

Abraham:
The Man That God Called His Friend



Hosted by the Southaven Church of Christ
Southaven, Mississippi

Wade Webster
Lectureship Director

Copyright © 2014
ISBN 1-930999-22-4

Southaven Church of Christ
POWER Publications



P. O. Box 616
Pulaski, TN 38478
931-363-6905

Dedication

Someone has said that “appreciation is a wonderful thing” because “it makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.” Each year as we give honor to those who have faithfully served God and others, we grow ourselves. By noticing noble traits in them, we are encouraged to develop these same traits in us. Cliff and Marty Lyons, the couple we honor this year, certainly possess many traits worthy of our emulation. For fifty-three years they have labored together in the cause of Christ. When I think of this Christian couple, three words naturally come to mind: service, sacrifice, and steadfastness.

Service

Cliff and Marty Lyons have the hearts of servants. They have always been willing to serve wherever they were needed most, whether a preaching school in the Arctic or a youth camp in Alabama. Like the postman, neither snow nor heat has kept them from their appointed rounds. Over the last couple of years at AP (Apologetics Press) Camp in Alabama, I have had the privilege of getting to know them better. These great servants of God volunteered to serve in the kitchen. Serving in the kitchen meant cooking meals, washing dishes, scrubbing tables, and emptying garbage. It also meant getting up before 5:00 a.m. to fix breakfast for over 200 campers and staying on the job until supper was served at about 6:00 p.m. Like their Lord, they have never been ashamed to gird on the towel of service and perform the lowliest of tasks (John 13; Phi. 2:5-8). One of the songs that we sing at camp seems to fit them perfectly. The song is entitled, “Make Me A Servant.” The opening lines of the song are:

Make me a servant Lord, make me like you
For you are a servant, make me one, too.
Make me a servant, do what you must do
To make me a servant, make me like you.

As you recall, Jesus did not come “to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Mark 10:45). In like manner, Cliff and Marty do not stand around waiting for others to serve them. They are busy serving. If you want to serve them, then you will have to track them down as they are serving others. This year, Cliff and Marty were not scheduled to serve at AP Camp, but they showed up anyway. They diverted a scheduled trip to see family to come by the camp and serve until all the staff arrived. That is just the kind of servants that they are.

Sacrifice

From the beginning, being a preacher meant sacrifice for Cliff and Marty Lyons. After leaving the army, Cliff got a job with Boeing Airplane Company, a good job with good benefits. The future was bright. However, Cliff wanted to do more with his life. He wanted to preach the gospel. Cliff made the decision to leave Boeing and to enroll at Freed-Hardeman University. Although it is hard to imagine now, Cliff went to Freed-Hardeman not knowing much Bible. However, under the tutelage of great Bible teachers like H. A. Dixon and W. A. Bradfield, he quickly found the knowledge that he needed. In addition to knowledge, Cliff found a bride – Martha June Shiver. Cliff would be the first to tell you that he could not have found a better one (Pro. 18:22). Marty, as she is affectionately called, has stood faithfully by him wherever he has gone for more than 53 years. Countless are the sacrifices that she has been called upon to make as a preacher’s wife.

In addition to the sacrifices that all preaching families make, Cliff and Marty accepted the additional sacrifices required of those who serve as missionaries. Their second preaching work, and first foreign work, was in Wellington, New Zealand. After five years in this mission field, they returned to the States and worked with congregations in Tennessee, Georgia, and Oklahoma. However, Cliff and Marty were not done with missionary service or sacrifice. In 1995, with the support of the Southaven congregation and her elders (Bill Pierce and Coleman Simpson), they agreed to go and work 200 miles above the Arctic Circle in Murmansk, Russia. Temperatures in Murmansk routinely fall below -4 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter

months. Unless you are a polar bear, and perhaps, even if you are, this is quite a sacrifice.

Likely, Cliff and Marty would downplay any sacrifices that they have made. That is just the kind of people that they are. However, I think that we will all agree that they have done some things that others have never done and might never be willing to do. I am confident that Cliff and Marty would be the first to tell you that God keeps His promise in giving a hundredfold to those who make sacrifices for His cause (Mat. 19:29). No doubt, they are looking forward to the remaining portion of that promise - eternal life.

John Keith Falconer is credited with saying, “I have but one candle of life to burn, and I would rather burn it out in a land filled with darkness than in a land flooded with light.” As you know, our country is filled with light. For many years, the gospel has been preached here. Furthermore, our land remains filled with gospel preachers. However, this has not been the case in Russia. For many years, the god of this world blinded the minds of men there so that the light of the glorious gospel could not shine unto them (2 Cor. 4:4). The dawn has finally come for Russia, but few are there to preach the gospel. Although the harvest is plenteous, the laborers are few (Mat. 9:37). Years ago, the laborers were even fewer. However, someone somewhere prayed for laborers, and Cliff and Marty Lyons were God’s answer to that prayer.

Steadfastness

After college, Cliff and Marty’s first work was in Woodbridge, Virginia. Like many first works, it was a difficult work. In addition to the usual things, Cliff had to battle Premillennialism, not in the community, but in the congregation. For most preachers, first works are short works. It usually takes some time for preachers to develop the patience necessary to stay with a congregation for more than a couple of years. To their credit, Cliff and Marty managed to serve in their first work for seven years.

Eric, one of their sons, paid them a tremendous compliment when he described how “steady” or even keeled they were as parents. They were not up one day and then down the next. Although there

were hard times, they did a good job of insulating their children from the stresses that existed in congregational work.

Perhaps, no field of labor shows their steadfastness as much as their work in Murmansk, Russia. For nineteen years (1995-2014), they have served in this difficult field. In 2000, while crossing the street to catch a trolley, Cliff was hit by a car that ran a red light. His shoulder was dislocated and his leg, wrist, and pelvic bones were broken. Thankfully, Cliff had recently purchased a membership in MEDJET and was quickly flown back to Oklahoma. As soon as Cliff had healed, Cliff and Marty returned to Murmansk to continue the work there. They were steadfast and unmoveable in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

I believe that you will agree that learning about these tremendous traits in this fine couple—service, sacrifice, and steadfastness—make us want to be better. It has been such a pleasure to support them in this great work. It is our prayer that God will bless them with many more years to serve in the kingdom.

Works Cited

- Owens, Jimmy and Carol. “Make Me a Servant.” *Lyrics Translate*, N. d. Web. 27 June, 2014.
- Voltaire. “Quotation 1186.” *The Quotations Page. QuotationsPage.com* and Michael Moncur. N. d. Web. 27 June, 2014.

Acknowledgments

G. B. Stern noted that “silent gratitude isn’t much use to anyone.”

I am confident that all ten of the lepers cleansed by Jesus were thankful to some degree (Luke 17:11-19). After all, they had been cured of one of the most dreadful diseases in the ancient world. However, only one of them took the time to return and to say thank you. Whatever gratitude the others felt, it was silent. It wasn’t much use to anyone, except perhaps, to teach others like us not to make the same mistake.

I want to make sure that the gratitude that I feel isn’t silent. I want to make sure that those who have helped me produce this book know that I appreciate what they have done.

First, I want to thank my wife and kids. Producing a book is tiring and time-consuming work. I thank them for giving me the time to tackle this project once again. No one knows the sacrifices that the preacher’s wife and family make for the cause of Christ.

Second, I want to thank April Meacham for agreeing to proof and to perfect the manuscripts one more time. No one is more important in getting this project to print than she.

Third, I want to thank those who submitted manuscripts for the book. Manuscripts help to preserve the lectureship for years to come.

Fourth, I want to thank Mark Teske and Paul Meacham, Jr. for agreeing to write manuscripts for those who could not. The book would not have been complete without their contributions.

Fifth, I would like to thank the elders for agreeing to publish this book. Publishing a book is an expensive undertaking. At best, it that takes years to recoup the initial cost. With so many demands for money, I’m glad that producing a book still makes the cut.

Sixth, I want to thank Paul Sain for printing the book for us. He produces a fantastic product at a fast pace and a fair price. You can’t ask any more than that from a printer.

Seventh, I want to thank Shelley McGregory and Diane Mansel for their help from a secretarial standpoint. They handle many day-to-day things that keep the book and me on schedule.

I suppose that acknowledgments in the front of books are like credits at the end of movies. Most people don't read them, except perhaps, those who have helped in the production. If that is you, let me say again, "Thank you."

Table Of Contents

Abraham: The Man That God Called His Friend <i>Wade L. Webster</i>	13
Dust And Ashes: Remembering Our Place Before God <i>Barry Grider</i>	25
Gathered To His People <i>Cliff Lyons</i>	39
The Altars Of Abraham: Drawing Near To God In Worship <i>Greg Dismuke</i>	55
The God Of Abraham: A Perfect God Willing To Be Linked To An Imperfect Man <i>B. J. Clarke</i>	71
If Ye Were Abraham's Children <i>Jacob Rutledge</i>	99
Abraham's Bosom: A Place Of Great Comfort <i>Kyle Butt</i>	115
Deciphering The Laughter <i>Bobby Liddell</i>	131
God Remembered Abraham <i>Brandon Baggett</i>	145
Melchizedek: The Man To Whom Abraham Gave A Tenth <i>Donnie Debord</i>	159
Sitting Down With Father Abraham <i>Mark Teske</i>	177
Fully Persuaded <i>Wade L. Webster</i>	185

The Day That Abraham Saw All The Way To Calvary <i>Morne Stephanus</i>	197
Ye Are My Friends If Ye Do Whatsoever I Command You <i>Mike Baker</i>	215
Let There Be No Strife...For We Be Brethren <i>Paul Meacham, Jr.</i>	227
When Abraham Got Taken To The Woodshed For Lying <i>Chuck Webster</i>	237
Archaeology And Abraham <i>DeWayne Bryant</i>	251
Abraham: A Man Whose Wife Obeyed Him, Calling Him Lord <i>Glenn Colley</i>	265
Shall Not The Judge Of All The Earth Do Right? <i>John DeBerry</i>	277
Leaving Home For Parts Unknown <i>Chad Dollahite</i>	291
Finding His Boy A Bride <i>Cliff Goodwin</i>	303
Burying Your Better Half <i>John Daniels</i>	319
The Day That Abraham Heard The Gospel <i>J. J. Hendrix</i>	337
Investigating Ishmael: The Other Son Of Abraham <i>Robert Jeffries</i>	353
Entertaining Angels Unawares <i>Mike Vestal</i>	371
Three Tests Of Abraham's Faith <i>Allen Webster</i>	387
Not A Thread Or A Shoelace: Avoiding The Appearance Of Evil <i>Howard Odom</i>	401

For I Know Him That He Will Command His Children After Him	
<i>Richard Stevens, III</i>	413
The Covenant Of Circumcision	
<i>Billy Bland</i>	429
Living In A Tent/Looking For A City	
<i>Lennie Reagan</i>	449
Blessed In All Things	
<i>Obed Rodriguez</i>	465
A Faith Strong Enough To Pull Back The Knife	
<i>Eric Owens</i>	479
Was Not Abraham Our Father Justified By Works?	
<i>Robert R. Taylor, Jr.</i>	495
Sarah: A Woman Who Was Blessed To Keep House	
<i>Donna Faughn</i>	509
Sarah: Whose Daughter You Are, As Long As...	
<i>Cindy Colley</i>	523
Cakes Upon The Hearth: Turning Strangers Into Friends Through Hospitality	
<i>Nancy Daniels</i>	535
Hagar: Hated Handmaid Of Sarah	
<i>Sheila Winstead</i>	549

CHAPTER 1

Abraham: The Man That God Called His Friend

Wade L. Webster

Three times in the Scriptures, Abraham is called the *Friend of God* (2 Chr. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Jam. 2:23). The most well-known of these statements is found in the book of James. We read, “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and **he was called the Friend of God**” (King James Version, Jam. 2:23). I believe that this is one of the greatest designations given to any man in the Scriptures. Who would not want to be known as the friend of God? This description ranks right up there with the designations given to David—the man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22); Moses—the meekest man in all the land (Num. 12:3); and John—the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 19:26; John 20:2; John 21:7; John 21:20).

What Does The Designation Mean?

The word translated as “**friend**” (*philos*) refers to “a **friend**...an associate...**he who associates familiarly with one**, a companion” (Thayer and Smith, “Philos”). God and Abraham were close (Pro. 18:24). In fact, we see just how close they were from a statement found in Genesis 18. Before God destroyed Sodom, He told Abraham of his plans.

And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? **For I know him,** that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. (Gen. 18:17-19)

Please note that God knew Abraham. Abraham was His friend. God was not going to hide what He was about to do from His friend.

To further define what it means to be God's friend, please consider a statement that was made about Moses. "**And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.** And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle" (Exo. 33:11). God counted Moses as one of His friends. He communicated with Moses as a man would do with his friends. He talked with him face to face.

Being God's friend is defined the same way in the New Testament. Consider a statement that Jesus made to His disciples. We read, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: **but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you**" (John 15:15). Jesus counted His disciples as His friends. He shared with them His plans.

What an amazing thought it is that God has treated us as His friends! He has not hidden His plans from us, but has

revealed them to us in His Word (Eph. 3:5). Just as God told Abraham about His plans to destroy Sodom, He has told us of His plans to destroy this world (2 Pet. 3:10; 2 The. 1:7-9).

Why Was The Designation Given?

Why did Abraham receive this special designation? James wrote, “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, **Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God**” (Jam. 2:23). Abraham was called the friend of God because he believed God. *Believed* is from a Greek word (*pisteuo*) that means “to be persuaded” or to “have confidence.” It means “to trust in Jesus or God as able to aid either in obtaining or in doing something” (Thayer and Smith, “Pisteuo”). Abraham trusted God. He had confidence that God would keep His promises. Abraham was not ashamed of God and God was not ashamed of Him. In Hebrews 11, we read,

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country; that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:13-16)

Repeatedly in the Old Testament, God is identified as the God of Abraham (Gen. 28:13; Gen. 31:42; Gen. 32:9; Exo. 3:6; Exo. 3:15-16; Exo. 4:5).

The Scripture that is being referenced by James as being fulfilled (Jam. 2:23) is found in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis (Gen. 15:6). Yet, in the Genesis record, there is no mention of Abraham being called the “friend of God.” In fact, this designation is not found until the book of Second Chronicles (2 Chr. 20:7). The statement from Genesis 15 was recorded approximately 30 years before Abraham offered Isaac. Yet, James connects the statement with this event. The faith that was declared in the statement (Gen. 15:6) was demonstrated in the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22). It was Abraham’s faith in the promises of God that moved him to offer Isaac. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we read, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Heb. 11:17-19). Amazingly, no one had been raised from the dead prior to Abraham’s offering Isaac. Many had died (Gen. 5), but no one had come back to life. Yet, Abraham believed that God could do something that He had never done before. He believed that God could raise someone from the dead. The whole context of Genesis 22 is filled with faith. Faith fills Abraham’s conversations.

First, consider the conversation that Abraham had with his servants.

When Abraham and Isaac arrived at the designated spot, Abraham told his servants that they were going to go and worship and that they were going to come again to them (Gen. 22:5). Please understand that Abraham understood

the Lord's command. He knew that he was to "offer" Isaac "for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:2). Yet, he spoke of them both going to worship and them both coming again. A man of lesser faith would have said that that he and his son were going to worship and that he alone was going to come again. In fact, a man of lesser faith would not have been at the mountain in the first place. Abraham was at the mountain because he believed God. He believed that if he took Isaac's life in obedience to God's command, that God would raise Isaac from the dead according to His promise that Abraham's seed would be as the sand on the seashore innumerable.

Second, consider the conversation that Abraham had with his son.

As Abraham and Isaac were climbing the mountain to worship, Isaac noticed that an ingredient of worship was missing. He saw the wood and the fire, but not the lamb. We read, "And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Gen. 22:7). Notice the faith with which Abraham answered: "And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together" (Gen. 22:8). Although Abraham could not have known exactly how God would provide (a ram caught in a thicket), he was confident that He would. Of course, Abraham's faith in God was not misplaced.

It was reasonable for Abraham to believe that God could do something that had never been done before. After all, God had already done something that had never been done before in Isaac's birth. He had caused a man who was a hundred years old and past producing seed to father a child. He had caused a woman who was ninety years old and barren to give birth to a son. Concerning Abraham's faith, Paul wrote,

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. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. (Rom. 4:18-25)

Although there seemed to be no hope of having a child from a natural standpoint, Abraham hoped against hope. He believed that “which was spoken” (Rom. 4:18). He believed that He would yet be “the father of many nations” (Rom. 4:18). He was not “weak” in faith (Rom. 4:19). The Greek word that is translated as *weak* (*astheneo*) means to be “feeble, to be without strength, powerless” (Thayer and Smith, “*Astheneo*”). Although Abraham’s flesh or body was weak, his faith was “strong” (Rom. 4:20). Although his body was “dead” (Rom. 4:19), his faith was very much alive. Abraham “staggered not” at the promises of God (Rom. 4:20). *Staggered* comes from a

Greek word (*diakrino*) that means to “dispute” or to “doubt” (Thayer and Smith, “Diakrino”). Abraham did not dispute God’s promises. He did not doubt them. He accepted them. He embraced them (Heb. 11:13). He was “fully persuaded” of them (Rom. 4:21). *Persuaded* comes from a Greek word (*plerophoreo*) that means to be “fully convinced or assured” (Thayer and Smith, “Plerophoreo”). Abraham had a blessed assurance that what God “had promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:21). *Perform* comes from a Greek word (*poieo*) that means “to carry out, to execute” (Thayer and Smith, “Poieo”). Abraham believed that God was able to carry out the promises that He had made to him.

