

Faithful Obedience

But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.

Genesis 17:21-23

In this chapter God gives the final details of the promised son to be born of Sarah to Abraham, along with the sign of circumcision to symbolize the associated covenant. Abraham's reaction to these details seems to indicate that, up to this point, he was assuming that Ishmael would inherit the former promises made, according to Sarah's plan in the previous chapter. But the details presented were so incredulous in Abraham's mind that he laughed at the thought of such a humanly impossible event, just as Sarah laughed in the following chapter at the same news. But in His mercy God allows for Abraham's human reaction, yet firmly confirms the promise of both the son and the everlasting covenant, before abruptly ending the conversation as He "went up from Abraham." We might tend to assume from Abraham's initial reaction that he did not believe. Yet we see the evidence of his faith when he does with his whole household, *on the selfsame day*, all that God prescribed for the symbol of the promised covenant. As the apostle James would write centuries later, Abraham shows us his faith by his works. In this case his actions speak much louder than the words of his initial reaction. We can be thankful for the mercy of God evidenced by this example. He knows that in our flesh we may sometimes waver, and yet the faith that prevails in our spirit by His Spirit will ultimately result in obedience to His word. The apostle John puts it: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." Once Abraham recovered from his brief lapse, he demonstrated once again in his repentance that the ultimate sign of faith is obedience. Let us follow his example and be blessed with faithful Abraham.