

## CGYG & LIFE Bible Study – Genesis 16-17

### Read Genesis 16:1-16

-God had promised Abram a great number of descendants, but Sarai was still childless. What was her plan to rectify that situation? Why do you think she made up this plan?

-Why did Sarai blame Abram after Hagar conceived, even though it had been her suggestion? How did Abram respond, and how do you think God would judge between them?

-How & why does God's promise regarding Ishmael (16:9-12) differ from His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3,7? (You might also consider Genesis 17:18-21)

-What do we learn about God from His dealings with Hagar and Ishmael in this passage?

God's word in Genesis 16:9-12 regarding Ishmael and his descendants began to be fulfilled within Ishmael's own lifetime (Genesis 25:12-18) and continues to be fulfilled to this day in the Arab nations, who claim to be descended from Ishmael.

### Read Genesis 17:1-27

Genesis 17:1 marks the first use of the name, 'El Shaddai' (God Almighty) in the Bible.

-In v.2, God says He will confirm His covenant with Abram. What is a covenant? (Review Genesis 15:1-21)

-What was the covenant that God made with Abram in Genesis 15? How does He expand on this covenant in Genesis 17:1-8?

-For his part, what did God demand of Abraham?

-Why did God rename Abram and Sarai?

-What is circumcision, and what does it signify? Did being circumcised automatically set a person in right relationship with God as one of His covenant people? (consider also Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4 & 9:25-26; Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:9-12; Romans 4:1-3,9-12)

-What did God tell Abraham with respect to his offspring in v.15-21? How did Abraham respond? (see also Romans 4:18-21)

### **Aliens and strangers in the world**

Circumcision was given to Abraham and his descendants as a sign of the covenant that God made with him. It would be a permanent reminder to him and his descendants after him of the promises God made to Abraham. Those who rejected this sign were therefore rejecting the promises of God and so were cutting themselves off from His blessing. Yet, from the beginning, circumcision was meant not only to be an external sign and a 'badge of national membership', but was meant to point to a greater spiritual reality – to the need for the inner purification and cleansing necessary for a life of obedience to God. Hence, circumcision was not meant to be only outwardly, but a 'circumcision of the heart', a cutting off of the old, sinful nature so that we might follow God. Thus, while circumcision marked entry into the community of God's people, those who were circumcised outwardly but whose hearts remained uncircumcised would ultimately face God's judgment rather than His blessing (Jer. 9:25-26). As the apostle Paul writes, "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God." (Rom 2:28-29)

For us who believe in Christ, baptism has superseded circumcision as the sign of the New Covenant. Yet, the same truth remains that the external sign of the covenant has lasting value only for those who have had their hearts circumcised by Christ at the Cross, through the putting off of the old sinful nature (Col. 2:9-12). Though we were once dead in the uncircumcision of our sinful natures, God made us alive with Christ, forgiving all our sins, nailing them to the Cross (Col. 2:13-14). As Abram was given a new identity, so also we who have been raised with Christ have a new identity in Him. And as Abraham responded in obedience, so also must we respond, walking no longer in the ways of the sinful nature, but walking instead in obedience to God. "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." (Col. 3:1-2)