Faith is still a requirement of all who want to be God’s friend. The writer of Hebrews declared, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). If we possess the faith of Abraham, God will gladly call us His friends. Like Abraham, we have no reason for us to stagger at God’s promises. After all, He is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). Just as God was not ashamed to be called Abraham’s God because of the patriarch’s faith, He will not be ashamed to be called our God if we are full of faith. However, if we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us. Jesus declared, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).

When Was The Designation Given?

It is also important to note in the words of James when the Scripture referred to (Gen. 15:6) was fulfilled. James wrote, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works,

when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jam. 2:21-24). Please note that Abraham was justified “when he had offered Isaac” (Jam. 2:21). This is when the Scripture was fulfilled and Abraham was called the friend of God. Please note what God said as Abraham drew back his knife to slay his son: “And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me” (Gen. 22:11-12). Notice the words, “Now I know” (Gen. 22:12). It was at that point when Abraham “had offered Isaac” (Jam. 2:21), that God knew that Abraham “feared” or revered Him (Gen. 22:12; Gen. 22:16). It was at this point that Abraham’s faith was made “perfect” (Jam. 2:22). Had Abraham not offered his son, his faith would have been imperfect. Those who believe in salvation by faith alone argue that Abraham was counted as righteous at the point of faith alone. However, this is in direct contradiction to the context of James and to the chronology of Abraham’s life.

The context makes clear that Abraham was not justified by “faith only” (Jam. 2:24). Works were involved. James declared, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? (Jam. 2:20-21). Of course, the works that were involved were works of God and not works of man. In the context, James gave an example of the kind of works he had

in mind—offering Isaac (Gen. 22). As you recall, this was a work that was commanded by God. In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, we read,

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. (Gen. 22:1-2)

Abraham did not devise the plan of offering Isaac to please God. He was not going about to establish his own righteousness (Rom. 10:1-3). He offered his son because that is what God commanded. The works that are excluded are works of man (Eph. 2:8-9).

As you know, many of our denominational friends and neighbors reject baptism on the basis that it is a human work. However, it is not a human work. It is a work that is commanded by God. At Cornelius' house, Peter declared, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days" (Acts 10:47-48). Please note that Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, "commanded" Cornelius and his household to be "baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48). *Commanded* comes from a Greek word (*prostasso*) that means to "order" (Thayer and Smith, "Prostasso"). The apostle Peter ordered them to be baptized. Please note that they were to be baptized "in

the name of the Lord” or by the authority of the Lord (Col. 3:17). Clearly, baptism was not a work of human merit. It was a work prescribed by an apostle. It was a work done by the authority of the Lord. Those that argue that all works are excluded usually do not realize that they are also excluding faith. After all, faith is a work. Jesus declared, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29). Faith is a work, but it is not excluded. It is a work of God. Those that argue that salvation is by faith alone also miss the clear teaching of James 2 and the life of Abraham. Based on the life of Abraham, James argued, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jam. 2:24). Abraham’s justification was not by “faith only.” It involved both faith and works.

Those that argue that Abraham was justified at the point of faith alone in Genesis 15 fail to consider the fact that Abraham had already obeyed God three chapters earlier in Genesis 12. As you recall, he left his country and kindred as God commanded (Gen. 12:1-4). The Hebrew writer declared, “**By faith Abraham**, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, **obeyed; and he went out**, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8).

The statement in Genesis 15 is in between two great acts of obedience—leaving Ur (Gen. 12) and offering Isaac (Gen. 22). Abraham was God’s friend because he obeyed God. His faith was an obedient faith. Abraham did all that was asked of him in Genesis 15. He believed. As we have already noted, faith is a work (John 6:29). When more was required (Gen. 22), Abraham did that, too. Abraham was God’s friend because he did whatever God commanded him. When God told him to leave, he left. When God told him to trust, he trusted. When God told him to offer, he offered.

Today, we are God's friends when we do what He has commanded us. To His disciples, Jesus declared, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). Sadly, many want to be the friend of God without obeying the will of God. They want to be God's friend by faith alone. However, faith without works is dead.

In this introduction to the life of Abraham, we have seen **what** the designation *friend of God* means—communication; we have seen **why** the designation was given—faith (Jam. 2:23); and we have seen **when** it was given—"when he had offered his son upon the altar" (Jam. 2:21). It is my prayer that by studying the life of Abraham, the man that God called His friend, we, too, can become the friends of God.

Works Cited

- King James Version. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web.
- Thayer and Smith. "Astheneo." *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version. Biblestudytools.com*. Web.
- . "Diakrino." *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version. Biblestudytools.com*. Web.
- . "Philos." *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version. Biblestudytools.com*. Web.
- . "Pisteuo." *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version. Biblestudytools.com*. Web.
- . "Plerophoreo." *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version. Biblestudytools.com*. Web.
- . "Poieo." *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version. Biblestudytools.com*. Web.
- . "Prostasso." *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version. Biblestudytools.com*. Web.

Chapter 2

**Dust And Ashes:
Remembering Our Place
Before God**

Barry Grider

I still remember the voice of the older preacher as he proclaimed, “Don’t forget, God’s up there [pointing heavenward], we’re down here.” It was a reminder to his audience of the holiness of God and the frailty of man. God is high and lifted up (Isa. 6:1), while man is weak and lowly. Daniel wrote concerning the Almighty,

I watched till thrones were put in place.
And the Ancient of Days was seated:
His garment was white as snow, And
the hair of His head was like pure wool,
His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels
a burning fire; A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him, A
thousand thousands ministered to Him;
Ten thousand times ten thousand stood
before Him. The court was seated, and
the books were opened. (New King James
Version, Dan. 7:9-10)

Reading such passages, one is forced to the same conclusion as the psalmist, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it” (Psa. 139:6). “What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?” (Psa. 8:4).

The Bible student must never forget who he is without God. So much emphasis is placed upon who we become through Christ, and it should be, we must be careful not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). Realizing that our Lord has lifted us out of the muck and mire of sin is truly humbling.

James wrote, “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble’... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (Jam. 4:6; Jam. 4:10). God recognizes those and exalts those who humbly come before Him. The one who refuses to understand His place before the Almighty and exalts himself above God or behaves himself flippantly before his Creator will be made low. Nebuchadnezzar tried to exalt himself above God but then came tumbling down:

The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” While the word was still in the king’s mouth, a voice fell from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know

that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.” That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws. (Dan. 4:30-32)

When the people of Tyre and Sidon paid homage to Herod and declared him to be a god and Herod received their worship, the text reveals the Lord struck him, “And he was eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12:23).

God will not allow any angel or mortal to overtake His throne nor to receive worship that only He deserves. The apostle Peter understood this and corrected the ignorant Cornelius who fell at Peter’s feet worshipping him. “But Peter lifted him up, saying, Stand up; I myself am also a man” (Acts 10:26).

As a result of pride, it appears that the Devil wanted to overtake the place of God, which thought no being created by God should ever entertain. Paul speaking to Timothy concerning the qualifications of elders said, “Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6).

The realization of who we are before God is the purpose of this study.

The Context of the Passage

“Then Abraham answered and said, ‘Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord’ (Gen. 18:27). On the occasion that Abraham

made this statement, he was in the midst of interceding before Deity on behalf of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The sins of those cities were abominable. They were completely overtaken by the lusts of the flesh and in particular, homosexuality. God has always condemned sexual activity outside the marriage bond of a man and a woman and homosexuality was a gross perversion then and it still is today. Hence the name *Sodom* is often times associated with that type of deviant behavior.

Abraham, being a righteous man, in no way condoned the wickedness of that city. In fact, it was his nephew Lot who chose to go and reside there, not Abraham. Lot chose to pitch his tent toward Sodom because of the prospect of financial gain. His was a covetous decision and many otherwise good men have made similar decisions down through the ages, choosing the almighty dollar over the spiritual. The cost of his decision not only impacted him but his family, as well.

We never hear of Lot crying out to God on behalf of the wicked cities of the plain, but rather, Abraham was the one making requests. He, of course, was the patriarch of the clan, and he wanted the cities to be spared particularly because of his nephew, Lot, and his family. Abraham is considered to be the father of the faithful (Gal. 3:7) and “the friend of God” (Jam. 2:23). Can one think of two greater epitaphs to have inscribed on one’s grave marker than those two statements? Abraham had long been in communion with God which included an active prayer life. This intercession on behalf of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah was not the first time he had ever spoken with the Lord. He consistently prayed or in this instance spoke face to face with Deity. How often do people, even children of God who have the right to pray, fail to commune with the Father in Heaven until a crisis comes? Abraham was not such a man. He was no stranger to God

when he petitioned the Almighty. He was already familiar with the New Testament truth, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (Jam. 4:8). He understood, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And his ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12).

Some of the most beautiful prayers I have ever heard prayed are petitions on behalf of others. It may be for God to be merciful to a sick person or a grieving family. It may be a prayer of strength offered on behalf of a weak brother or sister who has come in repentance seeking such prayers. It may be a prayer for a sinner that he might open his eyes to the truth and obey it before it is everlastingly too late. God is pleased with such intercession and as in the case of Abraham’s petition on behalf of Lot, Lot’s family, and the entire population of those wicked cities, the God of Heaven listens when righteous people seek Him. A vivid picture was painted by the psalmist when he wrote, “Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me; For I am poor and needy” (Psa. 86:1) Just as a parent cuffs his ear and leans toward to his child to listen, so the Father in Heaven listens to His children.

The divine Visitor would indeed acknowledge the request of Abraham, but for what was Abraham requesting in the context of this passage? His prayer was that God might spare these wicked cities. In Genesis 18, three “men” come to visit Abraham. These are not mere mortals. It is understood that one of the “men” is the Lord and the other two are angels. It is the judgment of this writer that the Lord here is the second person of the divine Godhead. He informs Abraham that he and Sarah will become parents in their old age. Concerning Abraham, the Lord said, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness

and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Gen. 18:19). The Lord knew He could trust Abraham with children and indeed a special son would be born to him and Sarah, and through his seed the Christ child would come.

The Lord then revealed his plans for wicked Sodom and Gomorrah. He would destroy these cities completely. Abraham then begins to plead with the Lord by reminding Him of His great character. “Would you destroy the righteous with the wicked” (Gen. 18:23). “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). It is not that God has to be reminded of His righteous character, but He permits us to acknowledge who He is when we are pleading on behalf of another. It is not that without Abraham’s petition God might err in His judgment, but rather an opportunity for us to make our requests. This intercession or petitioning is only given to the children of God. Likewise, we know that the prayers of righteous people can affect the Almighty. Remember,

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (Jam. 5:16-18)

God did something as a result of the righteous prayer of Elijah. And God was willing to heed the petition of the faithful Abraham. As Abraham made his request to spare the city, the Lord finally said if he found ten people who were righteous, He would not destroy it. He said this that He might honor the

request made by Abraham. I sometimes wonder how many people in our land who engage in evil ever stop to think that perhaps all that is saving our nation from devastation are the prayers of the righteous. Of course, even ten righteous were not found and God did destroy those wicked cities.

“Dust and Ashes”

The phrase *dust and ashes* is also found twice in the book of Job,

He has cast me into the mire, And I have
become like dust and ashes. (Job 30:19)

Therefore, I abhor myself, And repent in
dust and ashes. (Job 42:6)

The statement reflects Job’s view of himself as compared to the Holy One of heaven and, likewise, of his ever present need of repentance and restoration. So it is that Abraham has come to the same conclusion. He searches his heart and is truly humbled when considering how he, the created one, is making request of the Creator.

Man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) and, hence, possesses a living soul (Gen. 2:7). Yet man was formed from the dust of the ground, according to the same passage. God warned man that if he partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die. Man did partake of that which was forbidden and so he began to die physically. God said, “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

One of the most sobering passages concerning the frailty of man is recorded in Ecclesiastes 12.

Remember now your creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them": While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars Are not darkened, And the clouds do not return after the rain; In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, And the strong men bow down; When the grinders cease because they are few, And those that look through the windows grow dim: When the doors are shut in the streets, and the sound of grinding is low; When one rises up at the sound of a bird, And all the daughters of music are brought low. Also they are afraid of height And of terrors in the way; When the almond tree blossoms, The grasshopper is a burden, And desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets. Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to the God who gave it. (Ecc. 12:1-7)

Lessons Learned

God's name should always be held in reverence.

For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all

gods. For all the gods of the people are
idols, But the Lord made the heavens.
Honor and majesty are before Him;
Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.
(Psa. 96:4)

Holy and reverend is his name.
(Psa. 111:9 KJV)

It is sad to see the holy name of God treated so flippantly in our society today. God is worshipped in unauthorized ways with worshippers more interested in what pleases them than what truly pleases the One whom they supposedly worship. Jesus prescribed worship that is in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Likewise, the apostle Paul commanded, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17). Yet when challenging some concerning that which God authorizes in worship they have no inkling what is under consideration.

Still there are others who mock the name of God or speak in irreverent tones when invoking his name. Let every Christian resolve to come into His presence “in the beauty of holiness” (Psa. 96:9). It is imperative that we guard our speech and our actions because we stand before a holy God. Remember, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Always distinguish between God and man.

As Abraham thought about who he was compared to Who God is, it humbled him. God said to Moses from the burning bush, “Do not draw near to this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground” (Exo. 3:5). Likewise, God asked Job, “Who is this

who darkens counsel By words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2). Man is not in a position to demand of God, or to question His judgments and counsel. Abraham was humble as he considered his audacity in making requests unto God.

God still listens to man.

The Lord was willing to heed the requests of Abraham, His faithful child. Likewise, God will answer the requests of the faithful today. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phi. 4:6). Again, Peter reminds us, “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

As long as Abraham remembered his place before God, then God would listen. What was the problem with the foolish farmer of Luke 12? It was not a crime for him to have made money. As far as we know, he was honest. Certainly nothing was wrong with preparing for his future. The problem was he made his plans without considering God. Do you recall the journeyman of James 4?

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. (Jam. 4:13-14)

You see, the problem with this man is that he did not include the Lord in his plans for the future. Friend, be

humble before God and he will give the desires of your heart (Psa. 37:4). He will direct your paths (Pro. 3:5-6). After all, “And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8).

The Lord is mindful of who we are.

Abraham remembered who he was in the presence of God but God knows who we are. Listen to these comforting words, “As a Father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him. For he knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psa. 103:13-14). What a blessing to know that the Creator understands that which is created. He understands why we do not always get it right. He understands the weakness of human flesh. In fact, that is the reason Christ came in the first place. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

God so loved us that He, in the person of Jesus Christ, came and dwelt among us (John 1:14). No one can ever say that our God does not understand because Jesus does understand.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16)

So the Lord understands us because He both created us and redeemed us.

Remembering our place before the Lord prepares us for eternity. It is interesting that Abraham fully believed the Lord meant what He said concerning the judgment that was to come upon the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Else, he would not have pleaded so earnestly for the cities to be spared. God is the judge of all the earth and one day all the nations of the earth will be gathered before the one He has appointed to judge (Acts 17:31; Mat. 25:31). There is no getting around the judgment. “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). No one should take lightly the impending judgment of the Lord. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

Conclusion

God is good at all times. Yet God is high and exalted. He is the Maker of us all. Reverently and submissively, let us come into His presence always remembering who we are. Understanding our place before Him will not only cause us to walk soberly, but it will draw us closer to Him. When we do that, we will bask in His marvelous grace, mercy, and love. We will know Him as a Father and have the realization that this same God who is all supreme desires a relationship with us forever.

Sometimes a child prays, “God is great and God is good.” We sometimes remark how sweet and simple is that little prayer. In reality, that child is expressing the two most marvelous truths ever known. God is great and God is good. Let us never forget it!

Works Cited

King James Version. Print.

New King James Version. Print.

CHAPTER 3

Gathered To His People

Cliff Lyons

Abraham was a man of great faith and is called the friend of God. About two hundred eighty verses in the Bible mention his name (Abram or Abraham). Indeed, he is one of the greatest men who ever lived upon God's Planet Earth. He was one hundred seventy-five years old when he died—and was “gathered to his people” (King James Version, Gen. 25:8).

