

# Genesis

Creation, Covenants, All Grace – study 16



*But he who was of the bondwoman was born **according to the flesh**,  
and he of the freeman **through promise**.*

-- Gal. 4:23 (NKJV) emphasis added

## The SEED after the FLESH (16:1-16)

**16:1-6** *The logical way is not necessarily the Divine way. Catalogue the results of Sarai's (and Abraham's) impatience*

(1) The most deeply-taught believer is not exempt from the temptations, weaknesses, and tendencies of the old sinful nature. ... Sarah's motives were undoubtedly good, and we may fully believe that Abraham was actuated in the same way, and yet their actions were manifestly wrong. How frequently this remarkable combination of good motive and bad conduct occurs in history and daily life! The end does *not* justify the means, whatever people may say. -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *Genesis 1-25* pp. 197-198

(2) ... he had slipped from faith, to be guided by reason and *the voice of Sarai* (2), not of the Lord (*cf.* Mt. 16:22f.). The New Testament likens Hagar's son, 'born after the flesh', to the products of self-effort in religion (Gal. 4:22ff.), ever incompatible with those of the spirit (Gal. 4:29). -- **Derek Kidner**, *Genesis* p. 126

**The fruit, not of  
faith, but reason –  
the wild-ass man**

**16:7-12** *How has the fleshly decision made by Abram come back to haunt even the children of the promise?*

(3) *The far-reaching effects of a believer's sin.* -- Evil-doing on the part of a child of God is perhaps the very worst thing that can happen, and often has very widespread effects. It has been well pointed out by a modern writer that the existence of Mohammedanism to-day is really to be traced to Abraham's false

step; Mohammedanism which is in some respects the deadliest opponent of Christianity. Isaac and Ishmael still struggle in fierce opposition. -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *op. cit.*, p. 198

(4) The father of the faithful had begotten a wild-ass man instead of a child of grace. This is God's judgment on the fruit of self-effort. -- **Donald Grey Barnhouse**, *Genesis* p. 129

**16:13-16** *According to Hagar's understanding, who is 'the Angel of the LORD' (vv. 7,9,10,11)?*

(5) It is clear from the above that the angel of Yahweh is a visible manifestation (either in human form or in fiery form) of Yahweh that is essentially indistinguishable from Yahweh himself. The angel of Yahweh is more a representation of God than a representative of God. In the words of R. North, "*mal'ak* means representation, as a 'presence' or manner of rendering oneself present, rather than the specific form of this representative which is messenger." -- **Victor Hamilton**, *The Book of Genesis* p. 451

## ... NEW NATURE, NEW NAMES

### The ABRAHAMIC COVENANT EXPANDED (17:1-8)

**17:1** *What is the significance of the NEW NAME now revealed to Abraham? (Ex. 6:3)*

(6) In five of the six places in Genesis where El Shaddai is used, the name is followed by the promise of posterity. The one exception is 43:14. And three times (28:3; 48:3; 49:25) the activity of El Shaddai is described with the verb *barak*, "bless." -- **Victor Hamilton**, *op. cit.*, p. 463

(7) In Genesis it tends to be matched to situations where God's servants are hard-pressed and needing reassurance. -- **Derek Kidner**, *op. cit.*, p. 129

**17:2-8** *How are the chapter 12 promises expanded?*

(8) It may be no accident that the word *eternal* is present in ch. 17 but absent in ch. 15. Is it not interesting that in the chapter where at least four covenant stipulations are placed before Abraham -- walk before me; be blameless; keep my covenant; circumcise yourselves -- the covenant should be thrice described as an *eternal* one? This repetition of *eternal* emphasizes that God's covenant with Abraham has not suddenly shifted away from the unilateral emphasis of ch. 15 to a bilateral pact here in ch. 17. To be sure, God has expectations concerning Abraham's behaviour, but these do not become

