

10434

ISAAC, WE BRETHREN, AS ISAAC WAS, ARE CHILDREN OF PROMISE

Speaker: Bro. Jim Cowie

Study #1: Children of Promise - is anything too hard for God?

Reading: Genesis 17

Thanks bro. Sam, my beloved brethren and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ and especially our dear young people.

It is a pleasure for us to be back here in our second home, to spend the last week or so of 1996 with you around the Word of God. It has been, b&s and young people, in many ways a momentous year. For some, it has been a year of destiny; I guess most of you are aware that about 3:30 pm on the 3rd of December, a Tuesday afternoon, a young brother known to many of you perhaps, and certainly known very well to us in Queensland, went out for his last job of the day! He had an occupation that is very dangerous at any time, but he was working in particularly difficult country, country that had him agitated on the Sunday that he spent at our meeting just two days before. He went to lop the head off a tree that had been felled earlier in the day, and the work had been forestalled by a storm which is not uncommon in Queensland at this time of the year. His brother, at the funeral, was to later say to me, that it would not have mattered who went to lop the head off that tree on that afternoon. They were going to die! The tree had fallen and lain against a stump which was under the log and could not be seen from the top side on the slope. And the enormous weight of the head, was ready to spring like a bow as the saw cut through a log that was something like 900 mm, or 3 feet for those who are older, thick. And when the time came, the breath was snuffed from the body of our brother. He was not to return home that evening to his young wife and to their 4 children all under the age of 8; he was to be laid in the ground, just 3 days later amidst an outpouring of sorrow that I have not seen for some considerable time. I guess the shockwaves of that, b&s and young people, have travelled through all parts of the ecclesial world in Australia, but they had a particularly deep affect upon the ecclesia and to ecclesias to which we belong in Queensland; I say that because bro. Ross McKinnon was a member of the Wilston ecclesia. He grew up in the Sunday School and the young peoples' group over which I had something to do as a leader in bygone years; and to see the life of a young man, 31, snuffed out like that, and to leave behind a family and a grieving mother, not to mentioned a deeply saddened father and family, was to know that our opportunities for service are limited. Our life is but as a vapour that can be blown away in a moment, and we don't have time, b&s and young people, to be playing around and fooling around with the time that God has given us, and yet, 1996 has been one of the most tragic years that I've experienced!

It would have been lovely to have spent the time, preparing for this series of studies over my desk, but I haven't been allowed that time. Like many other brethren, a lot of my time goes on, chasing after problems; I'm a big enough problem to myself, b&s, we have got some enormous problems! We know that we're in the last days, we know that we're at the end, and it comes down to this, it's a question of whether or not, we as individuals not to mention the community, but just looking at us as individuals, Whether we as individuals are going to survive to the end? I believe, many of us will, because many of us realize that the source of our strength is in this Word, and that's why we've gathered here on this occasion. And that's why we open it every day and imbibe its principles; we know that our salvation depends upon keeping this Word locked away in that mind, so that the thinking can at least be kept, for the most part, on higher things! But there are some who are not doing that, there are some who have left our ranks in 1996, and for all the lessons we've learned from laying to rest our young brother, there are some who were not there to learn those lessons! And just last weekend, at our breakup at Wilston for our young people, a series of slides were shown at the end of the activities, set to music, no commentary, just music; a series of slides about the important events of 1996, and there were, of course, news reports about things going on in Russia and Israel and elsewhere. And interspersed amongst those, there were photographs; photographs of those that had been baptized during the year, and thankfully one of those was my own daughter, but there were also photographs, b&s and young people, of some who had left the truth, and there were several of them from our ecclesia alone. There were several of them, who in 1996 decided to throw in the towel, and to go out and get out of this world what they think they can get out of it! For whatever time remains, because they will tell you themselves that Christ is coming, they know He's coming! they know the truth's right, when you go and talk to them, they know the truth is right, but they're out there, trying to extract what they can out of this filthy, evil world, leaving the rest of us to go on! Resolutely, hopefully to the end, like I said, it's been a year of destiny for some, and when the judgment seat comes, b&s, and we all stand there, none of us with confidence in ourselves, but confidence in what God has been able to do in our lives, and that alone! When we stand there, and they stand there with us, and there will be many others from previous years as well, 1996 will have been a year, for some of them, a time of destiny!

The series of studies that we've put together, for the end of 1996, is based upon the life of Isaac. It's a lofty subject, b&s, as you'll see as we proceed, as our young people get their mind around this subject, they're going to see that it's a lofty subject. But it's got some very simple lessons to teach us, lessons for young people and for us who are further down the path towards the kingdom of God; and we will be talking about those lessons, God willing, in the days to come. We will not, b&s, be drawing away from the issues that face everyone of us! When we come to those issues in the Word of God, we will be plainly speaking about them. I see no point, after the year that we've had, I see no point whatsoever in using kid gloves, or ducking around the issues! As far as I'm concerned, when we come to the issues, you'll hear about it, and all of us will have to take stock, because the aims of this study are basically this: we're going to test, b&s and young people, the quality of our own personal relationship with our God. Now I guess, for some of the younger people, (I mean the younger young ones, those who

perhaps are coming along to this series of studies for the first time in their capacity as a young person, who's just reach the age to do so), perhaps some of those may not be able to say at this stage of their life and experience, that they even have a personal relationship with God. But, b&s and young people, that is the aim of the truth; we talk about God manifestation, and so we ought, it's the fundamental principle or doctrine of the bible. We talk about the Divine Name, we talk about our doctrinal base, we talk about the Atonement, but b&s, at the end of the day, when it comes to that point in time, when they lay your body in the grave, whether you're 31, 13, or 91, when it comes to that day, what will count is not how much you knew about the truth, or how much you knew about its doctrines, it comes back to this, it's what kind of relationship YOU PERSONALLY HAD WITH YOUR GOD!