How did God make a man like Abraham? Simply stated, he was a man of great faith; he trusted and obeyed God—and God blessed him. God is the Potter; we are the clay. Abraham was a faithful hearer and doer. He was not perfect, but he was faithful. We need to follow in his steps and imitate him as he lived in obedience to God's will. Too many people today do not understand how God made man in the beginning (Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 2:7; Ecc.12:7; 1The. 5:23) nor do they understand how he makes a man of faith like Abraham. However, we **need** to understand that God made us responsible men and women. We can choose to live righteous lives, or we can choose to follow the broad way that leads to destruction (Mat. 7:13-14; Jos. 24:15). There is a war being fought for the souls of men. God, who loves us, has provided a way for us to be saved and go to heaven. Satan, our enemy, is seeking to destroy us in hell. But we can be thankful that God limits Satan as he tempts us (1 Cor. 10:13). We are free moral agents; we choose our eternal destiny by

the life we live. Abraham did (Heb. 11:8-10; Mat. 11:28-30; Rom. 6:23). Someone has said, “God is voting for us; Satan is voting against us; and we cast the deciding vote.” When Eve was tempted by Satan in the garden, she had a decision to make. Both Adam and Eve understood God’s command not to eat of the tree “of the knowledge of good and evil.” They disobeyed God; they sinned. Sadly, in our world today, masses of people are also misled and deceived by Satan. We need to listen to God (His Word) and trust him as did Abraham.

Some of the blessings of being a Christian are that we know where we came from; we know our purpose in life; and we know where we are going at death. Abraham, a Patriarch; Moses, an Israelite; and the apostle Paul, a Christian, were all aware of these foundation principles regarding our life on earth. These three men and many others believed there was a “better country,” “an heavenly” that God had prepared for them. They knew there was more to life than a physical body that dies and goes back to the elements of the earth. Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

The confused atheist and evolutionist are allowing Satan to have his way with them; they are allowing Satan to win the battle. For example, they speculate that perhaps life came from dead matter! However, true science says that cannot really happen per the law of biogenesis. The evolutionist keeps changing his magic chronological guesses—now trying to go back in time six or seven billion years for some so called “big bang.” Thus, they keep changing their time line. God’s Word has **not** changed since inspired men wrote it, none at all! God has **not** updated, back-dated, or changed His creation account in Genesis one. All men **need** to understand that there is no other book like the Bible. The very first chapter of the Bible

tells us the truth about God's creation, including how we are made in His image. We, with a faith like Abraham, believe it. God made us and gave us His Word, which we can trust, to guide us from earth to heaven (Gen. 1:26-27; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 2:11-13). Our hope, as was Abraham's, is zeroed in on heaven. When Abraham had lived a full life, trusting and obeying God, he was ready to be "gathered to his people." Let us study this statement, with emphasis on the question, Shall we know one another in heaven?

What Happens When We Die?

False ideas about death abound. We will notice four of them: 1) The founder of "Christian Science," Mary Baker Eddy, taught that "there is no death; it is a mere "illusion" (Jackson, "False"). Questions: Is she still living? Where is her **dead** body? More important, where is her spirit? 2) Some think death is the end of human existence (that we die like old Rover—and that is the end of matters). If that is true, why does the Bible talk about man facing the judgment? (Mat. 25:46). 3) Hindus and others, including some Americans, believe in reincarnation. They think the human soul passes through different phases—through humans and animals. One or more lives may be lived as a cow, goat, or pig or some other animal. Hebrews 9:27 says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." The rich man of Luke 16 did not get a second chance at life on earth, not even as a reincarnated cud-chewing billy goat! 4) Others say that in death we are not conscious (soul sleeping). It is true that the body is "asleep" in the grave, but our soul is conscious in Hades. Long ago, Daniel wrote, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). The apostle John saw "under the altar" the souls of

Christians who had been martyred. They “cried with a loud voice, saying, How long O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:9-11). How can we claim to believe the Bible and not believe there is consciousness after our spirit separates from the body at death? (Jam. 2:26). The Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists and others teach many false things about death and related matters.

What is meant by death? Various dictionaries say it is the “act of dying”; “cessation of existence”; “loss of life”; “state of being dead”; “end of life” and other similar statements. However, these definitions do not measure up to God’s definition! Something is lacking! After all, God made man and warned him about death (Gen. 2:17). In James 2:26, God’s Word says, “The body without the spirit is dead.” Guy N. Woods wrote that death “is simply and solely separation—separation of body (the flesh) and the spirit (the immortal entity)” (6). Thus, our body is dead when our spirit separates from it (Gen. 25:8; Gen. 35:18; Acts 7:59). Solomon wrote, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7). The body is buried in the grave and goes back to the dust from which it was taken (Gen. 2:7). However, Solomon says, the spirit returns to God who gave it.

What happens then? The body is buried, decays, and goes back to the elements of the earth. However, the spirit continues to exist, and, in fact, shall exist forever. Our spirit goes to the Hadean world (unseen world) to await the resurrection and judgment (Luke 16:19-31; John 5:28-29). Jesus said to the penitent thief, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Of course, our Lord’s physical body was in the tomb for only three days; then He was raised from the dead and “declared to be the Son of God with

power” (Rom. 1:4). His spirit and body were joined together again (Luke 24:26-40). Jesus’ spirit had been with the thief in Paradise, and His body was buried in the tomb. Thus, His spirit came forth from Paradise and His body was raised from the tomb to be reunited. He spent forty days with the apostles and other disciples and then ascended back into heaven. But let us discuss further the case of Abraham.

While On Earth, Abraham Looked Forward To Heaven

By faith Abraham sojourned on earth, but “looked for a city” (Heb. 11:9-10). He believed God would keep his promise (Gen. 12:1-3). His faith was so strong that he believed he could obey God in offering Isaac on an altar as a sacrifice—and that God would still keep his promise—that through Isaac all nations would be blessed (Heb. 11:17-19; Gen. 21:12). He believed God would raise Isaac from the dead, if he took his life and offered him as a sacrifice. Indeed, Abraham believed that he and others, following death, would live again. Considering what Abraham believed about Isaac (if he slew him), let us study further the statement that Abraham was “gathered to his people.”

When Death Came, Abraham Was “Gathered To His People”

Abraham was prepared for death. In Genesis 25:8, Moses wrote, “Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.” This passage teaches that Abraham, after his long pilgrimage, faced death as a satisfied man. Let us notice especially the phrase *gathered to his people*. This does **not** mean that his **body** was gathered to his sleeping ancestors in Chaldea or elsewhere, for his physical body was buried in the cave of Machpelah where Sarah was buried.

The phrase *gathered to his people* with slight variation, appears in Genesis 25:17, regarding Ishmael; in Genesis 35:29, regarding Isaac; in Genesis 49:29-33, regarding Jacob; and in Deuteronomy 32:50, regarding Moses and Aaron (Woods 16). From the context of these passages, it is obvious that this phrase does not refer to the burial of their physical bodies. For example, Moses was buried in a secret place, “in a valley in the land of Moab” (Deu. 34:6), not in the burial place of his fathers. Thus, the similar wording, *gathered to his people* in these passages, refers to their spirits being gathered to Sheol where they would be with their people. Woods says the phrase *gathered to his people* “refers, not to the fact of death, nor to the place thereof, but to the journey of the spirit to the unseen world” (17). Abraham’s spirit was gathered to other spirits in Sheol, where some of his people were, who had earlier died. He was conscious and would know them. It is recorded that he knew the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

God’s Whole Man, Spirit, Soul, and Body

The apostle Paul wrote that man is made up of “spirit and soul and body” (1 The. 5:23). Regarding this passage, Bob Winton writes: “The spirit is the eternal part of the person; the soul in this usage is a reference to the life of the person; and the body referred to is the physical body in which the spirit dwells” (“First Thessalonians,” 88). Sometimes the word soul is used in reference to the eternal part of man, our spirit (Ecc. 12:7; Acts 2:27); sometimes it refers to the individual, the entire person (1 Pet. 3:20; Acts 2:41), and sometimes it means our physical life, which we lose at death (Psa. 72:13; Psa. 78:50; Gen. 2:7). Hebrews 4:12 also makes a distinction between the soul and spirit of man.

God gives us our spirit (Zec. 12:1), and at death (Jam. 2:26) our spirit returns to God (Ecc. 12:7). Thus, our body

is buried in the earth, but our spirit returns to God who gave it to us. Abraham “gave up the ghost”; Rachel’s soul departed her body (Gen. 35:18); and as Stephen was stoned, he called out saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). In Abraham’s case, while living and walking by faith, he expected, after death, that his spirit would “fly away” to that unseen world, Sheol, where he would be with kindred spirits who had also walked by faith, such as Sarah. After the resurrection and judgment, we believe that Abraham will be with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and all of the righteous in heaven. So, when God tells us that Abraham was “gathered to his people,” can we infer that Abraham would recognize his ancestors, friends, and others beyond this life? (Luke 16:19-31). Yes, indeed! What about us? Will our distinctive personal character survive death? Shall we know one another in paradise and later in heaven? I believe Genesis 25:8 and other Bible passages will lead us to believe that our personal identity will survive death and that we will know one another in heaven. True, no direct statement in God’s Word states that we will know/recognize one another in heaven, but it is taught in other ways, and the evidence is convincing.

Consider Further Evidence From The Old Testament

What about Jacob’s mourning for Joseph? Joseph’s brothers had deceived Jacob into believing that a wild beast had killed him. Jacob believed the lie. Genesis 37:35 records Jacob saying, “For I will go down to Sheol to my son mourning” (ASV). What does that mean? Jackson writes, “He certainly was not anticipating joining Joseph in some common grave, for Joseph had no grave (from the grieving viewpoint of Jacob). He expected to be reunited with his son in Sheol, hence, recognition is implied” (“Will There Be?”).

Consider what David said when his baby died. David had been fasting and mourning before the baby's death. But after the baby died, he said, "Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23). David understood that he himself would one day die, and that he could be with the baby again. "I shall go to him" implies that David would recognize him in the spirit world. This passage has comforted many fathers and mothers when a dear child has gone to sleep (died) in their arms. Indeed, David found comfort and was convinced that he would know his baby after this life. As one grand old song says, "Jesus has promised, and I'm sure, heaven will surely be worth it all." Truly, God's great love and scheme of redemption make it possible for us to be saved from our sins and live in hope of heaven—hoping to see God and all the righteous, including seeing/recognizing dear loved ones in Christ who have preceded us in death. I hope to see my "little brother" who died in a farm accident at age three and a half. If he were still living on earth, he would be about sixty years old. Like David, I can go to him. Let us now notice some evidence from the New Testament regarding recognition in heaven.

Evidence From The New Testament That We Will Know One Another In Heaven

Think about Moses and Elijah when they appeared with Jesus at the transfiguration (Mat. 17:1-9). Moses and Elijah were alive; they were there with Jesus, but Moses had died hundreds of years earlier and "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" hundreds of years before the transfiguration. They had not lived on earth at the same time. Thus, they did not know one another during their sojourn on earth. Yet, (they) Moses and Elijah recognized one another that day—as they discussed the approaching death of Jesus (Luke 9:31).

Hence, although they had been dead hundreds of years, they could communicate and reason about our Lord's death. They recognized one another. Peter, James, and John recognized them, although they had not known them in earthly life.

In Hades, Abraham, Lazarus, And The Rich Man Recognized One Another

Luke 16:19-31 is a great passage—teaching us that there is consciousness and recognition beyond this life. Some object to using this passage in discussing what happens at death saying that it is a parable, but we do not believe it is a parable and even if it is, it teaches the truth. Dungan says regarding the word *parable*, that it

is from the two Greek words, PARA, beside, and BALLEIN, to throw; hence a placing beside or together, a comparing, comparison: a story by which something real in life is used as a means of presenting a moral thought. The actors in a parable are real—human beings are actors, and they do nothing which they could not do. (227)

Also, Jesus did not say it was a parable. We believe the evidence points to real people and real events in life and in Hades. In parables, people are not named—as are Lazarus and Abraham in this passage. Considering what we have written thus far, when Lazarus died, he (his spirit) moved out of his earthly tent (body), and angels carried him to paradise (or “Abraham’s bosom”).

Concerning Luke 16, Winton lists several points—showing that the spirit of man in Hades is conscious and that they recognized one another.

1) The rich man could see both Abraham and Lazarus—this requires consciousness. 2) Lazarus was in a state of happiness—he was comforted, which requires consciousness. 3) The rich man was in a tormented state—his anguish requires consciousness. 4) The rich man could communicate with Abraham across the great gulf that separated the place of torments where the rich man was, and the place of comfort where Lazarus and Abraham were—consciousness is necessary in order for communication to be possible. 5) The rich man recognized Lazarus and called him by name—which requires consciousness. 6) The rich man made two requests of Abraham—which requires consciousness. 7) The rich man’s requests for the services of Lazarus necessitated consciousness. 8) The rich man could remember his earthly status and his five disobedient brothers—memory requires consciousness. 9) The rich man was concerned over the spiritual status of his wicked brothers back on earth—any emotion requires consciousness. (“Where are the Dead?”)

Please note that the rich man (while in Hades) knew who he was, recognized Lazarus and Abraham, and remembered his brothers on earth. His memory was intact; and so were Abraham’s and Lazarus’s. Our Lord’s teaching in this passage—is one of the best Bible passages, and perhaps

the most familiar—to help us understand what happens at death. The rich man’s body was buried (Luke 16:22), but he (his spirit) was very much alive, and able to recognize other souls in Hades. Of course, a great gulf was fixed (impassable) between the rich man and Abraham and Lazarus. Hades has two parts: paradise or Abraham’s bosom and Tartarus or a place of torment (2 Pet. 2:4). Our Lord and the thief were in paradise prior to our Lord’s resurrection (Luke 23:43). Lazarus was also in this part of Hades, “Abraham’s bosom.” The rich man was also in Hades, but he was in a place separated by a great gulf, a place of torment (or Tartarus). Our conscious spirits (after death) will stay in Hades (a temporary place) until judgment day. Thus, if we shall know one another in Hades, we believe we will know one another in heaven.

Martyred Saints Of Revelation 6:9-10 Cried Out To God For Vindication.

Souls were present in the Hadean realm (paradise or Abraham’s bosom, Luke 16). John saw them (souls) under the altar. They were aware of their surroundings, thus conscious. They knew why they were there. They remembered the past. They asked when judgment would be forthcoming against those who had murdered them. Therefore, they remembered how some men on earth had treated them (murdered them). These souls were assured of vengeance in due time. The book of Revelation assures us, if we are faithful, we will be victorious and receive “a crown of life” (Luke 18:7-8; Rev. 2:10; Rev. 3:21).

Other Bible Verses Giving Insight To Conciousness And Recognition After Death

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 Paul gives us further insight—as he discusses living in our “earthly house” (physical body) on earth, but desiring to have that spiritual body, “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Verse ten discusses the

judgment, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” Surely, if we are to be judged regarding “the things done in his body,” **our** body, whether “good or bad,” we will be conscious and able to remember things done in this life. According to Solomon, we will be held accountable for even the “secret” things we have done. “Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecc. 12:13-14). Therefore, life on earth is a serious matter. Sinners need to obey the gospel in becoming Christians; and Christians need to be faithful “unto death.” (2 The. 1:7-9; Acts 2:38; Rev. 2:10).

Among other passages that give us insight to matters beyond this life are the following: Matthew 8:11; Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:1-58; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. Another example is that of Onesimus, a run-away slave, in the book of Philemon. Onesimus became a Christian, but Paul sent him back to Philemon—carrying the epistle bearing his name. Paul writes in verse 15, “For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever” (Phil. 15). Jackson comments, “The apostle raises the possibility that ‘providence’ was involved in this situation. ‘Perhaps’ this slave had “been separated” (the passive voice is significant) from his master temporarily so that he might “have him forever” (v. 15). This statement clearly implies future recognition and association. It is a thrilling affirmation!” (5).

It seems reasonable to draw the conclusion from what is presented above regarding Abraham, Jacob, David, Moses, and Elijah, The Rich man and Lazarus (and Abraham again),

the souls John saw under the altar, Philemon and Onesimus, and the great judgment to come that all of these and other Bible passages require consciousness and recognition after death. Thus, we conclude that the Bible teaches that “We shall know one another after this life” in the Hadean realm; and we believe, if we know one another there, that we will know one another in heaven.

