modern analogy might be, say, talking to a man face-to-face in a room and talking to him via a web-cam on computer. In both, the man and his words are real and both are taking place in ‘real time’, but in one he is actually in the room. The important thing is to remember that in

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any case the message is very real and is not 'just a dream'.

Equally, the word '*amar*' does not fully differentiate what is said in one's mind and what is said to one's ears. That is, God might have spoken to God in a vision through Abram's mind, or face-to-face direct to his ears. Either is actual and true and real, so it does not matter.

God's words on this occasion were straightforward and blunt – "I am (the) Almighty God". God referred to Himself as *Shadday* or *Shaddai*, meaning most powerful or Almighty. In this name is a warning, for it is rooted in *shadad*, meaning the despoiler or devastator, who can violently ruin. This simple statement of His name is, then, a statement of intent – do what He says and all will be well, but, do otherwise and you will reap the dire consequences.

You will also notice that God says He is 'The' Almighty God. Really, this is not required, for 'Almighty' or *Shaddai* already includes this fact. However, it is possible that God wished to qualify Who He was because Abram lived in a country where many false gods were worshipped, so 'The' represented His uniqueness and power.

God's message to Abram was blunt: "walk before me, and be thou perfect." You will note the construction of this demand. God did not offer Abram a tasty morsel first, and then tell him how to achieve it. No, He demanded total obedience first, before issuing a description of what He would give to him.

In many churches throughout the world nowadays, offers of the 'benefits' of being a Christian are made with no mention of the need to obey God. Such is unsound and Biblically untrue. We must obey God regardless of what we receive in return. Even if we suffer every day we are to obey Him. But, this is not understood by most Christians, and so many pastors are liable.

Abram had to live an holy life ('before me') and had to be 'perfect'. As has been said elsewhere, it is a modern lie to say that if we find a 'perfect church' we are to leave it! Our aim *should* be to be perfect. The Hebrew

tamiym

has its Greek counterpart, and it means to be complete, whole or 'sound'. It carries with it the idea of being 'healthy' and wholesome, having integrity. That is, to live fully under the influence

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of truth and Biblical fact.

From my own experience few do this, but prefer denominational teaching and useless tradition, meeting with heretics or those whose beliefs are inferior, and a very watered-down idea of Who God is. As a result their lives are not sound and they do not truly walk with God. We are all guilty of this at times, but those who do so constantly are in grave danger of God's wrath and Almightyness.

After He had demanded this total obedience, God told Abram that such obedience would bring him God's promise or covenant. The 'covenant', *nathan*, is something bestowed or granted; it is something appointed to someone. It is not given for works or for obeying, for obedience is demanded whether or not we are given a gift. This is consistent with predestination/election. Nevertheless, God makes Abram's holiness a condition for receiving, because this is what God required at this time.

Let me explain further... Abram would not receive the promise because he personally decided to be holy, but because God firstly chose him to receive the promise, and then demanded the condition – Abram's holiness. Furthermore, Abram's holiness could not be brought about unless God firstly made him spiritually alive (regeneration). So, none of it was 'of works'... the works came about as a result of God's gift.

Though all this might seem to be subtle and even of minor importance, it is of the *greatest* importance, for we must always have the right root from which to grow. The promise was a repeat of former promises – that Abram would be the father of a nation and of countless peoples.

Verses 3-8

1.

“And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

2.

As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

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3.

Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

4.

And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

5.

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

6.

And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

You will note that the effect of this encounter was that Abram fell on his face – he did not fall backwards! One falls on one’s face when meeting with a superior, a ruler. A contrary example is when Eli fell backwards, because he was under judgement and was being put to death by God as a punishment. Falling backwards, then, is not the sign of being in the presence of God, unless it is in judgement, or Satan is mimicking an holy encounter, as often happens in charismatic circles.

We are told that Abram fell on his face, *naphal* – to prostrate oneself before God. Whilst it can also mean to be thrown down, this is not the sense in the text. The sense is that of a voluntary act of subjugation, a recognition of God’s presence. That is, a visual plea for mercy as well as an act of obedience. Whilst Abram lay on the ground, God spoke to him. The word *dabar* tells us that the discussion was real and consisted of actual speech.

God said that as far as He was concerned the promise had already been made (predestinated),

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that Abram would be the father of many nations. As a token of this fact, his name would be changed from Abram to Abraham. You may remember that 'Abram' means 'exalted father'. Now, his new name, *Abraham*, would mean 'father of a multitude'. As scripture shows, a person's 'name' is far more than what he is called: it includes everything about him.

Thus, to call on the 'name' of Jesus is much more than repeating His name like a parrot (as do charismatics, Romanists, etc); it is to call upon everything that Christ stands for. Here, Abram was to be called Abraham, which denotes his new status as chief of a nation, plus his spiritual life and walk with God.

The new nation that would come from Abraham would bring kings as well as others, and his life would be one of fruit and good, including wealth. God said that He would 'establish' or confirm, *quwm*, this promise to future generations: that is 'forever' and continuously. Make no mistake, the promises made to Abraham and resultant Jews ('thy seed') did not end with Christ; they will continue to the end of time.