Our brother didn't know on that day, a tree would spring back upon him and pin him to the bank of the hillside, and snuff the breath out of his body; but one thing I can say about that brother, he was uncomplicated (I use the term 'simple' not in terms of intelligence but simple in terms of the style of life that he lived), he lived out in the bush in the middle of nowhere, they ate from day to day, they had no bank balance, they lived in an unfinished house most of us perhaps would not even deign to live in, but they were content with that! When they laid him in the grave, b&s, a man whose life was uncomplicated, but all the things that are taking so many away today, at least in his last moments, he could say, that he wasn't entangled with the world. I can't speak for him personally, b&s, any more than you can speak for me, about the quality of his personal relationship with God, but at least he lived in circumstances that promoted that kind of thing; and we do know this, that regardless of who he worked with (and some of them were pretty rough, given the nature of the game) he was known to always give 'thanks' in their presence for the meals that they ate together. He was known to be unashamed about his convictions!

When it comes to the end, b&s, whenever that might arrive, all that matters is the quality of our personal relationship with God! Do we have one? Well, we're going to learn from this study that we need to have one, and we're going to learn how to get one, and how to maintain it! because we're going to look at a man who had one, a wonderful relationship not only with his God but also with his father, who stood in God's stead, as far as he was concerned in many ways! And secondly, we want to talk about our character development, in our current standing before our God in His truth. Where do we stand, b&s and young people at the end of 1996? what are the prospects for '97? Do we face it with the confidence, that if Christ is to come in that year, that we will be ready for Him? or is our life falling apart? Have we lost sight of the fundamentals? This is the issue that I see. All the problems we have to face, b&s, nowadays, come down to this, that people have got away from the fundamentals; the bible is a very simple thing, and if we follow its principles and we get the fundamentals right, that our life can be right, but when you get away from it and you complicate your life with all sorts of justifications as to why you can do this, when the bible says you should be doing the opposite, and people do that, we all do that, when you do that, b&s and young people, you are bound to get into trouble, and that's what's happening! We're getting away from the fundamentals. So we'll look at those issues as we proceed with our study.

But I guess if I had to say, what was the most important issue of this first study here this evening, it is couched in the title of this series. It's really getting down to the fundamental, the fundamental issue of how are we going to survive to the end! How each one of us, b&s and young people, are going to be in the kingdom? the title for this series is WE BRETHREN, AS ISAAC WAS, ARE CHILDREN OF PROMISE, you'll notice I haven't said 'are children of THE promise', which is the way the scripture, or at least the AV couches that phrase. I've said as it is in the literal Greek, we are children of promise, and we're going to explore what that means. Let me ask you, do you know what it means to be 'a child of promise'? Well, we're told that like Isaac was, we are children of promise. Does that have any meaning for you? does it have any impact upon your life? Well, we're going to try and find out what it means, and what kind of impact it ought to have upon our lives!

So let's then, at the outset, having laid those foundations as to where we hope to head in this series, now lay some further foundations which will help us as we proceed. And the first foundation, b&s and young people, is to remind ourselves as to who we really are, we are part of the divine family, are we not? And that, if I might use the term that is now loosely used amongst many, that is an awesome privilege! and I mean an awesome privilege. It's in the 11th chapter of Hebrews that the apostle Paul reminds us of that great privilege. Now we're all familiar with Hebrews chapter 11, the chapter of faith and the honour roll of faith. We see the summary of the faith of the patriarchs in verse 13, to which we shall return in due time, God willing, in our series; and we come down to verse 16 of Hebrews 11 and there we find the apostle saying this of the patriarchs: 'But now they desire a better country, that is a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city', or a corporation of people as the word 'city' implies. That's, of course, the perfected ecclesia, he's referring to, but the apostle makes the point in verse 16, that God is not ashamed to be called THEIR God. Now, as I guess many of you are or will be aware, the word 'called' there in the Greek is based upon the word 'kaleo' (Strong's - 2564), it has a prefix and a suffix, but 'kaleo' has the idea of 'calling upon or entitling'. There are 32 occurrences in the New Testament of this word, and on 11 occasions the word is translated 'surnamed'. It might be better to translate it that way here in verse 16, 'God is not ashamed to be surnamed their God'. Now we say, of course, that's because He's speaking about the patriarchs, that God has a surname which is based upon the name or names of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who have been the subject of Paul's writing up to this point.

So when you come back to that occasion when God actually gave Himself, or at least He explained to Israel His name, you find that He not only gave Himself the name 'Yahweh' but He gave Himself a surname as well! That's back in Exodus chapter 3, isn't it? so let's go back to Exodus 3, again it's a very familiar ground, but it lays an important foundation for our study. When Yahweh appears to Moses at the burning bush, at Exodus 3 and verse 14, He expresses to him His name, 'And Elohim said unto Moses, 'hayah, asher, hayah' (Strong's - 1961 & 834) I WILL BECOME WHOM I WILL BECOME', of course, expressing as we know, and as we teach even our Sunday

School scholars, that there in the declaration of that Divine Name, was the divine purpose of calling out a people from amongst the Jews and the Gentiles, that Yahweh might be manifested in them. I WILL BECOME, and we might add in the paraphrase, the word 'manifested'; I WILL BECOME manifested in them WHOM I WILL BECOME. People of my own choosing, whom I will form and fashion into my own likeness, and when men look upon them, they shall look upon me, and in those people I will walk, and I will be seen in them. That's the subject of course, of God manifestation, but He didn't stop there, did He?