Some Argue Against Future Recognition

Although the evidence from the Word of God seems overwhelming that we will know and recognize one another in heaven, some raise objections. One of the main objections is that if we know/recognize our loved ones that are in heaven, what about those who are not there? Thus, they reason, knowing that some of my loved ones are not in heaven, how could I have joy and happiness there? Woods reasons, “But this supposition, instead of solving the difficulty, increases it, for, if we are unable to recognize **any** of our loved ones there, we must then be uncertain whether any of them are there, even if they are, in which case we should worry about **all** of them” (20). May the very thought of loved ones being lost motivate us now, while in the body, to encourage them to obey the gospel of Christ. Also, we trust that God will take care of any such potential problems. With a faith like Abraham, we trust God, that we will have true happiness in heaven. 2) Some object by asking, How is it possible to recognize others, if the brain is dissolved in the earth? The Bible teaches that our memory goes with our spirit at death to the Hadean world (Jam. 2:26; Luke 16:19-31). There, our memory will not be dead, but active and alert (Rev. 6:9-11). 3) Another argument sometimes used against knowing one another in heaven is the question How will my spirit recognize another spirit when both are spirits not having a body? The Bible does not teach that we will be mere spirits in heaven, but that we will

have spiritual bodies. Paul said, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44). Job said, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" (Job 19:25-27). Woods says regarding this passage, "Here in the most positive fashion, the resurrection of the body, the preservation of the personality, and the identity of the individual are taught, Job believed that he (as Job) would see God; that he would see God in the flesh (with the change implied through which bodies must pass in the resurrection), and that it would be Job who experienced this with his own eye, and not another" (19). The objections offered against our knowing one another in heaven, "have their origin in a defective concept of the nature of the next life or in projecting the limitations of this life into the next, or both" (Woods 18).

Let us have a faith like Abraham, Moses, and others who lived by faith during Old Testament times (Heb. 11), looking for a city "whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 10:10). Let us strive to be like the great apostle Paul who said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phi. 1:21). When facing death, he wrote that he was ready to move out of this earthly tabernacle, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8). We sincerely believe the Bible teaches that we shall know one another in heaven. What a wonderful place heaven will be

“when all of God’s singers get home.” Let us, like Abraham, look “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb.11:10). Hopefully, after death, it can be said of us, “He was gathered to his people.”

Works Cited

- American Standard Version*. Star: Fort Worth, 1901. Print.
- Dungan, D.R., *Hermeneutics*. Delight: Gospel Light, Print.
- Jackson, Wayne. “False Ideas Regarding Death.” *Christian Courier*. Christian Courier, n.d. Web.
- . “Will There Be Personal Recognition in Heaven?” *Christian Courier*. Web.
- King James Version*. Nelson: Nashville, n.d. Print.
- Winton, Bob. *First Thessalonians*. Commentaries & Topical Studies. 2013. CD-ROM.
- . “Where Are The Dead?” *Sermons*. Commentaries & Topical Studies. 2013. CD-ROM.
- Woods, Guy N. *Shall We Know One Another In Heaven?* Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1988. Print.

CHAPTER 4

The Altars Of Abraham: Drawing Near To God In Worship

Greg Dismuke

So many wonderful things can be said of the great patriarch Abraham. Maybe the greatest one thing that could be said of Abraham as a summation of all he was is that he was a man that allowed God to utilize him to accomplish His will. However, I am compelled to mention some of the wonderful individual attributes of this godly man. He was a man of obedience, a man of prayer, a man who is still a model of faith to the faithful. He was a great provider for his family, and one who displayed generosity and demonstrated courage. Abraham was a friend of God and a man of worship. It has been stated that one could trace the paths of Abraham by the altars that he built. These altars showed he was a man of worship. Many lessons can be learned from Abraham and his worship to God.

The Source Of True Worship

And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land:

and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. (King James Version, Gen. 12:7-8)

Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. (Gen. 13:4)

Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord. (Gen. 13:17-18)

And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. (Gen. 22:9)

In every account of Abraham building an altar, it is evident Abraham knew to whom worship should be addressed. He was truly seeking the honor of God. The altars were erected as acts of gratitude in light of promises given to

him of God. This fact is clearly seen in the first altar built by Abraham after God's promise.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram *was* seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite *was* then in the land. And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. (Gen. 12:1-7)

Not only was Abraham grateful, but he never lost sight of whom he was worshipping. Anytime man loses sight of the

true object of worship, he becomes reckless in his worship. Man should be careful to erect his altar to God alone for several reasons.

First of all, God revealed He is the only true God. “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa. 46:9-10).

Secondly, consider the Lord’s response when Satan suggested Jesus fall down and worship him.

Again, the devil taketh him *up* into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these *things* will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (Mat. 4:8-10)

The Lord’s reply revealed God is the only object of worship.

Thirdly, God is a jealous God.

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven

above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. (Exo. 20:1-5)

God is jealously affected when one gives to another that which belongs to him.

Abraham understood that erecting the altars was for God's glory and not his own. It appears that much has changed today when it comes to worshipping for the honor and glory of God. What a difference in attitude from Abraham to the men of Babel. The men of Babel erected their tower for the express purpose of getting themselves a name (Gen. 11:1-4). Abraham erected his altars for the purpose of glorifying God's name.

Only one is worthy of worship. He is the One who introduced himself to Abraham in Genesis seventeen as El Shaddai, the Almighty God. He would perform all of the promises made to Abraham because of His Omnipotence. His omnipotence has been illustrated throughout Scripture:

- He wrote with his finger the Ten Commandments on tables of stone (Exo. 31:18).
- He reached those wherever they go who attempt to elude His power (Amos 9:2).
- He created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1) and He will shut them down (2 Pet. 3:10-11).
- He opened up the fountains of the great deep and the windows from heaven and destroyed the earth with

a universal flood that exceeded every high mountain by 15 cubits, while at the same time saving eight human souls and preserving the existence of every living creature (Gen. 6-9).

- He parted the Red Sea allowing Israel to escape (Exo. 14-15).
- He caused a shepherd boy to slay a giant (1 Sam. 17).
- He sent down fire and slew 450 false prophets (I Kin. 18).
- He had the power to come down to earth and live as a man (Heb. 2:9-18).
- He devised a plan for the redemption of sinful man (John 10:10).
- He used a boy's lunch to feed five thousand people (John 6:1-13).
- He can take an individual into a watery grave of baptism and apply the blood of the second person of the Godhead to the sin-stained soul, and bring him forth pure and clean as a person born anew, creating a saint out of a sinner (Rom. 6; Col. 2:11-12).
- He has power over death and will destroy this enemy in the end (1 Cor. 15:26).

We Can Learn The Submission And Sacrifice Of Worship

Abraham obeyed God. He responded to God in faith. His faith was an active faith that took God at his word and did what he said. In Genesis 22, we read of God commanding Abraham to go to the land of Moriah and worship Him there. We also learn that the offering was to be his only son Isaac.

And it came to pass after these things,
that God did tempt Abraham, and said
unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold,

here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only *son* Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide you here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid *it* upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here *am* I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where *is* the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the

wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here *am* I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son* from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind *him* a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. (Gen. 22:1-13)

Abraham's submission allowed him to make the ultimate sacrifice to God. He would not even withhold his dearest and most precious possession in order to please God in worship. Abraham sacrificed whatever it took to be able to worship the God of heaven. He sacrificed his father's house and his land and left the idolatrous practices of his kindred. He made the greatest of all sacrifices when he would not withhold his son in sacrifice to God. This was a gesture that did not go unrecognized by God. "And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Gen. 22:12).

God is omniscient, and certainly knew who Abraham was. But a great lesson to be learned is God allowed Abraham to prove what kind of faith he had by consummating it in obedience. In Genesis 15:6, the Scriptures record for us, "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for

righteousness.” God declared Abraham to be righteous on account of his faith (trust). His faith in God’s promise became the grounds of his acceptance with God. It was a faith that contained intellectual, emotional, and volitional components. The intellectual component of his faith accepted the words given by God as facts; the emotional component trusted God to be true to his promises. The volitional component of his faith responded in obedience to whatever God required. Genesis fifteen covers both the intellectual and emotional component of his faith; and when nothing else was required God declared him righteous. Genesis twenty-two showed the volitional component of Abraham’s faith when God required of him to offer his son as a burnt offering. Abraham’s faith was shown to be complete when the final element of his faith responded. Consider what James wrote regarding the Patriarch.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God. (Jam. 2:21-23)

We Need To Learn The Separation Of Worship

A statement in Genesis 22:5 is worthy of our consideration. “And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again unto you.” That certainly proves

that whatever Abraham thought he was doing before he and the lad went to worship was not worship. Abraham's worship called at this time for a separation. What if Abraham had taken the young men with him; what do you suppose their reaction would have been once they realized he was going to slay his son upon the altar? Would they have attempted to intervene on Isaac's behalf? We are not told why Abraham did not allow the young men to accompany them to the sacrifice. However, we are sure He was not going to allow anything or anyone to detract or distract him from carrying out his responsibilities in worship to God.

Lessons for Our Consideration

Let Us Learn The True Source Of Our Worship.

Jesus declared to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well an undeniable truth that must be understood by all in order for man to worship God properly.

But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.
(John 4:23-24)

It must be understood that when we approach the one true God in worship, we are not worshipping carnal, fleshly, worldly man, nor are we worshipping beasts. We are coming in the presence of a holy, righteous being that is spirit. In order for us to be true worshippers of a Spirit, we must be spiritual. In order for us to become spiritual, several things should be true of us:

1. Our souls need to be purified (1 Pet 1:22). The soul is purified through obedience to the Word of God. The result of the purification was the unfeigned (without hypocrisy) love of the brethren. Spirituality allows one to love purely those who share the same faith. So it must be sincere. All evil thoughts and feelings regarding one's brothers and sisters in Christ must be removed.
2. We need to be born again (1 Pet. 1:23). The new birth involves the rebirth of man's spirit (John 3:1-10). (The potential for spirituality is in us because we have a spirit.) The change in our lives should not die because it took place through God's imperishable Word. Everything that is born of perishable seed withers and falls, but that which is born of the Word of God is living and enduring.
3. We need to discard the old garments (1 Pet. 2:1). If one is to be spiritual, the attitudes and speeches that would drive wedges between believers and threaten that brotherly love must be put away. "Putting away" is an aorist participle with imperative force indicating a definite and decisive act with permanent results. This verb means literally to discard clothing. Here it is used figuratively to signify the putting away of the evils of one's former life. Tradition says that the early church converts would cast off forever their old clothing following their baptism and put on new garments as a symbol of the new life.
4. We need to maintain our spiritual lives with the right source (1 Pet. 2:2). A baby instinctively turns to its mother's breasts as the only source of nourishment. Likewise, the children of God must turn to God's abiding and enduring Word to sustain them. They must desire the right kind of milk; it must be sincere

milk. It must be without guile, literally unadulterated. In ancient times, milk was often mixed with gypsum, a chalky-like substance to increase its volume, thus rendering it impure and contaminated. This became a figure of the mixing of the Word of God with false doctrine. Christians who are spiritual are to desire their Word without any mixture of poisonous errors.

5. We must continue to desire it. Just as an infant, once directed to the breast, continues to desire it, so must a Christian return again and again to feast in the delights of the Lord. Once man becomes spiritual, he can erect his altar of acceptable worship to God. This is vitally important because there are two fundamental ways in which man tends to approach God in worship. One, if he is not spiritual, he will offer to God what he wants because it makes him feel good. Two, if he is spiritual, he will offer to God what God wants and learn to feel good about that.

Let Us Learn Submission And Sacrifice In Our Worship

1. To submit ourselves to God in worship is to do only that which is required by Him. We are limited to those things that God has authorized in His Word.
 - a. Breaking Bread (communion). This was instituted by the Lord (Mat. 26:26-29) and practiced by the early church (Acts 20:27; 1 Cor. 11:23-29)
 - b. Preaching (teaching). The church continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine (Acts 2:42). When the church came together to partake of the bread on the first day of the week, they also partook of the Word of God through Paul's preaching (Acts 20:7). Timothy was urged by Paul to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2).

- c. Singing (Col. 3:16). The Ephesian church was commanded to speak to one another “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). Songs of praise were lifted up to God both in private and public assemblies (1 Cor. 14:15).
 - d. Prayer (Acts 2:42). The Jerusalem church continued steadfastly in prayer. God honors the prayers of the righteous (Jam. 5:16; 1 Pet. 3:12). Paul urged the Thessalonian church to be thankful always and pray without ceasing (1 The. 5:17-18).
 - e. Giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The first-century Christians were urged to be generous givers. Notice this took place on the first day of the week when the church came together.
2. It is not enough to submit ourselves to God in the things He requires. We must also do them in the way He prescribes.
- a. Communion—Must be unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (Mat. 26:26-27), no substitutes.
 - b. Preaching—Must be sound doctrine that cannot be condemned (Tit. 2:1; Tit. 2:8).
 - c. Singing—Must be without the accompaniment of instrumental music (Eph. 5:19).
 - d. Prayer—Must be with the accompaniment of a righteous character (1 Pet. 3:12; Jam. 5:16; Pro. 28:9).
 - e. Giving—Must be from a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7).

Let Us Learn The Separation Of Worship

Consider what Abraham said to the young men who were with him. “Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship” (Gen. 22:5). We need to separate

ourselves from all of our worldly concerns and pursuits when we are preparing to approach God in worship. We need to say to our Domestic responsibilities, Stay here while I go yonder and worship. It does not matter if you are building a house, your worship to God should not be sacrificed in order for you to do so. If your house is a mess and guests are coming; you should not sacrifice worship in order to clean it up. If a meal is being planned for the church, no one should sacrifice worship in order to prepare it.

We need to say to our relationship responsibilities, Stay here while I go yonder and worship. Some couples have stated they need to work on their relationship and the only time they have together is Sunday. Well, I say what better place and time to draw closer together than in worship to the God of heaven. Many have experienced those times when family members come to town to visit; however, they do not share your conviction when it comes to worship. Sadly, some members have thrown worship on the altar to be sacrificed for the purpose of entertaining their guests. What an impact it would have to show how important our relationship to God truly is by telling our guests, Stay here while I go yonder and worship.

We must say to our occupational responsibilities, Stay here while I go yonder and worship. Some members are rarely ever in worship, and when asked about their delinquency, they always say it is work related. One should consider that Matthew 6:33 is in the context of one's physical needs being provided by God. God desires we would put Him first by emphasizing spiritual concerns and trust Him to provide for our physical ones. The point I am making is if you have a job that rarely allows you to worship and disconnects you from the saints, you need a new job. Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mat. 6:21).

Say to your proprietorship responsibilities, Stay here while I go yonder and worship. Abraham left his people and his possessions. “Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship” (Gen. 22:5). Nothing of our possessions should come into worship that may become a distraction. We need to tell our cellphones, Stay here while I go yonder and worship. It appears many important people are on call during worship. Unfortunately, it is not because they are doctors and may have to be prepared to go into a hospital to perform emergency surgery, but rather because they are foolish and believe they cannot afford to miss a text or instant message from their heathen friends. When approached about this subject, many claim they have a Bible app on their phone and that is why they use it in worship. It is one thing to use the technology available to us in worship to God for good; it is another thing entirely to allow the use of that technology to become a distraction in our worship to God. The world itself encourages us not to drive and text because it can be hazardous to your physical health. Those are two things that have been proven should not be done simultaneously. If one can understand that, one can understand that texting and worship should not be done simultaneously because it can be hazardous to your spiritual health.

Conclusion

We are living in a time when worship is more about the worshipper than the one to whom worship should be addressed. Worship for many today is centered on convenience rather than conviction. The worshipper craves an experience looking forward to being entertained as opposed to being edified spiritually and edifying others. The worship of today has reversed the process. If we were under patriarchy today, God would be responsible for building the

altars, bringing the sacrifices, and offering them for the honor of those who supposedly should have been worshipping Him. We are thankful to God for men like Abraham who shine in Scripture as a great model for all who will approach God in worship. He knew the source of his worship, for he sought to bring honor to God. He understood worship involved submission and sacrifice. And it was not lost on him that worship called for separation. Our worship today must seek God's honor by submitting to His will and making whatever sacrifice is necessary. If this is not true of you when you approach Him, then your worship is vain.

Works Cited

King James Version. Print.

CHAPTER 5

The God Of Abraham: A Perfect God Willing To Be Linked To An Imperfect Man

B. J. Clarke

How perfect would you have to be for an all-perfect God to claim you unashamedly as one of His own? For that matter, is it even possible that a perfect God would identify Himself by associating Himself with the name of an imperfect human being? God is perfect in both “his work” (King James Version, Deu. 32:4) and “his way” (2 Sam. 22:31). Man, on the other hand, is imperfect to say the least. Among accountable human beings, “there is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10-12). Paul elaborates even more concerning the sinful condition of mankind:

Their throat is an open sepulchre; with
their tongues they have used deceit; the
poison of asps is under their lips: Whose
mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:
Their feet are swift to shed blood:

Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes...For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:13–18; Rom. 3:23)

In view of man's sinful state, is there any hope that he can have a close and endearing relationship with such a holy and perfect Godhead? Again, we return to the original question—would a perfect God ever say, without reservation, that He is the God of an imperfect human being?