**El Shaddai's  
covenant  
– Thrice-eternal**

grounds for the establishment and authentication of God's covenant with Abraham. Rather, the covenant remains a personal commitment by God in which he binds himself to this open-ended promise to Abraham. -- **Victor Hamilton**, *op.cit.*, p. 465

## **The SIGN of the COVENANT (17:9-27)**

**17:9-14** *Although circumcision is the sole stipulation of the covenant, what is implied by this singular sign?*

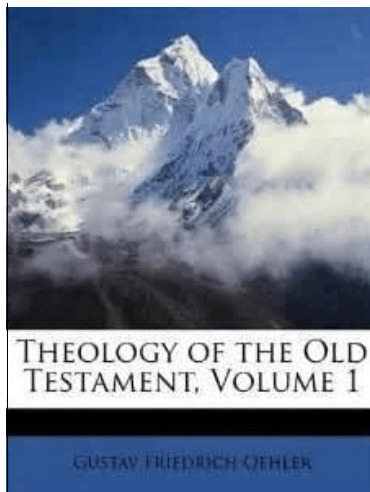
(9) The act as God set it before Abraham, was to be a mark upon the bodies of all His people, as a sign that they were to cut away all things in their life which might hinder them from being fruitful. ... If we long to bear fruit for the Lord in our lives, we must follow all the steps that have brought Abraham to this point. We

### ***EL SHADDAI* – new Name, new blessings**

It is no longer the powerful Divinity ruling in the world in general that is El-shaddai, but the God who testifies of Himself in *special deeds* of power, by which He subdues nature to the ways of His kingdom, making the childless Abraham the father of many nations (Gen. xvii. 1, xxviii. 3, comp. xxxv. 11), and who causes that race with which He has entered into covenant to experience His powerful presence in protection and blessing ... -- **Gustav Friedrich Oehler**, *op.cit.*, p. 91

The use of 'El to denote God is a feature of the patriarchal period; it emphasizes the greatness and sublimity of God, which emphasis is perhaps found even more strongly in 'El Shaddai ... A study of the names of God in Israel leads to the conclusion that they lay particular stress on the Majesty of God's Being: 'elyon, shaddai, 'adon, ba'al and melek as well as 'elohim. -- **Th.C. Vriezen**, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* pp.196-97

Though God's POWER dominates his designations so far, now God's GRACE is paramount. Nothing in Abraham, nor his offspring, merits God's faithfulness, His covenant will be **eternal** (17:7) -- an unconditional promise The people of Yahweh was established by divine grace and survives only through his continuing mercy. -- *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, editors: **G. Johannes Botterweck & Helmer Ringgren** p. 518



must learn to know God in His glory, power and provision. We must trust Him as our shield and reward and as the source of all supply. He must breathe His Spirit into us, changing our name and our nature. Then the knife must be applied to our flesh so that we die to self, and mortify the deeds of the body. Only then shall we bring forth fruit unto God. -- **Donald Grey Barnhouse**, *op.cit.*, p. 137-139

**17:15-18** *Despite this staggering reassertion regarding the supernatural nature of the covenant, how is Abraham shown to be clinging to his old nature?*

(10) He does not in vain prefix the declaration that he is 'the Almighty God,' and is furnished with power to help his own people: because it was necessary that Abram should be recalled from all other means of help, that he might entirely devote himself to God alone. -- **John Calvin**, *The Book of Genesis* p. 443

**17:19-27** *Though the covenant of promise is only through Isaac, how does God honour Abraham?*

(11) The blessing of Ishmael has carried with it the most terrible results of the centuries. Out of Ishmael came two horrible things -- both of them great hindrances to the people of God. For out of Ishmael came the Arab race, which today bars the advance of Israel, the rightful owner of the land which God swore should belong to Isaac and his descendants. And from Ishmael came Islam which is the strongest threat to the advance of Christianity the world has ever seen. -- **Donald Grey Barnhouse**, *op.cit.*, p. 142

***A question for Christians today:***  
**Have we**  
**‘taken the knife to our flesh’?**