Verse 15, 'And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, Yahweh Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my 'shem' (my name) by which I am made distinctive' (as the word 'shem' implies, Strong's - 8034). 'This is what sets Me apart and makes Me conspicuous; it's my name forever; and this is my memorial (or 'title' as the word could be rendered) unto generation of generation', to give the literal Hebrew. Who's the generation of generation? well, of course, it's another way of saying, those whom Yahweh has called to Himself, calling out of the Gentiles, as it were, a people for His name. And of this generation, b&s, around us, we are the generation of the generation; that's an awesome privilege. But in choosing the name, or should I say to be more accurate, the surname of verse 15, Yahweh has set forth the methodology, the process of redemption of that generation! You see, in choosing three patriarchs, He did so with precision; He could have chosen four or five or two or one, He didn't, He chose three. Why did He choose three? and, Why was it Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Well, we would say, it's obvious, it had to be Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Did it? Or was there in the selection in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that actually told you and me the process by which we would ultimately become members of the divine family. Well, I believe, as the transparency behind me demonstrates, that there was in the selection of the patriarchs, to form part of the surname of our God, a clear reference to the way that God would set out to redeem mankind.

Abraham, as we're going to see this evening, God willing, was to be delegated by God to be the father of the divine family. He was to have a son, born by the power of the Spirit, a man who is unique in the scheme of things, because he had to be, to set forth the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And from Isaac would come Jacob, out of whom would come a multitude of people through the 12 tribes of Israel. So as our transparency demonstrates, we have: Abraham, the father; Isaac, the son; and, as a father and a son worked together, b&s and young people, the result was a divine family, a multitude. And that multitude consists of you and me, we are part thereof, and as Yahweh looked down the corridor of time, He could say, 'this is my title, this is my memorial unto generation of generations; and in every generation He's been at work, through His Son to produce a multitude. Now isn't that a staggering and awesome privilege? and everyone of us in this place tonight has been called to be part of it! Simple in a way, isn't it? but wonderful, absolutely wonderful! And as we go through this study and we see a father and a son working so closely and beautifully together, in a way that is rarely seen today, very rarely seen between father and son, we're going watch, b&s, Yahweh Himself at work, and gain a greater appreciation of what He's done

for us, that we might be part of that multitude, that He was setting out to produce in His Son.

You know, that surname 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob' just happens to occur 12 times in scripture; I don't think that's an accident, is it? 12 times, the number of Israel, the number you might say of the divine family, and so, b&s and young people, when the Lord Jesus Christ came to that crucial hour, John chapter 17, the hour was come, this was what was on His mind, as Father worked with Son, and Son co-operated with Father, and as we shall see, God willing, on Monday evening, 'they went both of them together', to the work of redemption. As He stepped out, b&s, into the harshness and the cold of that night, to be rounded up, and to be thrust before the Sanhedrin and Pilate and Herod, and abused, this is what was on His mind: John 17 verse 1, 'He lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son' (you see, you've got a Father and a Son). What were they doing? and He says then, 'that thy Son may also glorify Thee; And as Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him', so there's Father and Son and many who would come through the work of Father and Son; and throughout this grand prayer, b&s and young people, we know, of course, that He often mentions the Name. Verse 6, 'I have manifested thy Name'; verse 11, 'keep through thy own Name; verse 12, 'while I was in the world, I kept them in thy Name'; verse 26, 'and I have declared unto them thy Name'. He had upon His mind, b&s, not only the name, Yahweh (He who will become), but the surname as well, because that surname expressed the work of the Father working through the Son, for a multitude, that they might be one, even as we are One.

We are beginning to see how lofty this subject could be, now I don't know how often that it is, that you've heard a study on the life of Isaac. I haven't heard too many in my experience in the truth, but when I came to look at it, b&s and young people, I found out this, that there are some absolutely beautiful secrets in the life of Isaac; and many of those secrets are hidden because they don't actually have any scripture. There's no scripture! there's just silence, absolute silence, yet there's great beauty in the silence! because the silence is deliberate, and what God hasn't said, at least in the early part of the life of Isaac, what He hasn't said about that man is deliberate that He might demonstrate in Isaac, what He Himself was going to do in His Son. It's wonderful, it's beautiful, it's powerful, b&s and young people, and we'll come to that in due time, God willing.