Of course, God is the God of all human beings in the sense that He is over all humanity, and all humanity should acknowledge that He is the “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:6). Yet again, the question must be asked: would a perfect God ever be willing to identify Himself with an imperfect human being by declaring unashamedly, “I am the God of (insert name here).”

A reading of the Holy Scriptures answers our question and even supplies some specific names to fill in the blank. After mentioning the journeys of Abraham (Heb. 11:8), Isaac, and Jacob (Heb. 11:9), the Hebrews writer declared the following concerning them:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And

truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: **wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God**: for he hath prepared for them a city. (emp. mine throughout, BJC, Heb. 11:13–16)

The bold declaration in this passage answers the beginning question of this chapter. **God is not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**. Proof of this is threaded throughout the Sacred Writings. God appeared unto Isaac one night and said “**I am the God of Abraham thy father**: fear not, for I *am* with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham’s sake” (Gen. 26:24). God told Jacob later on, “**I am the God of Beth-el**, where thou anointedst the pillar, *and* where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred” (Gen. 31:13).

At the burning bush, God told Moses, “Moreover he said, **I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exo. 3:6). The very Son of God also spotlighted the longstanding Divine association with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when He answered the Sadducean question about the resurrection: “And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, **I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?**” (Mark 12:26). In his sermon before the Jewish authorities, Stephen also referred to what

God told Moses at the burning bush, “*Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold” (Acts 7:32).

It is quite apparent from these passages that God was not ashamed to be associated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. On the contrary, He repeatedly identified Himself as “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Stated positively, God is proud to be called their God. We met the same idea in [Hebrews] 2:11 where Jesus is not ashamed to call those who are made holy, “brothers.” Beginning in Genesis 17:7–8 the OT has numerous statements of God’s offer to be their God and they his people. Leviticus 26:12 says it succinctly, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (Lev 26:12). This same relationship is repeated in the new covenant as was already mentioned in Hebrews 8:10 quoting Jeremiah 31:33, “I will be their God, and they will be my people.” In addition one should consider the hundreds of instances where God is simply called “their God” or “the Lord your God.” (Girdwood & Verkruyse)

“We are not to suppose that God is ever *ashamed* of anything that he does. The meaning here is, that they had acted in such a manner that it was fit that he should show towards them the character of a Benefactor, Protector, and Friend” (“Hebrews 11:16”). The Bible commentary by

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown avers that the fullest expression of the Greek phrase in Hebrews 11:16 is that God “is not ashamed **of them.**” In fact, “Not only is He not ashamed, but glories in the name and relation to His people” (“Hebrews 11:16”). “Despite the obvious failings of all these men, God was **not ashamed to be called their God.** He had prepared a spiritual city for them, and he was delighted to be known as their God” (Lea).

This is the greatest privilege, honour, advantage, and security that any can be made partakers of, **that God will bear the name and title of their God.** And thus is it with all believers, by virtue of their relation unto Christ, as he declares, John 20:17, “I ascend unto **my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.**” See 2 Cor. 6:16–18. (Owen)

So, what is it that links men to God in such a way that He is not ashamed to be called their God?

It Is Not A Sinless Perfection

On at least seventeen occasions in the King James Version of the Bible, God is labeled as the “God of Abraham.” As noted earlier, this was not some nickname pinned on God against His will. Rather, this was the designation God chose for Himself. Did God choose this description because Abraham was sinless while other human beings were not? Was God proud to associate His name with the name of Abraham because Abraham was so sinlessly perfect? On the contrary, the Biblical record does not attempt to hide the multiple transgressions of Abraham.

Abraham lingered.

Combining the timeline of Stephen's statement (Acts 7:2-4) with the phrase, "Now the Lord **had said** unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country" (Gen. 12:1) seems to indicate that Abram had not responded promptly to God's original call. Consider Stephen's words:

And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; **The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,** And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.
(Acts 7:2-4)

God called Abraham to get out of his country when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran (Acts 7:2). Was Abram unwilling to leave his family to obey the call of God? It was not until after his father died that he left Haran and removed himself toward the land of promise (Acts 7:4). He did not depart out of Haran until he was seventy and five years old (Gen. 12:4). It appears that God had to approach him a second time to urge him to leave his country and kin to enter the land of Canaan.

Abraham listened to family members more than to God.

God's instructions had been quite plain—"Get out of thy country, **and from thy kindred**, and from thy father's house,

unto a land that I shall shew thee” (Gen. 12:1; Acts 7:3). Yet, “**Lot went with him**” (Gen. 12:4). Who influenced Abram to ignore God’s plain instructions to leave his kinfolk? We are not told precisely who influenced Abram to take Lot and his family along. We do know, however, that he would live to regret this decision due to the strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle (Gen. 13:8), not to mention the fact that Lot’s family ended up in the city of Sodom where the men “were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly” (Gen. 13:13).

Abraham also listened to Sarai’s advice when he should have trusted in God’s Word. Growing impatient of never having a child, Sarai determined that Abram should go in unto her handmaid, Hagar. From her vantage point, she could obtain children by Hagar much faster than she could by hoping for a child to arrive from God. Abram hearkened unto his wife’s demand, went in unto Hagar, and she conceived (Gen. 16:4). Sarai grew bitter toward Hagar and blamed Abram (Gen. 16:5). Abram responded to Sarai, “Behold thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee” (Gen. 16:6). Sarai took full advantage of this permission and she “dealt hardly” with Hagar, who fled from the affliction Sarai was dishing out (Gen. 16:6).

The angel of the Lord found Hagar by a fountain of water in the wilderness (Gen. 16:7) and asked her where she had come from and where she was going. She responded that she was fleeing from the face of her mistress Sarai (Gen. 16:8). The angel of the Lord commanded her to return to Sarai and submit to her hands (Gen. 16:9). He also promised to multiply the seed of Hagar, commanded her to name the child Ishmael, and predicted in general the kind of man Ishmael would be (Gen. 16:11). Hagar did give birth to baby Ishmael when Abram was 86 years old (Gen. 16:15-16).

Thirteen years later, the Lord appeared to Abram and changed his name to Abraham to symbolize how he would become the father of many nations (Gen. 17:1-6). God told Abraham that Sarai's name would be changed to Sarah because she would also have a son. "Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen. 17:17-18). The nature of Abraham's laugh is oft debated:

Worship and incredulity seem intermixed here. We are under no necessity of making Abraham flawless as the Jewish commentators try to do. He found the promise difficult to believe at first. This is borne out by what he said **in his heart** and by his request to God that the promises might center in Ishmael. The expression **O that Ishmael might live before thee!** indicates Abraham's desire that this son be the heir of the promise and that he adopt him. (Hindson & Kroll)

God made it clear to Abraham that Ishmael would not be the son of promise. "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son **indeed**; and **thou shalt call his name Isaac**: and I will establish my covenant **with him** for an everlasting covenant, and **with his seed** after him" (Gen. 17:19). God did promise Abraham that He would bless Ishmael and make him fruitful (Gen. 17:20), yet reiterated, "But my covenant **will I establish with Isaac**, which **Sarah shall bear unto thee** at this set time in the next year" (Gen. 17:21).

Unfortunately, the sordid tale of friction between Sarah and Hagar, and their respective boys, Isaac and Ishmael, was far from over. After Sarah gave birth to Isaac, when Abraham was 100 years old (Gen. 21:5), she was initially happy. However, some years later, during a great feast for Isaac, Sarah saw Ishmael laughing in ridicule at Isaac, and she told Abraham, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac” (Gen. 21:10). How did Abraham react to this demand from Sarah? It was a very grievous request in his eyes because of his love for his son Ishmael (Gen. 21:11). However, it was time to focus on Isaac as the son of promise; thus, God commanded Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away (Gen. 21:12).

What an emotional morning it must have been for Abraham when he rose up early, “and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba” (Gen. 21:14). When the water supply was depleted, she could not bear to watch the death of her son, so she sat “a good way off” and “lift up her voice and wept” (Gen. 21:16).

It is important to see all of the emotional pain experienced by Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac, and to remember that **all of it could have been avoided if Abraham had listened to God instead of the faithless proposal of his barren wife**. If he had never tried to use Hagar as the conduit for fulfilling the promises of Genesis 12:1-3, then all of the friction between the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac would have been nonexistent. Every time we see the conflict that exists, even today, between the descendants of Ishmael (Arabs) and the descendants of Isaac (Israel) we should be reminded that, for all of the good

things Abraham did, his decision to listen to the bad advice of his wife Sarah, instead of God, proved to be disastrous—both then and now!

Abraham looked to a pagan land for blessings instead of God's land of promise.

It must have been very encouraging for Abram when he finally reached the land of Canaan and received a reiteration of God's promise to give the land to his descendants (Gen. 12:6-7). Abram was so moved on this occasion that he built an altar of worship to the Lord, who appeared unto him (Gen. 12:7). Abram removed himself into a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent there, and built an altar of worship, and called upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 12:1; Gen. 12:6-7), "and lived happily ever after"? Of course, the "happily ever after" phrase is not the way the Biblical story went for Abram, at least not right away. A famine entered the land: "and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land" (Gen. 12:10). Did Abram believe that God led him to the land just to watch him die of starvation? Did Abram not believe that God could and would reverse the famine in due time? Did Abram believe that the child of God should not have to endure any hardships? While we cannot read minds, we can say that Abram's decision to look to Egypt for help would pave the way for further difficulties in his life.

Abraham lied.

As Abram approached Egypt, he started thinking about the custom of many foreign kings to seize beautiful women and force them into their harems. Although Sarai was approximately 65 years old at the time (Gen. 12:4; Gen. 17:17), she was about middle aged, for she died at 127 years old (Gen. 23:1). Even today some women age more slowly than do others and some ladies maintain their youthful

beauty longer than do others. Sarai was such a woman in her time. Consequently, he said to Sarai,

Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. (Gen. 12:11–13)

Abram's reasoning was, "If they think I am your husband, they will kill me so that they can have you without any contest. On the other hand, if they think I am your brother, they won't feel compelled to kill me in order to have you for their own."

Just as expected, "when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair" (Gen. 12:14). The Egyptian princes were on the prowl for women to incorporate into Pharaoh's harem, and it did not take them long to spot Sarai and tell Pharaoh about her. He accepted their recommendation and Sarai "was taken into Pharaoh's house" (Gen. 12:15). This phrase implies much more than just having her come into the house for a visit or a chat. Pharaoh adopted her into his group of available women, and paid Abram handsomely "for her sake" by lading him with "sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels" (Gen. 12:16).

Pharaoh was severely punished for what he had been doing with Abram's wife. Indeed, "the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's

wife” (Gen. 12:17). Pharaoh confronted Abram, and said, “What is this that thou hast done unto me? Why didst thou not tell me she was thy wife?” (Gen. 12:18). The American Standard Version renders Genesis 12:19, “Why saidst thou, She is my sister, **so that I took her to be my wife?** now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way” (Gen. 12:19). Pharaoh then commanded his men to send away Abram and Sarai, and all that he had (Gen. 12:20).

It would be wonderful to say that this episode jolted Abram from ever traveling down this deceitful path again, but about 25 years later, when Abraham was sojourning in Gerar, he told Abimelech, the king of Gerar, concerning Sarah, “She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah” (Gen. 20:2). Imagine Abimelech’s surprise when God came to him in a dream by night, and said to him, “Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man’s wife” (Gen. 20:3).

In this instance, Abimelech “had not come near her” and he protested to God that he had done nothing unrighteous to deserve to die (Gen. 20:4). Abimelech’s further statements to God make it clear that Sarah had been complicit in this deceit: “Said he not unto me, She is my sister? And **she, even she herself said, He is my brother:** in the integrity of my heart and the innocency of my hands have I done this” (Gen. 20:5). God explained to Abimelech in a dream, “Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her” (Gen. 20:6).

God commanded Abimelech to restore Sarah back to Abraham or face the death penalty—not just for him, but also all that belonged to him (Gen. 20:7). God told him that Abraham was a prophet and that he would pray for Abimelech to live. Consequently, Abimelech wasted no time

in complying with God's instructions. He "rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid" (Gen. 20:8).

It is somewhat ironic that the king of Gerar called Abraham the prophet and gave him a much-deserved confrontation, instead of the other way around. Abimelech said unto him, "What hast thou done unto us? and wherein have I sinned against thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? **thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.** And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?" (Gen. 20:9-10). Abraham responded to this cross-examination as follows:

Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And **moreover she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother;** and she became my wife: and it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me: **at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.** (Gen. 20:11-13)

A couple of things stand out from reading this passage. First, Sarah was technically a half-sister to Abraham, for they had the same father, but not the same mother. Nevertheless, a half-truth is still a whole lie and Abraham was wrong for propagating this lie. Second, based on the statement in Genesis 20:13, it is at least possible that Abraham had told

this lie on more than just the two occasions we have recorded in Genesis 12 and 20. Abraham had asked her to tell this lie, not just in Egypt and in Gerar, but “at every place whither we shall come” (Gen. 20:13). We do not have every single episode in the life of Abraham and Sarah recorded in Holy Scripture, so it is possible that, during the time frame covered between Genesis 12 and 20, there were other times when this lie was told.

Abimelech did restore Sarah to Abraham and even heaped some coals of fire upon his head by sending him away in style with sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and women servants (Gen. 20:14). Moreover, Abimelech encouraged Abraham and Sarah to choose a dwelling place anywhere in the land. He also said to Sarah, “Behold, I have given **thy brother** a thousand pieces of silver” (Gen. 20:16). One can only wonder what tone Abimelech used when he said “thy brother.” It was likely spoken in sarcasm. The money was a huge sum and was designed to vindicate both parties completely and to pay damages for any wrong suffered.

Scripture records that “Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife” (Gen. 20:18). The fact that Abraham lied and prayed effectively in the same chapter takes us back to the very title of this chapter: “The God of Abraham: A Perfect God Linked To An Imperfect Man.” In fact, it is instructive to reconsider the statement God made to Abimelech in Genesis 20:7. God had said to Abimelech, “Now therefore restore the man’s wife; **for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee**, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine” (Gen. 20:7).

Although Abraham had sinned by lying—again—remarkably **God had not written him off altogether**. He **could still use Abraham as a prophet**, and as one who could intercede to save Abimelech's life! **Does this mean that God did not care about Abraham's lies? Not at all!** It **does** mean that God was willing to forgive Abraham upon his repentance, and that he could take this imperfect man and continue to work with him to perfect him more and more over time. What about us? We have a tendency to write brethren off once and for all after the first offence, much less the second, or third, etc.

We have established clearly that Abraham was not a man of sinless perfection, but what about Isaac and Jacob? After all, God is not just the "God of Abraham." He is the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." However, it does not take long to discover that Isaac and Jacob were no more sinless than their father, and grandfather, Abraham. When Isaac lived in Gerar, "the men of the place **asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister**: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon" (Gen. 26:6-7). Sound familiar? The apple, indeed, does not fall far from the tree. After a long period of time, Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, happened to look out the window and see Isaac "sporting with Rebekah his wife" (Gen. 26:8). Abimelech confronted Isaac, and Isaac used the same arguments to justify his behavior that his father used (Gen. 26:9-11).

Actually, the phrase *God of Jacob* is used even more often than *God of Abraham* or *God of Isaac*. Is this because Jacob was more sinlessly perfect than Abraham and Isaac? Hardly! Jacob is constantly depicted in Scripture as a deceiver. He stole his brother Esau's blessing by deceptive tactics (Gen. 27:1-41). He stole away from Laban, and his wife Rachel

stole her father's idol images (Gen. 31:1-34). It is not hard to find sins committed by Jacob—yet he is in God's Hall of Faith (Heb. 11:9; Heb. 11:20-21). How can this be? It is because a perfect God is willing to link Himself to imperfect men. He is not ashamed to be called their God!

No greater commendation could be given to any men than that *God is not ashamed to be called their God*. **The Old Testament does not hide the weaknesses of the patriarchs, but here the writer is looking back on history. He singles out their faith**, which cannot be denied. Moreover, he knows that the title 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' was the name specially chosen by God in his introduction of himself to Moses at the time of the exodus (Exod. 3:6). It is certainly unusual to read of God being unashamed, since shame is a characteristic of man. Nevertheless, he was in a special sense *their God* as the history of the chosen people shows. He delighted to be known as the God of Israel. (Guthrie)

Wuest observes, "The expression 'to be called their God' is most interesting in the Greek. The word 'called' is *epikaleisthai* (ἐπικαλεῖσθαι), the simple verb meaning 'to be called,' the preposition meaning 'upon.' Thus the compound word means 'to be called upon.' The idea is, therefore, that of adding an additional name to the one which one already has, namely, a surname. God was not ashamed to be

surnamed their God. He is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Why is God not ashamed to be called their God? If it is not sinless perfection, then what are the reasons? What is it about these flawed patriarchs that endeared God to say proudly, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”?