However, note the condition – their obedience and holiness. When Israel rejected Christ 2000 years ago, they lost the presence of God and the mantle of witnessing, but they did not lose the promise. A child can be placed in a prison for many years and still be the son of loving parents! In His word God promised that, one day, the mantle will be returned to the Jews (that is, those who are obedient and are saved) and they would be returned to His favour.

Here, God definitely promises the land of Canaan to the coming new nation. You will note that the land would be theirs forever. The modern political move to remove the land from the Jews is therefore unscriptural. The Jews own the land under God. This is separate from their duty to obey Him, though that duty continues to be a requirement... not as Jews under the old law and Jewish religion, but as 'spiritual Israel', people saved by grace alone.

Verses 9-14

1.

"And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

2.

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This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

3.

And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.

4.

And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.

5.

He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

6.

And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.”

As a sign of their status before God, all Jews had to receive a mark of their uniqueness – male circumcision. This is because the male is the head of the woman, and so marking the male also marked the woman by proxy. It was a mark that was to continue throughout all the days of Judaism. (Thus, today, it no longer applies, for Christ removed it Himself. This was why Paul hotly rebuked Peter, when the latter tried to tell new converts that they also had to be circumcised).

Each male child had to be circumcised (*muwl*, ‘cut off’ the foreskin) at the age of 8 days. This was to be the ‘token’ or sign of God’s promise to the Jews. Note that it was only a sign of a promise – it did not itself bestow eternal life on the bearer. In this way a Jew would be identified as such by the sign, but bearing the sign did not guarantee his salvation. To have salvation he had to be elected, and would show his election by his obedience. In other words, it was not his

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birth or his doing of rituals that made a Jew right with God, but his election and acting out of that election in obedience.

Circumcision applied not just to a Jew born in a Jewish family, but also to a 'stranger' ('not of thy seed') 'bought with money' who is not Jewish to begin with. That is, a servant or slave from another nation. In this way a bond existed between man and man, and was a sign of the bond between man and God. You will notice that if a man was uncircumcised, it would separate him from his fellow Jews. We are not told that it would separate him from God, though such might be implied.

In the same way, if a Jew is saved by grace, he will already have been circumcised. The circumcision will not have saved him, and he will join with other Christians who have not been circumcised. Yet, those non-Jews will be saved nevertheless. Remember, circumcision is only a sign that someone is born a Jew. It does not make that Jew acceptable to God for purposes of salvation.

Verses 15-22

1.

"And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.

2.

And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

3.

Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

4.

And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!

5.

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And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

6.

And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.

7.

But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

8.

And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.”

After this momentous statement, God then tells Abraham that his wife’s name would also be changed, from Sarai (‘princess’) to *Sarah* (‘noblewoman’ or ‘noble lady’). She would be blessed by God by being the mother of nations and of kings. A more immediate promise was given, that she would conceive a son.

Again, Abraham fell prostrate on the ground, but this time he laughed. The word, *tsachaq*, includes the idea of mocking. Abraham did not laugh out loud but laughed inwardly, yet God knew his thoughts. It is evident that Abraham made a show of his subjection to God by laying flat on the ground, but his mind could not accept this promise as really applicable to himself. How could he, a man of nearly 100, and a wife of 90, possibly produce a child! (Really, a stupid question to ask of God!).

Then, as if to dismiss God’s promise, Abraham said “Please bless my son Ishmael”! In His mercy, God ignored this very human reaction and repeated His promise; “Sarah your wife shall have a son, and shall name him Isaac. (*Yitschaq*, ‘he laughs’ – a reference to Abraham’s unbelief).”

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God repeated that He would confirm the promise of nationhood to Isaac. "As for Ishmael" said God, "I have blessed him". God had already blessed Ishmael before, and so He repeats the promise again, that Ishmael, too, would be fruitful. His descendants would include 12 princes and a great nation (e.g. Arabic). Even so, the promise would only rest with Isaac and the coming Jews, and this same Isaac will be born in due time the following year.

God then 'left off', *kalah*, finished talking, with Abraham, and 'went up from' him. 'went up' can mean to ascend, but the proper term would be that God 'withdrew' from talking. It was certainly an act of grace for God to ignore Abraham's mirth, which was itself unbelief, but with God a promise made on earth has already been made in heaven (see the New Testament, where Peter is told that whatever he binds on earth has already been bound in heaven, etc). Therefore, the promise stands, whether or not a man believes it to be true or real.

Verses 23-27

1.

"And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.

2.

And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

3.

And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

4.

In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son.

5.

And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were

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circumcised with him.”

Following this great promise, Abraham collected together everyone in his household and told them what God had said. Then, the males were circumcised immediately. Abraham, too, was circumcised, at the age of 99. Ishmael was 13. It is interesting that though Ishmael was to be the ‘father’ of the Arabs, he was still circumcised, even as Muslims are today. *(God said He would look after the seed of Ishmael, even though they would later oppose the Jews. However, there is a big difference between antagonism between nations and the imposition of terrorism. Thus, God’s promises to look after Ishmael’s seed – Arabs – does NOT include looking after Islam, or its terroristic adherents, or its hatred for Israel).*

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