Well, let's take another platform in our foundation, let's come to Galatians chapter 4, and have a look at where we take our title from. In Galatians chapter 4 we read in verse 28, (We won't look at the surrounding context so much except to mention that it is part of the allegory which the apostle Paul speaks of, and we perhaps will speak more about this later on, we won't complicate it at this point by going into the allegory. He's talking about Isaac and Ishmael and their respective mothers, and what they represent. But the passage we want is in verse 28 and perhaps verse 29), 'Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise'. The first thing you should do, is cross out the definite article before the word 'children' (it's not there in the text, and it shouldn't be there),

because it does actually take away the meaning of that phrase. If I say to you that you are the children of the promise, you say, well, the promise he's referring to is the Abrahamic promise; of course, you'd be right but you've missed what he's trying to say! When you look at the context, he's talking about the birth of two sons, Isaac from Sarah and Ishmael from Hagar. Now Ishmael had no problem being born. There was union between Abraham and Hagar and Ishmael was the product of it! No problem, it was just automatic in the ordinary line of things amongst human beings. But that wasn't so with Isaac, Abraham and Sarah waited years, decades, for him to be born; he was in every sense of the term, a child of promise; do you get the idea of that? If you don't, just hang on, it'll become more obvious in a moment!

Verse 29, 'But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now', so what we've got here in Ishmael is flesh, and in Isaac Spirit, so when the realm of the activity of human life, when God enters the arena of our life, He brings, of course, into our life, spirit, spiritual things, and by the power of His Word He takes control of our thinking, and our mind is dominated by divine principles which are able, at least in measure, to keep the flesh subdued; at least the flesh doesn't reign over us anymore. So you've got flesh and Spirit, one is natural, no problem! we're all born that way; I don't have any problem moving towards sin and carnality. Do you? It's absolutely as simple as falling off a log for me to get into trouble! my flesh has got a bias and it is determined to go the wrong way, that's natural to me! it's native to my flesh, as it's native to yours, and all the problems that I've got and that I see in others, can be traced back to that, to the extent, b&s, that the Spirit has entered our lives, and the power of God's Word dominates our thinking, so, at least God can in us, control the activity of flesh! Now that's pretty simple, isn't it? very simple. Do you know what, b&s, and young people, if my observations are correct, those who are no longer with us at the end of 1996, have either lost sight of it or never understood this simple fact; that when they were called to the truth, they were called to be 'children' of promise! and God said to them, and this is the promise that He made, I promise you that if you can get your head into this book, and keep it there on a daily basis, and imbibe it like the manna in the wilderness, with the same diligence that you show towards eating 3 meals a day, and you can keep my thoughts in your mind on a daily basis, I PROMISE YOU, I WILL GET YOU INTO THE KINGDOM!

There are some that don't believe that, or at least, the way they behave belies their professed belief. The truth's too hard, I just can't live it, say some; too many restrictions! whatever it is, the simple fact is, **THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THAT GOD IS STRONG ENOUGH TO BEAT THEIR FLESH!** That's what it comes down to, and there have been times in my life, b&s, as there have been in the lives of everyone, when I too have wondered about that. But if we can take on board the principles that this study on the life of Isaac are driving home to us, if we can see, b&s, what God did in the life of Isaac, and know that He's doing it for us, we'll have greater confidence to face 1997 and whatever this world might try and throw at us; and it is throwing at us some unbelievable wickedness. Unbelievable wickedness! And I'll be quite frank with you, I don't know how some of our young people who are in that stage of life where they are not really sure about where they're going (and we all go through this in our teenage years; this way or

that way, we're not really sure! we haven't been tipped over the edge) I don't know how they're surviving! This world is tossing up in every form of media, written, print, radio, television, video, you name it, an almost unbeatable array of blatant wickedness and evil. But I don't know how you can survive it unless you have your head every day in this book, and the facts are, b&s and young people, that some of us are not surviving it!

And that's where we come back to this simple thing, What's the quality of your personal relationship like with your God? What is it like? that's the bottom line, isn't it? In our studies of the life of Isaac, b&s and young people, will cause us to reflect deeply about that! Romans chapter 9, let's just consolidate what Paul has to say in Galatians 4. What he does in Romans 9 is to express in another way the same principles, in verse 6 of Romans 9 he says, 'Not as though the Word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children': (you see, he's talking about 'children', and he's saying, b&s, and young people, 'listen you can be born an Israelite, and there were millions of them, you can be born with a heritage, but it does not mean that you are a child of God!' That's the point he's making. Verse 7, 'Neither, (because they are the seed of Abraham), are they all children: but in Isaac shall thy seed be called' (those last few words, of course, are taken from Genesis 21:12 just after the weaning of Isaac and the dismissal of Ishmael.) Then in verse 8 he says, 'That is, They which are the children of flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son'. Now if we've got time, we're going to take you back to Genesis 18 and see where those words come from, they're the last part of verse 9 which is actually quoted from Genesis 18:10, and it's an important little phrase, 'At this time says God, I will come' (it's My work, I'm going to produce the results here) He's talking about the birth of Isaac, of course, as a child of promise, in a contra-distinction to the children of the flesh! And as I said, the leading exhortation out of that is this, that you can be born with a heritage! you can be born and raised and taught as a Christadelphian. As you come up through the Sunday School you learn all the first principles, at least learn some of them, and you get to the teenage years and you think you know the truth, doesn't mean you're a child of promise! If God is not at work personally in your life, if you do not understand that He's made a promise, that He can achieve in you what you cannot achieve in yourself; if you are not conscious of His presence, if you are not in communication with Him on a regular basis, by prayer and through reading of His Word, you can have all the heritage you like, you are not a child of promise!