It Is Their Singular Direction

As sojourners, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob kept their singular focus on the goal before them. They were not double-minded and vacillating as to where they wanted to be. They were not traveling in different directions. They were moving forward! “The patriarchs and Sarah did not **return** to Ur, even though they could have if they had wanted to. The recipients of Hebrews were to follow the patriarchs’ example and refuse to return to the religion of their ancestors, a religious system that no longer provided atonement for sin (8:7–13). Similarly, present-day believers should refuse to return to the attractions of this world (2 Tim. 2:3, 4; 4:10)” (Radmacher, Allen, and House). William Barclay aptly noted:

In spite of everything, **they never wanted to go back**. Their descendants, when they were in the desert, often expressed a wish to go back to the fleshpots of Egypt. **But not the patriarchs**. They had begun, and **it never struck them to turn back**. In flying, there is what is called *the point of no return*. When the aircraft has reached that point, *it cannot go back*. Its fuel supply has reached such a level that there is no option but to go on. One of the

tragedies of life is the number of people who turn back just a little too soon. One further effort, a little more waiting, a little more hoping, would make the dream come true. Immediately a Christian has set out on some enterprise sent by God, he or she should feel that the point of no return has already been passed.

The mind of the spiritual pilgrim is singularly directed to spiritual things. Simeon describes this pilgrim mind:

“His affections are set on things above, and not on things below.” **He sees the emptiness and vanity of all earthly things: he has weighed them in a balance, and found them wanting in every respect.** He has seen how uncertain they are, both in the acquisition and enjoyment; how wholly unsatisfying to a spiritual mind; and how soon they pass away. **Heavenly things, on the contrary, he has found to be every way worthy of his pursuit:** and he has determined, through grace, to disregard every thing in comparison of them. **He has learned to regard this world as a mere wilderness; a land through which he is passing to his own native country; the country where his Father dwells, and which is the place of his ultimate abode.**

It Is Their Steadfast Determination

The patriarchal pilgrims were determined to keep moving and trusting God to get them to their final destination. They were determined to trust, and hence God was determined to bless. F. F. Bruce commented:

“Those who honor me I will honor,” says God (1 Sam. 2:30). The patriarchs honored God by putting their faith in him; he honored them by calling himself “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6). **What higher honor than this could be paid to any mortal?** These three patriarchs were not faultless, but **God is not ashamed to be called their God, because they took him at his word.** For all his shortcomings, Jacob had a true sense of spiritual values which sprang from his faith in God. For these, then, and for all who tread the same path of faith, God has prepared his city, his commonwealth. There is, of course, no difference between the heavenly country and the city of God. Words could hardly make it clearer that the patriarchs and the other men and women of God who lived before Christ have a share in the same inheritance of glory as is promised to believers in Christ of New Testament times.

The entire chapter of Hebrews 11 is about men and women whose steadfast faith and determination saw them

through the most difficult and trying times because they hoped for what God would provide on the other side.

It Is Their Spiritual Destination

The spiritual sojourners were looking “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). These strangers and pilgrims on the earth were seeking a country—“a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:14-16).

The basic idea of the last sentence of this section is that one may know that God is not ashamed to be called their God, since he has shown that fact by preparing a city for them. The two halves of the sentence belong so closely together that it would be possible to translate it “God is not ashamed to acknowledge them as his people, and so he has prepared a city for them,” or even “... and this is shown by the fact that he has prepared a city for them to live in.” (Ellingworth and Nida)

It is very encouraging to reflect on how “God’s **preparation of a city** for them is a promise very much like Jesus’ promise to the disciples in John 14:1-3. Since the Father and the Son had worked very closely together in the preparation of this world, it is fitting that they would both be involved in the preparation of the next” (Girdwood and Verkruyse). It is often said that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. This preparation theme is threaded throughout the Scriptures.

God had “prepared” the land of Canaan for his people (Exod 23:20). The LXX used the same word as in Hebrews. God has “prepared” a dinner (Matt. 22:4), a kingdom (Matt 25:34), indeed, many things (1 Cor 2:9) for his people. God “prepared” a “place” to escape the dragon for the woman who bore a son (Rev 12:6). The holy city which descends from heaven has been “prepared” as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2). (Girdwood and Verkruyse)

“He is not ashamed to be called the God of those whose heart and portion are in heaven. **He has prepared a city for them**, and there they find rest and satisfaction and perfect peace” (MacDonald). Simon Kistemaker captures the essence of it all:

What an honor to be called children of God! God permits us to bear his name, for he already has prepared a place for us. We are privileged above all others because “our citizenship,” as Paul puts it, “is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). All who in faith long for the heavenly city that God has prepared receive celestial citizenship (John 14:2; Rev. 21:2).

The spiritual destination was uppermost in the minds of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They put things in proper perspective.

As former Jews, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their great examples of faith. **See these patriarchs disregard everything in the way of an earthly fatherland,** pass through life and die as nothing but aliens among men, aliens in fact, yea, aliens because **they are ever aspiring to a better, a heavenly fatherland, the City of God, prepared for them by God.** Will the readers do less? These Old Testament men of faith are the models for all New Testament believers when it comes to what faith is and ever must be (v. 1). (Lenski)

Bruce elaborates on this very point,

The truth is, **their true homeland was not on earth at all.** The better country on which they had set their hearts was the heavenly country. The earthly Canaan and the earthly Jerusalem were but temporary object-lessons pointing to the saints' everlasting rest, the well-founded city of God. Those who put their trust in God receive a full reward, and that reward must belong not to this transient world-order but to the enduring order which participates in the life of God. The example of the patriarchs is intended to guide the readers of the epistle to a true sense of values; like the elect sojourners of the Dispersion addressed in 1 Peter

they are to live in this world as “aliens and exiles” (1 Pet. 2:11), and like the Philippians to whom Paul wrote, their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20).

The New Testament Christian needs to live in remembrance of the fact that “Every foreign country is a homeland to them, and every homeland is foreign...their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven (*Diogn.* 5.5–9; cf. 5.1–9)” (Lane).

There is no doubt that the patriarchs believed in a future beyond their earthly sojourn (Heb. 11:8-16).

Nothing could more certainly demonstrate that the patriarchs believed in a future state than this passage. **They did not expect a permanent home on earth.** They made no efforts to enter into the possession of the promised land themselves. They quietly and calmly waited for the time when God would give it to their posterity, and in the meantime for themselves they looked forward to their permanent home in the heavens. Even in this early period of the world, therefore, there was the confident expectation of the future state. (Barnes)

Barnes goes on to describe the pilgrim mentality in outstanding fashion:

We may remark, that the life of the patriarchs was, in all essential respects,

such as we should lead. **They looked forward to heaven**; they sought no permanent possessions here; **they regarded themselves as strangers and pilgrims on the earth**. So should we be. In our more fixed and settled habits of life; in our quiet homes; in our residence in the land in which we were born, and in the society of old and tried friends, we should yet regard ourselves as “strangers and sojourners.” **We have here no fixed abode**. The houses in which we dwell will soon be occupied by others; the paths in which we go will soon be trod by the feet of others; the fields which we cultivate will soon be ploughed and sown and reaped by others. Others will read the books which we read; sit down at the tables where we sit; lie on the beds where we repose; occupy the chambers where we shall die, and from whence we shall be removed to our graves. If we *have* any permanent home, it is in heaven; and that we have, the faithful lives of the patriarchs teach us, and the unerring word of God everywhere assures us.

Conclusion

What a concept! To think that a perfect God would be willing to call himself by the names of human beings who are not worthy! “No higher tribute could be paid to any mortal. But God proudly claims whoever trusts and

obeys him, and they can humbly insert their name in the divine proclamation, “I am the God of _____!” (Hughes). We have all heard that “without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing in his sight” (Heb. 11:6). The flip side is also true. “With faith, it *is* possible to please God!” (Hughes).

F. F. Bruce noted that the concept of being a pilgrim and stranger upon the earth is “an ideal [that] has proved too high for many Christians throughout the centuries of our era; yet there has never failed a distinguished succession of men and women possessed of this pilgrim attitude who have sung with Henry Francis Lyte:

It is not for me to be seeking my bliss
And building my hopes in a region like this;
I look for a city which hands have not piled,
I pant for a country by sin undefiled. (Bruce)

Works Cited

- Barclay, William. *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox, 2002. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Barnes, Albert. *Notes on the New Testament: Hebrews*. Ed. Robert Frew. London: Blackie, 1884–1885. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries*. Galaxie Software, 2002.
- Ellingworth, Paul, and Eugene Albert Nida. *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1994. UBS Handbook Series. Oak Harbor: Logos.

- Girdwood, James, and Peter Verkruyse. *Hebrews*. Joplin: College P, 1997. The College Press NIV Commentary. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Guthrie, Donald. *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 15. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1983. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Hindson, Edward E., and Woodrow Michael Kroll, eds. *KJV Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Nelson, 1994. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*. Vol. 2. Wheaton: Crossway, 1993. Preaching the Word. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Lane, William L. *Hebrews 9–13*. Vol. 47B. Dallas: Word, 1998. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Lea, Thomas D. *Hebrews, James*. Vol. 10. Nashville: Broadman, 1999. New Testament Commentary Holman. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James*. Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- MacDonald, William. *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. Ed. Arthur Farstad. Nashville: Nelson, 1995. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Owen, John. *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Ed. W. H. Goold. Vol. 24. Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854. Works of John Owen. Oak Harbor: Logos.

- Pink, Arthur Walkington. *An Exposition of Hebrews*. Swengel: Bible Truth Depot, 1954. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Radmacher, Earl D., Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Nelson, 1999. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Simeon, Charles. *Horae Homileticae: 2 Timothy to Hebrews*. Vol. 19. London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833. Oak Harbor: Logos.
- Wuest, Kenneth S. *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. Oak Harbor: Logos.

CHAPTER 6

If Ye Were Abraham's Children

Jacob Rutledge

One of the greatest joys of my life was becoming a father. I remember the occasion when my wife told me that she was pregnant with our daughter—how exciting! Many have experienced the same joy and the thrill of discovering that you are going to be parents. In that moment of discovery, many potential hopes and dreams for that little human fill your heart. When you have children, you often hear the question, “Whom do you think they look like?” We then talk about how they have their mother’s eyes and their father’s ears. These qualities become more and more apparent as they grow older and their physical lineage is undeniable.

In Genesis 12:1-3, God announced to Abram, “You’re going to be a dad!” Yet, he would not just be Abram (great father) but Abraham (father of multitudes/nations). The fatherhood of Abraham had far-reaching implications for humanity: it would be through His descendants that God would bring about a universal blessing to mankind (Gen. 12:3). Throughout the rest of Genesis, we see the snail-paced process of the coming “son of promise” through which this great nation would begin. We gradually begin to notice that God is not only concerned with preserving a physical lineage, but also promoting a spiritual heritage (Gen. 18:18-19; Mat.

3:9). He does not want Abraham's descendants simply to inherit his physical qualities through procreation, but his *spiritual qualities* through education. He wanted the soul and character of Abraham's children to "look" like their forefather.

Consequently, after Abraham's children reached the point of nationality, God constantly reminded them to pass on the spiritual heritage of Abraham through obedience to His commands and continual teaching of God's faithfulness to their forefathers (Deu. 6:1-10). Yet, while they were more than willing to grow the borders of their nation through procreation, they were less than willing to stay true to the spiritual heritage of their father. Along the way, the Israelites forgot what it meant to be a child of Abraham; God spent much of the Old Testament calling for them to remember who they were and what was expected. Abraham's descendants had much in common with him physically but not spiritually.

In John 8:37-40, we see Jesus dealing with these "children." Yet, there was a great disparity between the claim they were making and the reality of the situation: they claimed to be Abraham's children but did not possess all of the qualities of their ancestor. Jesus called them out on this claim by simply stating, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (King James Version, John 8:39). If they were children of Abraham, they would "look" like children of Abraham.

As we examine this text, we want to ask the question, What qualities must we possess if we desire to be children of Abraham? If we desire to be children of Abraham, we must have Abraham's eyes, heart, ears, and hands.

Abraham's Eyes

When my children were born, one of the first qualities that we examined was their eyes: what color are they, whose

do they look like, etc. The eyes can show us who they look like and which side of the family they are going to take after. In a similar sense, if we would be children of Abraham, we must have his eyes. What does this mean? Are we saying that we need to have a certain physical attribute to be a child of this great patriarch? Certainly not! In fact, that was a common misconception that the early Jewish brethren proposed which the church had to disavow (Acts 15:1-2; Rom. 4:16). This is not about a particular prescription but a particular *perspective*; it is not about a physical characteristic but a *spiritual focus*. So, what kind of “eyes” did Abraham have?

Eyes that Looked Upward

In Genesis 12:1-3, we see that God calls Abram:

Now the Lord had said to Abram: Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

His subsequent obedience is seen in the following verse (Gen 12:4). When he accepted this call, Abram’s focus was directed toward another world—a much higher level than he had previously seen. His feet were on earth, but his heart was in the heavens. The Hebrews writer describes this spiritual sight in Hebrews 11:8-10:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he

would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Here we see the reason his eyes looked upward: he was walking by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). True faith has one source and one source alone: God (Rom. 10:17). Notice how Hebrews 11 begins with faith in verse 8 but ends with God in verse 10. His eyes were no longer focused on his family or his acquaintances, but upon the one personality that would become His most intimate friend (Jam. 2:23).

Eyes that Looked Forward

Because his eyes looked upward, they were also looking forward; that is, Abraham was looking toward something that was not there yet but would be in the future. Again, we see that he was walking by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). He was looking forward to a son that was not yet born, a land not yet conquered, and a blessing not yet bestowed—yet his faith did not waver.

How is it that a transient, temporal being could “see” things that were not yet apparent? Paul wrote,

Who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he

was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. (Rom. 4:18-21)

He could look forward because he was looking upward toward the one source that can show us things yet to come: God. It is only within God that hope is sustained, because only God can tell us things that will be before they exist (Rom. 4:17). Abraham understood that if God was the source of this revelation, then he could be sure that it was going to come to pass. For that reason, his eyes looked ahead.

Eyes that Did Not Look Backward

Because he was completely focused on the upward and pressed toward the forward, Abraham was not going to look backward. Yes, he had moments where his faith seemed to backtrack (Gen. 12:10-20; Gen. 16:1-4), but he never allowed his gaze to settle permanently and longingly on the old country. If his eyes were looking behind, then he would never move ahead. He understood that God's promise was far better than any prosperity he had gained in his past life.

Lot (Abraham's nephew) understood the pain of looking backward (Gen. 19:26). Looking back when God has called you forward results in a price to pay (2 Pet. 2:20-22). Abraham knew he would never attain the promise of God without constantly focusing the eyes of his faith toward their final destination.

If Ye Were Children of Abraham

The children of Abraham have his eyes—eyes that look forward and upward but never backward. The reason the

Pharisees were not Abraham's true children was because their eyes were focused anywhere but upward and forward. They were too busy looking outward (Mat. 23:25) and downward (Luke 18:10-12) to focus their eyes on what really needed to be seen.

Yet, children of Abraham, like their forefather, are called to look upward (Col. 3:1-3), to focus solely and exclusively on the source of our hope (Mat. 6:33-34). Through our faith in God, we look forward to a land whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10; 1 John 3:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:18). If we truly want to be children of Abraham, then we must understand that we can never longingly look back to the old country—we must never look backward (Luke 9:26; 2 Pet. 2:20-22). If we are children of Abraham, we must have the eyes of Abraham.

Of course, the Pharisees of Jesus' ministry could not understand that. They were not willing to cleanse the inside of the cup through faith in Christ and baptism (John 8:24; Luke 7:29-30) and therefore receive the spiritual heritage of Abraham. They wanted the fortune that came with the covenantal promise, but not the faith that was necessary to inherit it. Why? Because faith required more of them—yes, all of them! It did not require anything of them to become physical children of Abraham, but if they wanted to be spiritual children, they would have to endure spiritual rebirthing (John 3:3-5). Maybe they understood all too well what faith cost Abraham and they were not willing to pay the price. Abraham's faith did not come without great hardship and heartbreak, sacrifice, and sweat—the Pharisees did not want that. They wanted the faith of Abraham without having to walk in the footsteps of Abraham. They wanted the prestige and the praise without the perspiration. They wanted the heritage without the hard work, the acclaim of great faith without the agony of sacrifice that produces it. They wanted

all the benefits of being a friend of God without the burden of responsibility. It should be no surprise that their Their claims for the heritage of this man were empty.

Sadly, we find the same mentality in our culture today. From Madonna to Miley Cyrus, we discover those in our culture claiming the title of Christian (or claiming to be on God's side) without wanting to take the necessary steps to be a Christian. They want the fortune of being a Christian without the faith that is required. Society believes that any semblance of spirituality gets you into heaven; but a claim to a name does not make you a beneficiary of God's grace. Just as a claiming to be Abraham's lineage would not do the Pharisees any good, claiming to be a Christian on the day of judgment will grant you no pardon (Mat. 7:21).

