

Elder Vernon Johnson

Numbers

Two

Ishmael & Isaac Witness of Two Births

Gal. 4:22 "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise." Based on this passage of scripture there can be no doubt but that the birth of Ishmael and the birth of Isaac represented two types of births.

Ishmael's birth was after the flesh. When Abraham took the bondwoman and had a child by her, this child was born after the flesh. His birth was no different in the action that brought it about than any other child born into the world by natural generation.

In contrast, the birth of Isaac was by promise. It was typical of the spiritual birth in that the spiritual birth is also by promise. God promised to Abraham when he was old and well stricken in years that his barren wife Sarah, who was way past child bearing age, that he would restore them both to the time of life and that Sarah would bear a son at the set time in the next year.

According to Rom. 4:18-21, it was said of Abraham, "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." Thus, Isaac was born according to God's promise. He was born at God's set time. He was born contrary to nature.

Gal. 4:28 "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." Like Isaac's birth, our spiritual birth is according to God's covenant promise in the covenant of redemption (Rom. 8:28-30). Furthermore, our spiritual birth is according to God's set time: John 3:8 "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Additionally our spiritual birth is

contrary to nature: John 6:63 "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

Another great lesson illustrated in the births of Ishmael and of Isaac is that man wants to help God out. God had been promising to Abram that he would be a father of many nations and that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed and in his seed all families of the earth would be blessed. All the time that God had been making these promises Sarai was barren and had gone past normal child-bearing age. Sarai proposed a plan to Abram: Gen. 16:1 "Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai." Abram went along with this plan in an attempt to help God fulfill his promises. Consequently, Ishmael was born after the flesh. Ishmael's birth, however, did not fulfill the promises of God.

Just as Abram and Sarah attempted to help God fulfill his promises, men today think that God cannot save someone from sin or cause someone to be born again unless man helps him out. The birth of Isaac shows the utter foolishness of such thinking. God does not need nor require man's help in order to fulfill his promises. When Abraham was unable to assist in any way to bring about God's promises, then God performed his promises. The same is true today.