And if my eyes tell me anything, and if my ears are a sound witness as the days roll by, more and more of us, b&s and young people, who have a heritage, do not appreciate it for what it is! I look out on a community of young people and brethren and sisters, and if time was to go on, next year, God willing, someone else will stand here and look out upon this community; but only you can decide whether or not, in 12 months time if we are here, you'll be a child of promise! I can't do that for you, I can't build your relationship with God, I can't remove from your life hypocrisy and duplicity; I have a battle to do it in my own life, and I don't succeed all the time. We stand alone in that, b&s and young people, we are absolutely alone in that, but we're not alone! We are

alone in terms of not being able to help the person next door form their relationship with God, that's up to them, but we're not alone if we have a relationship with God! because then we are truly children of promise. And we'll come back to the phrase in Genesis 18, from whence Paul draws his little passage here, 'at that time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son', in a moment we'll come back to that, and we'll see that that's where the second part of our title comes for this evening's session, is anything too hard for Yahweh? Is it?

Are any of our problems too hard for Yahweh? Is there any situation in life that overtakes us, that's too hard for Yahweh? Well, there isn't, b&s and young people, it just requires each one of us, to come to that turning point in life, to decide whether or not we'll be amongst children of flesh or children of spirit, the latter being children of promise! And if we can believe that God has the power to overcome the flesh in our lives, we will surrender to Him our will, (and that's required of us), an absolute surrendering of our own will. We will surrender to Him the time that is needed to turn to His Word on a daily basis, we will surrender to Him the energy that we often use on fleeting and foolish things, (especially when we're young), we will surrender to Him our mind, instead of surrendering it to the world, which is doing all in its power to capture our thinking and to make it shallow, and if I might say, hollow!

You see, b&s and young people, if we've got to that point in life, where we understand the issues involved here, and we are building our relationship with God as a nourishing Father, then there will be that kind of surrender, and only you can determine whether or not that surrender has been made. It's possible you know, it's possible to maintain a facade, it's possible to go around looking as if you observe the rules, it's possible as we've found out tragically this year, that you can go on for years like that, and it's all hollow because there's an essential ingredient missing, there's a lack of that close personal relationship with God which will not allow duplicity and hypocrisy; those two things cannot survive in that environment! So we look, b&s, at ourselves; young people, we look at ourselves, and if we're honest with ourselves we can see gaps that need to be filled. That's what this study is about!

Let's have a quick look at Yahweh, the family Builder! Genesis chapter 17. Now we haven't got time to look at Genesis 17 in any detail, but of course, it's the first time when Isaac appears in the record predominantly as the 'child of promise' and has a major impact upon the faith of Abraham. What we see in Genesis 17 verse 1, is the 5th promise that God makes (at least this is the 5th appearance and down in verse 4 He begins the 5th promise that He is to make to Abraham). And this is a very important appearance, b&s and young people, because on this occasion, Yahweh declares Himself to be 'a nourishing Father'. Verse 1, 'Abram was ninety and nine years old when Yahweh appeared to him, and He said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect'. God had waited for 24 years after Abraham was baptized, to bring him to that time when he could hand him the knife and say, 'Okay Abraham, you've got to a stage in your life where I am confident, that if I give you this knife by which you will circumcize the flesh of your foreskin and that of your family, I'm confident, Abram, that you understand the issues involved here'.

Why didn't He give him the knife 24 years before at baptism? Well, be honest with yourselves! when you were baptized (if you were baptized as a young person, as I was) had you really come to grips with the issue, of the real battle between flesh and spirit in your life? had you? Well, God waited for 24 years after Abraham was baptized, and He said now, 'here's the knife; use it on yourself'; but look what He said to him in verse 1, 'I am El Shaddai, walk before Me'. In the Hebrew, the two words 'halak' and 'paneh' means 'to walk as though in God's presence' (Strong's - 1980 + 6440) To walk as though you are before His face; 'be thou perfect', the word 'perfect' 'tamiym' (Strong's-8549) means to be 'entire, complete', has the idea of single-mindedness, sincerity and integrity, it's the kind of spirit that a person has when they have no fear to walk in the presence of God! They're not fearful because there is no hypocrisy; it wouldn't matter to them if God actually walked alongside of them (which of course, in effect, He does, we're just not conscious of it most of the time). But that's what God is saying to Abraham, 'Abraham, I've waited for this point in your life, I've been bringing you, stage by stage, through a process of development. And now I've got you to a point, Abraham, when I can give you a knife, and I'm telling you, I'm going to give you something else! I'm going to make you a father in My stead; I'm going to make you the father of the Divine family. And I can't make you a father in My stead, unless you're like Me; Abraham, you have developed a personal relationship with Me, I'm encouraging you now to keep it up; it's not going to be easy, Abraham, but keep it up!'

'I AM EL SHADDAI, walk as though in My presence and be complete', that's the framework in which the 5th promise is given. And it's the 5th promise which embraces the subject matter of the formation of the multitude who will be called out of the nations. And it is in this promise that Yahweh speaks of the birth of the son, Isaac. He delegates to Abraham his fatherhood, He makes a promise about the son, and He says, you'll be a father of a multitude of nations. He's talking about His surname, that's why He uses the title, El Shaddai; and as you can see from the transparency, El Shaddai is a title that has been rendered two different ways, but both have an application, unquestionably, as we shall see in a moment! But the primary meaning of the title 'Shaddai' is to be a 'nourishing Father', 'shad' is a word in the Hebrew which has reference to the breast, to a mother feeding a child, nourishing a child, and so that title's been rendered by bro. Thomas 'the strength of the nourishers' but, of course, the term 'shaddock' which is very closely related to 'shad' means to be 'burely or powerful', and bro. Thomas suggests that its meaning is 'the strength of the destroyers' (Strong's - 7699 + 7703).