Within the denominational world, many people claim the title of Christian without actually possessing the faith of Abraham. They lay claim to the spiritual heritage without possessing his faithful works (Jam. 2:21-24). Sadly, when you show the faithful works that are necessary to gain that spiritual inheritance they, not unlike the Pharisees, begin to fall back on their good works. Excuses are given based upon the fact that the individual is a "good person" when, in fact, the Bible claims that none are good (Rom. 3:10-11) and that it is only through faith in the working of God that we are reborn (John 3:3-5; Col. 2:11-12). So, while many of our denominational friends would never think of their actions as Pharisaical, whenever they attempt to justify themselves under any other system than God's system as revealed in Scripture, they are attempting to be justified by another system of righteousness (Rom. 10:3).

The church of our Lord is not exempt from a mentality that lays claim to fortune without faith. While those who have obeyed the gospel have become true children of Abraham

(Gal. 3:26-27), they are not exempt from living a life of true faithfulness and holiness. When Christians try to excuse anything less than a complete devotion to the Lord (Mat. 22:37) by making claims to faithful church attendance or Bible class participation, then they are trying to claim the fortune without the faith. While faithful attendance to worship and Bible class are necessities in the life of the Christian (Heb. 10:24-25; Mat. 5:6), it is not all that Christianity is about, nor should it ever be used as an excuse to justify sin. How do we see this mentality in the church?

- When a husband is viewing porn at his computer every night but puts on a suit Sunday morning and leads singing.
- When a wife constantly battles her husband for authority in the home, but does not say anything when she comes to Bible class.
- When children attend every youth devotional but constantly disrespect and dishonor their parents.

If we believe that we can be faithful in these external forms while leaving the other elements undone (Mat. 23:23), then we have inherited a Pharisaical disposition as well. Do not let us think that just because we are members of the one true church that we will be excused on judgment day if we are living a life of hypocrisy (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

Abraham's Heart

I remember when my children were in the womb and sonograms had to be performed. The purpose was to check to make sure all of the vital organs were growing and functioning properly. Although they would spend time on each section, they always seemed to spend more time on the

heart. They understood that if the heart was not developing properly, then it would cause problems for the entire body.

When we examine Abraham, we see that there was something different about his heart. What kind of heart did Abraham have?

A Longing Heart

Abraham's heart was dissatisfied with the status quo. He was not going to settle for anything less than the eternal (Heb. 11:10). He desired a country that would not fade away. He desired the things of God. His desire was for the unseen and not simply the transient and temporal. One of the greatest marks of a man of God is his deep longing to know God more, to find deep satisfaction in simply being in His presence (Psa. 42:1; Psa. 84:10).

When Jesus addressed the Pharisees, he showed them that the greatest contrast between them and Abraham was their desire (John 8:44). They desired to kill Jesus and suppress the truth (John 8:40) which was far from what Abraham desired. Yet, their desires showed more than they really imagined: it showed who their true father was. When we examine the latter half of John 8, we see that the discussion is not as much about whom the children are as it is about whom the father is. The Pharisees initially lay claim to the fatherhood of Abraham, but when Jesus disproved that, they professed to be children of God (John 8:41). An even greater disparity exists between this claim and their actions. Notice that Jesus knew who their father was before he said it (John 8:38), yet he was gradually illuminating them to this reality. He recognized that there was some legitimacy to their claim to be descendants of Abraham (John 8:37; John 8:56), but he was not going to allow them to leave this conversation without looking their true father in the eye. He finally let them in on who their true father was: Satan (John 8:44).

The spiritual realm has only two fathers: God and Satan. That is not to say that they are coequal in power, but that each has a spiritual “brood.” Even when we call ourselves “children of Abraham,” we are linking ourselves back to being children of God (Gal. 3:26-29). The battle for the hearts of men has existed from the beginning of time. Adam and Eve were the children of God (Luke 3:38) and Satan did his best to bring them into his family by enticing them with desire (Gen. 3:5-6). As man progressed and procreated, some could still be identified as children of God because of their emphasis on spiritual elements and a desire to call on the Lord (Gen. 4:26). Yet, Satan’s brood would again prevail through the corruptive influence of intermarriage (Gen. 6:1-2). Essentially, the pages of the Bible (and human history) are filled with a battle between two families: the children of God and the children of Satan. Over and over again, it seems as if Satan is winning; his corruptive influence is felt throughout the period of Wandering (1 Cor. 10:6-7), the Judges (Jud. 2:11-13), and to the United Kingdom (2 Sam. 11). There is almost a sense of desperation as this redemptive drama unfolds, as if you are reading a tragedy: mankind had been greatly blessed by God in the beginning, but spurned His love for a passing moment of pleasure, and the corruptive influence of sin grows greater with each page. Moments of hope do occur. Noah and his family find grace in the eyes of the Lord and are given another chance (Gen. 6:8) and God makes a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). But those moments of hope are fleeting and soon the darkness grows greater. Yet, you remember at the very beginning that God made a promise: the Seed of Woman would eventually triumph (Gen. 3:15). Now, in our text, that promised one is here: God’s victor, the true Son of Promise, has arrived.

Jesus gets to the heart of what causes this birthing process: desire. In both instances, the desire of the individual determines their lineage. The identity of the devil's children is determined by their constant desire and pursuit of pleasure and pride (Eph. 2:1-3). Through habit they have come to desire the things of the world which separates them from God (1 John 2:15-17). Without a doubt, each of us was a child of the devil at one point or another (to a greater or lesser extent). On the other hand, the children of God have a love of the truth (John 3:21), listen to the Word of God (John 8:47), and are born again by the spirit of God (John 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:22-23). Just as Abraham did, his true children have a longing heart for God.

A Wandering Heart

It was Augustine who once said of God, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you." Since God's country was the only true land that could satisfy his soul, Abraham wandered from place to place, living as a pilgrim in pitched dwellings (Heb. 11:9).

The world promises that which it cannot give: lasting satisfaction. John would say that the world is passing away along with its lust (1 John 2:17). This world will eventually be rolled up like a robe and the vain pursuits of mankind will finally come to an end (Heb. 1:11). Many men have built castles of sand that cannot stand on the Day of Judgment (Mat. 7:26-27). They deceive themselves into thinking that they have some type of lasting stability. The heart of the righteous man understands that the only lasting stability is found within God and His Word (1 Pet. 1:24-25) and so that is what he builds his desire upon. Until he reaches his final goal, he is but a pilgrim in this land below (1 Pet. 2:11).

A Trusting Heart

I trust the lives of my children with very few people. Even when my wife and I leave our daughter with close friends, we still feel a little bit of anxiety while we are out. Our immediate family are the only ones allowed to keep them for more than a day. Whether I like it or not, I do have trust issues when it comes to entrusting some of my most sacred possessions into someone else's hands.

That being said, I now can appreciate, more than ever, the trust that Abraham placed in God when it came to Isaac. God came and told that poor old man to sacrifice the son he had been waiting on for so long. This was the son of his old age (Gen. 21:2) and for that and many other reasons, Isaac was very precious to Abraham. Yet, God calls His friend to sacrifice his son. Without hesitation, Abraham rose early in the morning and made the long trip up the mountain (Gen. 22:3). The Hebrews writer gives us a little more insight:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (Heb. 11:17-19)

Abraham trusted his God to take care of his most precious possession. He knew that God was faithful to His covenant and he trusted God with all of his heart (Pro. 3:5-7).

If Ye Were Children of Abraham

The true children of Abraham have restless hearts because the desire of their souls can only be filled by their

God. These people hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God (Mat. 5:6; 1 Pet. 2:2). They understand that they can never find lasting satisfaction in this world and so they do not seek it out. They understand that the only true stability is having a life founded upon the Word of Christ (Mat. 7:24-25). Because of this, they have fully and completely placed their trust into the hands of their faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19). When the world starts falling apart, they will not fear because they have the heart of their father Abraham—a heart that was already in the better country.

Abraham's Ears

As we continue to examine Abraham, we cannot help but recognize that he had an ear that was uniquely in tune with the voice of God. We could have examined this quality first due to the fact that faith originates from hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Abraham heard the call to go out into a foreign land and he did not disobey that call (Gen. 12:1-3). He did not put his hands over his ears so that the message would not enter his heart. He did not refuse to listen because it would call him to live a life of pilgrimage. Rather, he willingly listened and heeded the call of his Creator.

Sadly, his descendants did not possess this quality. Jesus bemoaned the deaf generation that he constantly had to deal with (Mat. 13:15). The call of God was going forth, but they were covering their ears so that the proclamation would not threaten their sense of self-righteousness (Acts 7:57). Jesus let them know that the true child of Abraham listened to the voice of God and His truth (John 8:37; John 8:43; John 8:47) just as He listens to the voice of His Father (John 8:38).

If Ye Were Children of Abraham

If we want to be children of Abraham, we must have ears that are willing to listen to the voice of God which is

discovered in His Word. We must be willing to hear even when it cuts to the heart. We must be willing to hear when He calls for sacrifice and self-denial (Luke 9:23). We must be willing to hear when He calls for transformation and the pursuit of holiness (Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 12:14). We must be willing to hear when He calls for proper marriages (Mat. 19:1-9). We must be willing to hear when He calls for proper dress (1 Tim. 2:9). We must be willing to hear when He calls for church discipline (1 Cor. 5). We must be willing to hear when He calls for true worship (John 4:23-24). When He calls for purity of heart (Matt. 5:8) and purity of meditation (Phi. 4:8), when He calls for courage in battle (Eph. 6:10) and meekness in manner (2 Tim. 2:24), when He calls for zeal in service (Rom. 12:11) and patience in hardship (Rev. 2:10), we must hear His voice! Until that day when we finally hear the great thunder of our Lord's glorious return (1 The. 4:16), we must always have our ears open to the truth of God's Word. Truly, the children of Abraham are the ones who have the ears that hear (Rev. 2:7).

The Hands of Abraham

Years ago, Holly Dunn sang a song titled "Daddy's Hands." In the song, she reminisces about the work that her father had done with his hands. It was not about the hands themselves, but the love and hard work that he had accomplished with them.

I wonder what Abraham's hands looked like. I imagine they were dirty and dusty from years of pilgrimage, hard work, and war. When Jesus was addressing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, He accused them of wanting to kill Him (John 8:40). Their hands were wringing with the desire to snuff out the light of the world. Yet, Abraham's hands were not spent in murdering God's messengers but in serving them (Gen.

18:6-7). If we take a longer look at the hands of our spiritual forefather, we can learn something about his character.

Hands that built an altar

It should be no surprise to us that one of God's friends offered worship to Him (Gen. 13:18; Gen. 22:9). Yet I imagine that if there were no passages that mentioned the worship of Abraham, we might very well assume it because of his great faith. Abraham set the spiritual tone for his family (Gen. 18:19) and he set an example through his personal worship. What good would it do if his hands disciplined his son for not worshipping if Isaac could not look over and see the old altars where his father used to sacrifice? Abraham's hands were spent in serving and worshipping His God.

Hands that Honored a Spouse

We are not given much insight into Abraham and Sarah's marriage. We know that he recognized her beauty (Gen. 12:11), honored her request (Gen. 16:2), wept bitterly over her death (Gen. 23:2), and purchased a proper burial place (Gen. 23:19). His hands were used in service and honor to his love. We can be sure that his example as a husband would set the tone for how his son would treat his wife (Gen. 24:67). While Abraham's hands were used to shed blood in defense of his family (Gen. 14:15), they would not bring war within his family.

Hands that Sacrificed a Son

The only time those hands were used against his family was when he had to bind Isaac and place him on the altar of sacrifice (Gen. 22:9). When I cradled my children in my hands after they were born, the farthest thing from my mind was harming them. I do not think Abraham ever imagined that the hands that once cradled his son would almost kill him. Yet, while his hands were always at the ready to help his son, their ultimate fidelity rested in the God Who made them.

If Ye Were Children of Abraham

What do our hands accomplish? The true children of Abraham use their hands in service to their God. Their holy hands are used in “building altars” of worship in the church and in their home (1 Tim. 2:8). They use their hands to honor their parents (Eph. 6:1-2), their spouses (Eph. 5:23-25), and their children (Eph. 6:4). And, while they would never bring their hands against their family for harm, their greatest fidelity lies with the One Who made them (Mat. 10:37). The hands of the children of Abraham are used in faithful obedience to their God (Tit. 2:14; Heb. 5:9).

Conclusion

From time to time, my daughter has tried to place her feet in my shoes and walk through the house in them. Right now, she struggles to wear those big shoes, but a time will come when she will be able to fill them.

Through the faithfulness of our God to His covenant, we can become children of Abraham today (Gal. 3:26-29). And, while they are big shoes to fill, we can be the children that God desires when we possess our forefather’s faithful eyes, passionate heart, listening ears, and working hands.

Works Cited

New King James Version. *Biblegateway.com*. Web.

New King James Version. Nelson: Nashville, 1992. Print.

CHAPTER 7

Abraham's Bosom: A Place Of Great Comfort

Kyle Butt

From the dreadful moment that death crept into our world on the heels of Adam's sin, mankind has craved knowledge of what will happen when we die. Civilizations separated by thousands of miles and an equal number of years have long suggested, guessed, speculated, and attempted to divine what lies on the other side of the shade. For most of humanity's time on Earth, the Hebrews writer explains that the fear for death has dogged the vast majority for the bulk of their lives (New King James Version, Heb. 2:15). Into this morass of ignorance about the timeless side of eternity, our Lord brought much clarity when He told about the blessed place of rest in the bosom of Abraham.

Abraham's Bosom: Not Part of a Parable

We read about Abraham's bosom in Luke 16:19-31. Some writers and scholars have suggested that the story in which it is found, the story of the rich man and Lazarus, is a parable. This suggestion is an inadequate explanation for a number of reasons. First, the story is introduced as historic narrative. Nothing in the text indicates that Jesus wants it to be understood as a parable. No statement like that found in Luke 15:3 says, "He spoke a parable." Second, and probably

the most powerful piece of evidence against the parable idea, is the fact that the story is narrated using the proper names of the people involved. Out of the entirety of Jesus' repertoire of parables, never once did He tell a parable using proper personal names. To suggest that the story of the rich and Lazarus is a parable would mean that it would be the only one of its kind. In order to do that, some type of convincing evidence must be brought forth that indicates that this story is positively a parable. Since no such evidence is available, the story should be understood as an accurate account of events that actually happened and not as a parable.

Abraham's Status: Living

Another aspect of Jesus' story that compels the reader to take it as history and not parabolic is the fact that Abraham's status as being spiritual alive, even though his physical body had been long dead, was confirmed by the Lord. At one point during Jesus' ministry, He was accosted by the sect of the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection from the dead. They had devised a scenario in which one woman, during the course of her earthly life, was married to seven different men. The Sadducees then asked Jesus whose wife the woman would be in the resurrection. They thought that Jesus could offer no sufficient response, and their disbelief in the resurrection would be confirmed. They were set right and humiliated, however, when Jesus responded by saying: "But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him" (Luke 20:37).

Jesus' point was clear. Moses' experience at the burning bush occurred hundreds of years after the physical death of

Abraham. In fact, the body of Abraham had been buried by his sons Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 25:9). Thus, if Abraham's body was dead, but the burning bush passage indicated that Abraham was still alive, then it must be that Abraham's soul was living in a spiritual habitation. We are then led to understand, by the story Jesus tells, that Abraham's soul was inhabiting a wonderful, paradisiacal position in the afterlife.

A Place of Comfort

The actual description of Abraham's bosom where Lazarus was carried by angels is extremely limited. We mostly understand its blessed condition in contrast to that wretched place that the wicked rich man finds himself. The text of Luke 16 explains that the rich man, following the death of his physical body on Earth, found himself in a place described as "being in torments" (Luke 16:23). So dreadful, in fact, was the rich man's misery that he yearned for the minute pleasure of a tiny drop of water from the finger tip of Lazarus, that it might cool his tongue, "For," he moaned, "I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:24).

In contrast, the rich man lifted his eyes to see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. The text merely states that rich man had his good things during his physical life on Earth, but Lazarus had his evil things. In a reversal of roles, the rich man, after death, suffers in torments, but Lazarus is "comforted" (Luke 16:25). That is basically the only description given specifically of Abraham's bosom—that it is a place of comfort for those who have been faithful to God while on Earth. And it is the polar opposite of being in torments.

While we do not find other verses in the Bible that specifically mention Abraham's bosom, we can identify verses that elaborate on the idea of God's faithful being

comforted after their deaths. Isaiah 57:1-2 explains: “The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.” The ideas of rest and comfort are clearly seen in this verse and are tied to a righteous person’s physical death. This verse seems to be an obvious reference to the state of the righteous immediately following their deaths which would apply to Lazarus. Thus, when we connect the thought of Isaiah to those concepts found in Jesus’ story, we are again reminded of the peace and comfort and absence of evil and wickedness, pain or sorrow, experienced by the righteous in Abraham’s bosom.

