

WHAT ARE YOUR ISHMAELS?

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In Genesis 17 the Lord is having a conversation with Abraham regarding His promise to Abraham that his progeny would be as endless as the stars in the heaven. When you consider that Abram is now 99 years old the limits of his faith are being stretched. He had been given this promise when he was 85 and the Scriptures record Abram's response that the Apostle Paul later receives a revelation on regarding justification by faith—"And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6).

But 14 years have now passed. Ishmael is 13 years old and even though Abraham {God changes both his and Sarah's names in this chapter (Genesis 17)} knows that the Lord explicitly told him 14 years before that Ishmael would not be the promised child it is becoming harder and harder to stand in faith because he is now 99 years old and 99 year olds do not give birth to children to a mother who is 90.

The great Apostle Paul penned by the Spirit words that Abraham and we today in the Church have the most difficulty believing—"We walk by faith, not by sight." That's why it is so important for you to develop the Eye of the Eagle as we continue to impress upon Christians—if you don't develop your spiritual eyes like Elisha did you will never know what is going on in the spirit realm and will always be unsure of God's plans for you.

In Genesis 17 God is reiterating His covenant promises to Abraham and says, "I have made you the father of a multitude of nations." Notice the tense—it's already done! When was it done? It was done 14 years before when Abraham was 85 years old and God made him the promise.

And even though the Word declares that Abraham "believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness" he still allowed Sarah to talk him into having relations with her servant, Hagar, which gave birth to Ishmael. And even though Abraham has had 13 years of a relationship with Ishmael he's been told that this child was *not* the promised child.

So notice Abraham's reaction when the Lord appears to him (and Sarah) at age 99. The Lord—as He always does—knows it's a "done deal" because He has spoken the Word which must come to pass. But He wants to reveal further matters regarding the covenant to Abraham so He discusses the need for circumcision for all of the male children in his household. This time Abraham responds to the promise by falling on his face and thinking thoughts which are not of faith—"Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Genesis 17:17)

As a result of this erroneous *thinking* Abraham responds to God with this statement that you should meditate on for a bit: "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" What is he doing? Ishmael was a child of the flesh, not the child of promise. Abraham is tired; he's old; he's tired of standing in faith for this child of promise that never seems to come. So he makes a plea to God to just forget about God's plan and "go with Ishmael." After all, Ishmael is already a part of the family and he's now a teenager. Abraham is asking God to follow Abraham's plans and use this child of the flesh to bring about God's covenant plans and this can never be done.

A child of flesh will always be at odds with the child of promise—this is why the Arabs are still trying to destroy Israel. And we must learn as Abraham did that our plans of the flesh can never accomplish the will of the Lord which must be according to Zechariah 4:6.

Yet we tend to do the same thing as Abraham did in our own lives. In fact, most churches (not the true Church that I always capitalize since it represents the plans and will of the Lord Jesus and not the doctrines of men and demons) are living proof that Ishmael is still alive—they are churches of the flesh and not the Spirit of the Lord. The Lord Jesus cannot even get into them as depicted in Revelation 3:20 of this Church age because Jesus is having to knock and ask to come inside the doors of the church that He died for and purchased yet He cannot get in for they are worshipping their own Ishmaels inside the doors.

Nowhere do we see this more clearly than in the Book of Acts which is the only book to learn about the early Church—how it was birthed and how it functioned and grew through prayer, boldness and the teaching of the Apostles and full functioning Five-fold ministers and deacons. Most churches today have departed from that model.

I wrote a teaching article a week ago on the website titled: "A True Disciple." If you've not read it you should do so now because the rest of this blog will deal with what the Lord showed me this morning from Acts 14 regarding the early Church and what Paul and his friends and disciples accomplished. So it's very, very important that you understand Jesus' definition of a true disciple.

This is important because it goes to the very foundation of what every *true* church should be doing—the Great Commission which is stated clearly in Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus is the Head

of the Church and He is supposed to be your Lord as well as your Savior. He has commanded us to: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

I believe if you are honest you will admit that few churches are doing this—they’re certainly not “making disciples.” A disciple is a disciplined one, especially where the Word and prayer are concerned. A disciple comes to know the truth and is thus “free” by study and meditation in the Word and Jesus’ commands.