In the next chapter, b&s and young people, three angels come to Abraham. Two of them go off to destroy Sodom, and Abraham is left in the presence of the preeminent angel amongst them, the personal representative of the Father; and while Yahweh is nourishing the divine family there at the tent of Abraham and Sarah, He is also in Sodom and Gomorrah as the strength of the destroyers! Those two meanings have got application, unquestionably to the context. But when we have a look, (and we haven't got time to pursue this here this evening), but the references we've given you there at the base of that transparency, Gen.49:25, maybe we could have a look at that one, maybe it won't do any harm to just quickly turn to Genesis 49 and verse 25, here in the prophecy of Jacob we read concerning Joseph, (we won't go into the surrounding

context) he says in verse 25, 'Even by the EI of thy father who shall help thee, and by the Almighty, or Shaddai, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts and of the womb', so he uses the title, EI Shaddai, again, in the context of producing a family; and this family is produced by a nourishing father, who takes upon Himself, not only the role of not only the father who produces the children, but of a mother who nourishes them! Of course, in Yahweh our God, the beautiful principles both of fatherhood and of motherhood are combined and unified in one Being.

Ever seen God quite like that, young people? Is that your conception of the God that you are attempting to forge a relationship with? I guess when we grow up, we tend to be taught by (I don't know if it's the education we receive in the truth, or in the family, whatever it is, but we do tend as children to grow up with a view of God as a fearsome Being, and He is, our God is a consuming fire! He was to show that when He went down to Sodom and Gomorrah, and the time will come, b&s, and especially, young people, the time will come when He will reappear as EI Shaddai, in the guise of the 'strength of the destroyers'. And He will come to burn up and to crush and to obliterate the filth and the corruption, and the wickedness and the vileness of this world in which we live, which are taking so many of our brethren away! Make no mistake about that, our God is a consuming fire; He hates and detests what this world is doing to His children! And the people who have been lost this year, and in previous years, haven't been lost because God wants to lose them, make no mistake about that! They've been lost because the Amalekites have cut their throats, and if you think that God is going to be kind to the Amalekites, then forget it, He won't be! But to us, He's a nourishing Father; I want you to think about that, because I'll tell you something; I've wrestled with this. When I sin against my God, (and you all sin against your God) I find it difficult to see Him as a nourishing Father; there's something in my flesh which tries to paint a picture of a vengeful God, 'How can God forgive me for that?' especially when you recycle a weakness. How can I possibly go back to God for that? I've been and talked to brethren and they'll tell you, I can't come back! That's the way our flesh works, b&s and young people, be aware of that, be aware that God is an avenger of those who are obdurate and stiff-necked, and those who will not turn; but remember this, He is a nourishing Father to those that will come back to him, on His terms! And He will nourish His children because they are children of promise! He's made a promise, I CAN BEAT IN YOU, WHAT YOU CAN'T BEAT IN YOURSELVES; come to Me, and let Me nourish you! If you think you can't beat that problem, come to Me, I can beat it! We, brethren, are children of promise as was Isaac!

Are you beginning to see what that means? Well, here He is, this nourishing Father (and as I said you can look at those passages and you will see, as you proceed, you'll see in places like Isaiah, he says in chapter 1, and verse 2, 'I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against Me'; let's hope we're not in that category! Brethren and sisters and young people, when you go home tonight and prepare for tomorrow morning's meeting, I want you to ask yourself a honest question; how much progress has God made in your life in forging a close personal relationship between Himself as a nourishing Father and a child of promise? How's He getting on? Well, I'll tell you something, if your answer to that is that not much progress has been

made or that we're going backwards, it is not His fault! The responsibility is entirely upon our shoulders. If we've got problems in that area, it is in our hands to do something about it; you don't have to be Einstein to do it, all you need, b&s and especially young people, all you need is the desire to do it, the desire to surrender your will, your self will, your selfishness. Because your flesh is like my flesh, it's saying, 'Why don't you do this? Why don't you indulge that? Why don't you go there? Why don't you copy that person? Why don't you read that? Why don't you flick that switch? it's all I, I, I, I, it comes back to that! You've got to surrender self-will and selfishness, then the Father can work!

And we see Him working with Abraham, beautiful b&s and young people, beautiful, the way He works. This is what I call the 'AS FOR' chapter, let me just show you, this is really a pity because we could spend 2 or 3 studies here and not exhausted it, but we haven't got 2 or 3 sessions. Have a look at verse 4 of Genesis 17. Ever wonder why it says this, this is the beginning of the promise, you see, it says in verse 3, 'That God talked with him saying', well, what does He say first? 'Abraham sit up and take notice', No, He didn't! look what He says in verse 4, 'As for Me, Abraham, everything I'm going to tell you, everything contained in the promises that I'm making to you, depends absolutely upon Me in the first instance; it's what I can do in your life. This is what I'm going to do, 'as for Me', but you have got responsibilities, Abraham'. So when we come down to verse 9, He says, 'God said to Abraham, thou shalt keep my covenant therefore', now if you go to a literal translation like Rotherham's for instance, this is how he translates that first phrase, 'But as for thee my covenant thou must keep', so whereas God said in verse 4, as for Me, He now turns to Abraham and says, 'Abraham, but as for you, here's a knife, now cut off your flesh'. Then He comes to Sarah, verse 15, He says, 'As for Sarai thy wife, she shall be called Sarah; and I will bless her and give thee a son of her', etc. Then Abraham, of course, falls upon his face, he laughs in belief, not unbelief, but belief that it would be so. And he said in his heart, verse 17, 'Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old, and shall (look what he says!) shall Sarah that is ninety years old, bear?' He had been calling his wife, Sarai, for a long time; I call my wife Margaret, and if I was to talk to her tonight and say, 'listen Mabel,' I would expect to be,, I don't know!. You see, Abraham immediately changes with God, because he has accepted everything that God has told him! but as for Me, Abraham, I can do it, and Abraham says back to God 'I know you can do it!'