Now if the early Church functioned under Five-fold authority and was governed by the Apostles then why should the Church today be any different? Should we not see all five offices that Jesus established and Paul wrote about in Ephesians 4 functioning together in the churches today? We should but we don’t. Instead we see various Ishmaels and Ishmael models on display.

Notice what the Lord showed me this morning from Acts 14:21-23 regarding the Apostle Paul and those who worked with him as missionaries or apostles—“sent ones”:

1. They preached the gospel in every city (v. 21). That means they preached the genuine gospel and not some “campmeeting” type perverted gospel designed after the flesh of Ishmael to bring in funds so they can continue this abomination and try to make this Ishmael “live before thee.” These Balaam Boys as I call them (though many are girls as well) try to make foolish Christians who aren’t disciples give them money by claiming that they speak for God which is contrary to Scripture—Ishmael, like the “strange fire” offered by Aaron’s sons before the Lord, can never “live” in the sight of the Lord—He established the Church and He designed it to function through leadership as we will see later. There are so many *false* gospels being preached in the world today—many more than churches who preach the true gospel.
2. As a result of preaching and teaching the doctrine of the Apostles they “made many disciples” (v.21). That is why Paul was often in a city for over a year preaching and teaching—it takes time to develop a disciple. Just because you get saved doesn’t make you a disciple—you need to be trained and established in the Word and the apostle’s doctrine (*cf.* Acts 2:42). You need to be taught how to flow in the Holy Spirit and how to pray effectively. It takes a lot of time and teaching to become a real disciple. That’s why we need genuine training centres today to teach and train disciples for Five-fold ministry.
3. Through this discipleship they were able to “strengthen the souls of the disciples” (v. 22).
4. They were used by the Spirit to “encourage them to continue in the faith” (v.22)

5. **“Saying that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God” (v. 22).** Part of encouragement is the truth that I’ve preached many times for decades—“Jesus never said it would be easy. He’s got work to be done and He’s looking for true disciples to accomplish that work but He never said it was going to be easy. He didn’t have an easy life—he was beaten nearly to death and then had to get up and go to the Cross to suffer in the sun and “be lifted up” to fulfill the Scriptures.
6. **They “appointed elders for them in every church.”** God works through and by leadership. Jesus established the Church and left it in the hands of the 12 apostles as leaders who “ruled and reigned” spiritually in the place of Jesus as His representatives on the earth to build the Church that He had died for. But there were also prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers—the other four offices of the Five-fold ministry that Paul writes about in Ephesians 4. And you will notice from Ephesians 4:11-16 that the true Church requires Five-fold ministry in order to “make disciples,” etc. that the Lord has called us to do in the Great Commission. Also notice that this did not “pass away after the original 12 apostles died” as we’ve heard for years. No, the Word plainly says, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith” so Five-fold ministry is required in each new generation in order to accomplish this task.
7. **“Through prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”** Every true church should be committed to fasting and prayer yet few are today. When we lived in Austin I was a member of the Austin Area Ministers Association. We’d meet for lunch once a week for a luncheon and have speaker. Ministers and their wives attended and a different church would host the even each month. This was good and it helped fellowship. This occurred on the first Tuesday of the month. The following Thursday one of the hotels in town had given us free of charge a suite that looked out over the City of Austin so we could pray for the city. Though hundreds always attended the luncheon on Tuesday the most I ever saw come to prayers on Thursday there were 7. I think that explains why the city of Austin is in the shape that it’s in.

In 2011 the Lord allowed us to go on Christian T.V. here in America for the first time. We flew to Florida and rented a car. As Eve, the kids and I were driving through the South the Holy Spirit spoke something to me that is indeed a simple revelation to understand. While driving I turned to Eve and said, “You can always tell when you’re driving in the South because every few blocks there’s a police car and a church. Here’s the question—with all of these churches in town, how come the devil is still in charge of this community?”

I believe the reason is obvious—and it’s because of something the Lord said to me in October, 1991, “The Church is not being led by the Holy Spirit—it’s being led by religious spirits.” Religious spirits will always get you or your church to erect an Ishmael because they know

there can be no anointing for Ishmael and they're afraid of the anointing. It's also why the Holy Spirit told me in June, 1997, "Never judge a church or ministry by how big it is or how much money they have—you only judge it by the anointing."

I want to encourage you today to *be* a true disciple and to follow the original Church model set up in the Book of Acts that Paul followed.

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