What about Ishmael? Are you going to leave him out of the picture? I know you'll give me a son. I know this is a bit of a question at times, but if you go to Romans chapter 4, (which we were intending to do, but don't have time), you go to Romans chapter 4 verses 17 to 22 and take the literal translation of that passage, as you know, when you translate it properly, it should be the exact opposite to the way the translators have done it. For it says 'Abraham considered not his own body' it should read 'HE CONSIDERED HIS OWN BODY AS NOW DEAD and he considered the body of Sarah, that that too was incapable of bearing children and he was unflinching in his belief, giving glory to God'. That's why he's on his face here, you see, verse 17, 'Abraham fell upon his face'; when was the last time you saw someone who was actually casting scorn upon a promise, flatten his face to the ground? I mean, most people who were casting scorn upon a promise that they didn't believe, would be belly-laughing, wouldn't they? But Abraham is flat on his face! he's giving glory to God because he believes absolutely that

what God has promised, He is capable also of doing!

But Sarah's not quite ready and Ishmael wasn't also ready; but God's got a message for him too, verse 20, 'And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee', you see, this is the AS FOR chapter, and what it's telling us, b&s and young people is this, that as for God in relation to your life and mine, and we're in the multitude over here in verse 4, 'thou shalt be a father of many nations; for I have made, (end of verse 5), I have made you a father of many nations', we're amongst that multitude, as for God in relation to us personally, He will not fail! it's only up to us to believe like Abraham believed.

Now there's a passage in Exodus 6, which we might very quickly look at, this is just for a little bit of light relief perhaps, but it tells us something, b&s, about what God was doing here in Genesis 17. In Exodus chapter 6, we read in verse 2, 'God spake unto Moses and said unto him, I am Yahweh. And I appeared unto Abraham (the word 'appeared' there 'raah' means 'to see' (Strong's - 7200), 'I was seen by Abraham and by Isaac and by Jacob as El Shaddai (now you'll notice the words, the name of are in italics and you can cross them out because they're not in the text) and the word 'by' can be rendered 'as'. I appeared or I was seen by these three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as El Shaddai, as a nourishing Father. Then it says, 'but by My name, Yahweh, was I not known to them'. Now, of course, there's a bit of a conundrum because we know, in the record of Genesis, not only is the name Yahweh used right throughout Genesis, it is certainly used in the life of Abraham, and it comes out of the mouth of Abraham, as we shall see in a moment. He obviously knew Yahweh by that name, so you've actually got to look for another understanding of this passage, it can't mean they didn't know the name, Yahweh!

To be sure, the name, Yahweh, had not been explained to him, in the way it was explained to Moses, and you ask yourself, why did God wait until the days of Moses and the children of Israel in Egypt to explain His name? All of those questions are answered when you have a look at what verse 3 is actually saying! So here's the strength of the nourishers! In Exodus 6 verse 3, we have a passage that apparently ought to be rendered another way! In the Hebrew, the emphasized conjunction 'and' is very strong and the whole sentence is interrogative, that is, it's in the form of a question, both parts being rhetorical questions linked and contrasted by the end. Now the Hebrew is identical to several other places in the Old Testament; for instance, there's Exodus 8:26 which is rendered, 'lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians? and (conjunction) and will they not stone us?' now that's the structure of the Hebrew here in Exodus 6 verse 3. In Job 2:10 we read the identical structure, 'What, shall we receive good at the hand of Yahweh and shall we receive evil?' Jonah 4:10, 'hast thou had pity on the gourd? and should not I spare Nineveh?' So using that structure in the translation, consistent with those passages in Exodus 6 verse 3, we could render it this way: 'Did not I appear unto Abraham unto Isaac and unto Jacob by El Shaddai' (absolutely, as a nourishing Father) AND by My name Yahweh was I not known unto them?' Absolutely, the difference, the family wasn't built yet! but it was going to come, and when God sent the angel to Moses at the burning bush, b&s and young people, He explained to Moses to take back to the children of Israel who were the multitude that came from the loins of Jacob, who owed their existence to the fact that God had

delegated His Fatherhood to Abraham, and from Abraham He brought forth a son, and through the son He developed a multitude! He had a family! 'Was I not known unto them by My name, Yahweh?' Of course, He was; they just didn't understand yet because the family wasn't there, but it was to come! And Abraham, b&s, could see that; in Genesis 17 he could see that, and he believed it absolutely; he knew that family would come!

But there was now, b&s, a time of great urgency in his life and in the life of Sarah, because in verse 21 of Genesis 17 we read, we read about a set time, 'But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year'. By 'a set time' He means one year, 360 days; and when you think about it, the natural gestation period for the birth of a child is 9 months and 10 days. So from the time that God made this promise in Genesis 17 until the time that Isaac had to be conceived, was no longer than about 2 and 1/2 months; do you know what? Abraham's been around since he's been called for 24 years, chapter 12 to chapter 17, that's 5 or 6 chapters. But the next 4 chapters, 18, 19, 20 and 21, record the history of 2 and 1/2 months! Ever thought about that? and in that time, Abraham moves from a place where he's been for years, down in the land of the Philistines. Why is he down there? Why does he end up in the land of the Philistines and Sarah's taken into the house of Abimelech? What's that all about? Why did he want to move anyway, he had an ecclesia there at Hebron? He probably had an ecclesia of a thousand people, why would he move from there for?

What would force him to do that? Well, I'll tell you what forced him, it was the explosion that obliterated Sodom and Gomorrah, and a total disruption to the economy and the whole fabric of society in that area! And there were people fleeing everywhere from the plains of Sodom and Gomorrah, when the two angels went down there and blew it to smithereens; Abraham's peaceful home at Hebron was disturbed and for some reason he moved from there into the unknown land of the Philistines, and there his wife ends up in the house of Abimelech! This all happens, b&s, before Sarah conceives, it all happens in 2 and 1/2 months; there's a real urgency here, and that's why 3 angels come, in the next chapter, to Abraham sitting in the tent. We read in chapter 18 verse 1, 'Yahweh appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And he lift up his eyes', his mind, b&s, is rolling every day, and it hasn't been that long since he was talking with the angel who went up from him in verse 22 of the previous chapter.'He left talking with him, and God went up from Abraham', hadn't been long, and Abraham is sitting there, b&s, and he knows the time is short! He's in expectation, and all of a sudden, 3 angels come, and he recognizes one of them! There are some people who think that this is one of those places where angels were entertained unawares! Forget it! Abraham knew absolutely who he was dealing with! It says in verse 2, 'He lifted up his eyes and lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them and prostrates himself on the ground'. That wasn't done if those three men were just ordinary travellers, he wouldn't be acting like this, b&s, nor would he say in verse 3, 'Yahweh, if I have now found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant', what's he saying that for? Pass not away, you see, he's referring back to verse 22 of chapter 17, when God left off talking with him, He passed away, He went up from him. And now Abraham is pleading with this leading

angel who he's been dealing with before, b&s, the angel of Yahweh's presence, I believe, and he's determined to extract from that angel, what he needs on this occasion.

And what he needs is for Sarah to be brought up to speed with her husband! because she doesn't believe that that son will be born, and Abraham does! And he's been praying for her, b&s, and here's God's answer (you noticed I changed the words 'my lord' in verse 3, to Yahweh; this is one of those 130 odd occurrences in the Old Testament where the Sopherim changed 'Yahweh' into 'Adonai'). Abraham addresses this leading angel, as 'Yahweh' and he's dealing with Yahweh, and, of course, he sends Sarah to get a meal ready, and he does so himself, and they bring out the food and they entertain the angels, and in verse 9 we read, this is very interesting language, they said unto him, where is Sarah thy wife, and he said, behold, in the tent'. Then look at verse 10, did you ever notice this? 'and He said', so in verse 9, 'and they said unto him', that is, the three men said to him; (we don't know whether one of them was the spokesman), but it said 'they said unto him' but in verse 10, it is this, 'and He said, I will certainly return unto thee, according to the time of life. And lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son'. That's the words that the apostle Paul had picked up in Romans 9, remember, in the context of children of promise? 'And Sarah was behind him in the tent door, and she laughed', verse 12, 'therefore, Sarah laughed within herself (now this was the laughter of disbelief) and she said in her heart, after I'm waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?' (I'm past it, look at my body, shrivelled up, impossible for me to conceive and bear a child, it simply can't be done)! She's not saying this out loud, it's going on in her heart; b&s and young people. I know a lot of people who have said in their heart, it can't be done! but they don't tell you about it at the time. It's only when you go knocking on their door and saying, we'd love you to come back to the meeting, please! that they will tell you, it can't be done!

'And Yahweh said, verse 14, (see that, He's the 'I' of verse 10), 'I will certainly return. And Yahweh says unto Abraham, 'wherefore did Sarah laugh saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for Yahweh?' Do you believe that He can't bring forth a spiritual birth out of your shrivelled up flesh? Do you believe that? Is anything too hard for Yahweh? 'At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son'. And then, Sarah did what we all do, she goes defensive! Verse 15, 'Sarah denied saying, I didn't laugh; oh, I didn't do anything unbelieving like that, no, no! I come to all the meetings, well, most! and I try and do the right thing! Let's not try and justify ourselves, b&s and young people, let's admit what we are! shrivelled up flesh like Sarah; and unless we can believe that God can achieve in us what we can't achieve in ourselves, we're finished!

So let's ask ourselves the questions again; do you think that it's too hard for Yahweh to get you into the kingdom of God? How much are you allowing God to work in your life? b&s and young people, and Has He got control of your mind? Have you got any kind of a real personal relationship with your God? Well, let's be honest with ourselves, Well I tell you something, we're all a little shaky at times on that, but this is for sure, GOD WILL NOT GIVE UP ON YOU UNTIL YOU GIVE UP ON HIM! and even when you've given up on Him, He will wait for you! Do you know that? HE WILL WAIT FOR YOU TO

TURN, because He is a nourishing Father! and you and I thankfully and wonderfully, beautifully are children of promise, and nothing is too hard for Yahweh!