We would all do well to consider seriously the fact that the Bible does not view the death of God’s faithful servants as inherently evil or bad. In fact, speaking in regard to the person dying, their death is often viewed as something beneficial and rewarding for them, both in the Old Testament (as seen in Isaiah 57:1-2) and in the New Testament. To flesh that out in more detail, let us consider a story found in 1 Kings 14. That chapter relates the details of the sickness of Jeroboam’s son. Jeroboam had wickedly forsaken the Lord, set up calf-idols in Israel, and led God’s people astray. In the course of his reign, his son Abijah became very sick. Jeroboam instructed his wife to disguise herself, go to the prophet Ahijah, and inquire whether the child would live or die. God spoke to the prophet Ahijah and explained that Jeroboam’s wife was coming. He also told Ahijah that Jeroboam’s son would die at the exact moment that Jeroboam’s wife stepped back into the city. The interesting aspect of the story comes in 1 Kings 14:13, which reads: “And all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he is the only one of Jeroboam

who shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something good toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam” (1 Kin. 14:13).

This series of events seems counterintuitive to most of us, who often mistakenly view death. Most people would suggest that if Jeroboam’s son Abijah was pleasing to God, he should be the one who gets to live. But we must remember that in death, the righteous is “taken away from evil” and ushered into a place of comfort and peace. That is why the psalmist could legitimately and honestly write: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psa. 116:15). That is also why the prophet Balaam, through inspiration, could write: “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!” (Num. 23:10).

In addition to these thoughts on the destination of the righteous, it would be beneficial to offer a brief explanation of the destination of innocent children when they die. Some people have mistakenly taught that children are born with sin, and if they die as infants or children, they go to torment in a lost condition. Does the Bible teach that babies go to torment when they die? In order to answer this question, we must find a Biblical example in which an infant died, and in which his or her eternal destination is recorded. To do such is not difficult. In 2 Samuel 12, King David’s newborn son fell terminally ill. After seven days, the child died. In verses 22 and 23, the Bible records that David said: “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (2 Sam. 12:22-23). It is clear that David’s dead infant son would never return to this Earth, but David also said that one day, he would go to be with his son. Through inspiration,

David documented that his own eternal destination was going to be “in the house of the Lord” (Psa. 23:6). Therefore, we can conclude that “the house of the Lord” would be the eternal destination of his infant son to whom David would one day go. King David was looking forward to the day when he would be able to meet his son in the afterlife. Absolutely nothing in this context gives any hint that the dead infant son’s soul would go to torments.

Furthermore, Jesus said in Matthew 18:3-5:

Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. (Mat. 18:3-5)

And in Luke 18:16-17, Jesus remarked: “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” Therefore, we have been given a specific example in the Old Testament of an infant who died and would live forever. Abraham’s bosom was the most likely place where the soul of the infant went after he died. And Jesus Christ Himself, in the New Testament, stated that little children retain the qualities that make a person eligible to inherit the kingdom of God. We see, then, that infants and small children that die are in a **safe** state, and will live eternally, most likely going straight to Abraham’s bosom immediately following their deaths here on Earth.

With such clear statements from the Bible about the eternal destiny of dead infants and small children, why have religious people mistakenly taught that babies go to hell when they die? Due to the influential nature of John Calvin and his teachings, many people have taught that sin is “passed” from one generation to the next. It is believed by many religious people that children “inherit” the sins of their parents. Yet, the Bible pointedly and explicitly teaches that such is not the case. In Ezekiel 18:20, the Bible says: “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son.” Also, in Exodus 32, Moses pleaded with God to forgive the sins of the Israelites when he said: “Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written. And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book’” (Exo. 32:32-33). The Bible is plain in its teaching that babies do not inherit the sins of their parents.

In addition to the fact that innocent children are given rest and peace when they die, we would also do well to consider a few statements of the apostle Paul. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote from prison to encourage the Christians in the city of Philippi. His letter was filled with hope and encouragement, but it also contained some very pertinent comments about the way Paul, and God, view death. In Philippians 1:21-23, Paul wrote: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”

Paul, a faithful Christian, said that death was a welcome visitor. In fact, Paul said that the end of his physical life on this Earth would be “far better” than its continuation. For

Paul, as well as for any faithful Christian, the cessation of physical life is not loss, but gain.

Abraham's Bosom: A Place of Waiting

Jesus' description of Abraham's bosom was that of a wonderful place of rest and comfort. It should be understood, however, that it is not the final "end" of the story for the soul of a faithful follower of God. Resurrection is surely coming in which every faithful follower of God will be given a glorified spiritual body before entering into the glorious home of Heaven. Thus, we understand Abraham's bosom to be a temporary place of waiting until Jesus returns as He promised, bringing with Him the souls of all the faithful. One of the clearest explanations of this is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, which states:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in

the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Jesus alluded to this series of events when He spoke in John 5:28-29 and said: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” We read a similar statement in the book of Daniel: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). The apostle Paul, through inspiration, gives additional insight concerning this idea in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54:

Now this I say, brethren that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

We understand, then, that both Abraham's bosom and torments, where the rich man found himself, are temporary destinations for the souls of those who die before the final coming of Jesus Christ. When Christ returns, He will bring with Him the souls of the righteous and they will be given a glorified, resurrected body that is incorruptible and spiritual. They will then be ushered into their final destination of Heaven (Rev. 21:22-27). The wicked will be taken from torment and cast into the lake of fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Rev. 20:9-15).

Just as an aside, but one of importance to the question of the final destination of the wicked, it should be understood that Satan is not somehow the ruler of hell. Cartoons have done much to influence the idea that many people have of Satan. The picture of a red, demon-like character with small horns protruding from his head, an arrow-head pointed tail, and a pitchfork in his hand comes to the minds of many when they hear the words *devil*, *Satan*, or *hell*. In fact, many of the cartoons that depict Satan with such images also show him sitting as a king in hell determining where each person will go and the punishments meted out to those who are lost eternally. This picture could not be further from the truth. And it is because of this errant view that many, maybe even a majority, of those who read Matthew 10:28 misunderstand what Jesus meant.

In the context of Matthew 10, Jesus warned His followers that wicked men would persecute them unjustly. As He sent them out to preach, He admonished them to speak the truth boldly without fearing the repercussions. In the course of His forewarning, He said: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mat. 10:28; Luke 12:4-5). Many Bible students who have read this verse

have incorrectly assumed that Jesus was saying that Satan has the power to destroy the soul and body in hell. They have mistakenly attributed to Satan power that he never has had.

Satan is not the ruler of hell, and he does not have the power or ability to cast or drag anyone into hell. In fact, when we read about Satan's ultimate end, we see that God is the Being who cast Satan, also called the devil, into the "lake of fire and brimstone" (Rev. 20:2; Rev. 20:10). Furthermore, the apostle Paul explained to the Christians in Rome that no "angels nor principalities nor powers" could separate them from the "love of God which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:38-39). Those in Rome could choose to reject God of their own free will, but no power in existence, including Satan, could pluck them from God's hand and cast them into hell.

In truth, God will cast Satan into hell at the end of time in the same way that He will cast all those who have lived wickedly and been assigned to the realm of torments and rejected Him (Mat. 25:46; Rev. 20:15). The Bible suggests that Satan will be "in charge" of hell anymore than any other unfaithful creature of God. He will find no delight in his eternal second death, and he will not enjoy any type of authority or special privileges there. Jesus' admonition to fear the one who can cast both the soul and the body into hell was designed to encourage His followers to rely on God, be strong in the face of persecution, and trust that as long as they were right with God, no force in the spiritual world had the power to harm them.

Abraham's Bosom: A Place of Rest

In conjunction with the idea that Abraham's bosom will be a place of comfort for the righteous is also the idea that it will be a place of rest. While referring back to the passage in Isaiah 57:1-2, the text says that the righteous

shall “enter into peace” and “shall rest in their beds” upon being separated from their physical bodies. This idea of rest is further elaborated on in the book of Revelation. There we read:

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. (Rev. 6:10-11)

While it is inadvisable to interpret Revelation in a strictly literal fashion, it seems clear that the souls under the altar are those who have died and are waiting for the final return of Christ, waiting to be given their glorious, resurrected bodies. One of the aspects of their wait is that of rest from the labors and trials that they experienced while on Earth.

The implication of Abraham’s bosom being a place of rest is that those who arrive there should/will have struggled through many labors and trials for the Lord’s sake. The application to our lives is that we should live in a way that we actually need a rest. We should live Christian lives of action that “wear us out” in the service of the Lord.

Resting From Our Labors

It is certainly true that there has never been a person who could perform enough good work to earn the forgiveness of a single sin. That is why the apostle Paul stated: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Unlike many religions, Christianity is one in which God’s gift of grace, coupled with a person’s obedient faith, saves that person eternally. [Note: That does not imply that there is nothing that a person must do in order to accept God’s grace, see Lyons and Butt¹]. Because we are saved by grace, some have mistakenly taught and believed that good works play a small role in the life of a Christian. They view Christianity more as a religion of what a person does not do than what a person does.

Such a view is far from the truth. Even a cursory look at the New Testament quickly reveals that the Christian’s life is to be one of action. It is interesting that many people fail to quote Ephesians 2:10 when they quote the two verses before it. That verse says: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Good works are a vital, major aspect to the Christian life.

The book of James adamantly declares that good works define and reveal a person’s genuine faith:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things

which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (Jam. 2:14-26)

Conclusion

Abraham's bosom is mentioned only one time in the New Testament. From that reference, we understand that it is not a fictitious or mythological place. It is a place of rest and comfort for those who have lived righteously during

their tenure on Earth. In addition, when connected to other passages concerning the afterlife, we see that it is a temporary waiting place for the souls of those who are looking forward to being clothed with a glorious, incorruptible resurrected body. The fact that it is a place of rest implies that those who attain it will struggle with trials and weary themselves with labors in the service of their Lord while on Earth. Let us all live our lives so that, should we pass from this earthly life before the Second Coming of our Lord, we will find rest and comfort in the bosom of Abraham.

Notes

1. Lyons, Eric and Kyle Butt. *Receiving the Gift of Salvation*. Montgomery: Apologetics P, n.d.

Works Cited

New King James Version. Print.

CHAPTER 8

Deciphering The Laughter

Bobby Liddell

The book of Genesis records the “beginning” of man, the “beginning” of the world, and the “beginning” of God’s relationship with man (King James Version, Gen. 1-2). As it does so, the book of Genesis, “The Book of Generation” (according to the Septuagint version), accurately chronicles the development of nations (Gen. 5-11) and especially the development of the nation of Israel as God’s own chosen people. Through this separation of the people of Israel from other nations, and by the gradual unfolding of God’s plan for man, the real purpose of the book of Genesis appears; that is, that God had planned and determined, in His foreknowledge, the coming of the Christ, Who would be the seed of Abraham, and of the Israelite tribe of Judah, as the Savior of all men (Gen. 3:15; Acts 2:23; John 3:16; 1 John 2:2).

The Call Of Abram

From Adam, the first man (1 Cor. 15:45), Moses’ inspired writing in his “book of the generations of Adam” (Gen. 5:1), traces the generations from Adam to Terah, the father of Abram (Gen. 11:26). The next verse states: “Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot” (Gen. 11:27). Then, Moses gives a brief history of the family of Abram and records their

journey from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran on their way to the land of Canaan.

And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran. (Gen. 11:28-32)

Moses writes that Abram took Sarai as his wife, and this simple statement, that Sarai "was barren; she had no child," might seem, up to this point in our study of Genesis, as an interesting but not an extremely important fact (Gen. 11:30). Who would have thought that old and childless Abram and Sarai would come to play such a role in the coming of the Messiah, that through their (at this time nonexistent) lineage, the "hope of Israel" would come (Acts 28:20)? God called Abram to leave his home and family in order to sojourn in a foreign land that God said, "I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1). Then, to Abram was the promise made that "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

The Promise To Abram

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. (Gen. 12:1-4)

God's promise included these three significant points: the name ("great nation"), the land, and the spiritual blessing that would extend to "all families of the earth." Later, God spoke again and revealed: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:18). Paul, the inspired apostle, looked back to God's promises made to Abraham as recorded in the first book of the Pentateuch, the book of Genesis and made the correct application of the spiritual aspect of the blessing to the promise of the coming of Christ.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the

blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut

up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:13-29)

The Spiritual Aspect Of The Promise

“The blessing of Abraham” as a spiritual blessing was dependent upon the “promise” made to “Abraham and his seed” and was fulfilled in Christ. God would bless Abraham; that is, Abraham would not bless himself (nor would the “families of the earth...bless themselves” as the RSV mistranslates), and he would become a blessing, as God through Abraham blessed all men that they might become “Abraham's seed,” by being “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). Abraham (Abram at the time) was seventy-five years old when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4) and journeyed by faith in the land of promise.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed;

and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (Heb. 11:8-13)

The Faith Of Abraham

Sara was “past age” for childbearing (Heb. 11:11), and until this time, she “bare him no children” (Gen. 16:1). Abram was advancing in years also and had no children, yet God said: “And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered” (Gen. 13:16). Abram wondered if God would bring this blessing through Eliezer of Damascus, his steward: “And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir” (Gen. 15:3).

God's reply was that the promise would not come through Eliezer, but through Abram's own biological offspring: "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir" (Gen. 15:4).

God brought Abram forth, and said to him: "Look now toward heaven, and tell (count, BL) the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (Gen. 15:5). Abram "believed in the Lord"; and God "counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). Abram did not just believe **in** God; that is, that God exists. He also believed the promise of God, and that God would keep His promise: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Gal. 3:6).

Three times, in the New Testament, God's inspired writers penned this phrase: "Abraham believed God" (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; Jam. 2:23). In addition, Abraham is rightfully recognized as the "Friend of God" (Jam. 2:23) and the father of the faithful (Rom. 4:1ff; Gal. 3:7); however, Abraham did not seek God's friendship and His approval by "faith only." He showed his faith by his works (Jam. 2:18; cf. Mark 2:5), and James wrote of him the following.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. (Jam. 2:21-24)

The Plan Of Sarai

Now, some time had passed, the promised child had not been born, and Sarai decided to come with Plan B, but Plan B was not based upon faith; thus, it was not the result of trusting God and obeying Him. Rather, Sarai's plan seems to be a human effort to help God out of a tight spot rather than to put unwavering trust in Him and His promises and to wait patiently for God Who cannot lie to do what He promised He would do (cf. Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2). That being said, Sarai may have had, at least in her way of thinking, a good motive. Many years had passed, and they still had no child. Maybe, she reasoned that the promise God made was to Abram only, that he would be the father, but that the promise made by God was not to her, as the mother of Abram's seed. (Later, she did understand, and acted by faith, for she "judged him faithful who had promised" [Heb. 11:11]).

While such thinking does not show a complete lack of faith, it may show a lack of complete faith. So, she said to 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" (Gen. 16:2). This would enable Sarai, according to the custom of the day, to have a child "by" her handmaid. Abram did as Sarai said, "And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived" (Gen. 16:4). We wonder why he would do this? Where was his faith? As a result of their plan, "Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram" (Gen. 16:15-16).

God's Plan

Their plan, concocted by human reasoning, was not God's plan (Gen. 17:1-15); therefore, when Abram was

ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him and said, “I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly” (Gen. 17:2). Abram was seventy-five when he departed from Haran (Gen. 12:4). He was eighty-six when Ishmael was born (Gen. 16:16). Thirteen years had passed since the birth of Ishmael, and as far as we have record, God had not spoken. Now, God appeared to Abram, and God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, and told him, “for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee” (Gen. 17:5-6). God made the covenant (of circumcision) with Abraham and restated the promise of land possession to Abraham and to his seed, and said, “I will be their God” (Gen. 17:1-14). Then, God changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, and promised He would give to her a son. This is the first time that God refers to Sarai/Sarah by name (as far as we know from revealed Scripture) in the promise.

And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. (Gen. 17:15-16)

Abraham Laughed

“Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” (Gen. 17:17). Abraham’s laughter was an expression of wonder combined with joy. Why would he laugh? No

doubt, he laughed at the idea that God **would** make the impossible possible—not because he doubted that God **could** do so. Abraham was astonished at the power of God that would bring about the fulfillment of God’s wonderful plan. He had not forgotten the promises made repeatedly by God to him.

In spite of his ill-advised effort to obtain a child by Hagar, his faith remained strong. Consider Romans 4:19: “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 Sara’s womb.” God promised: “Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (Gen. 17:19). Interestingly, the meaning of the Hebrew name Isaac is “laughter,” or “he will laugh.” God promised to bless Ishmael, and continued, emphasizing that His plan would come to pass, just as He planned it to do: “But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year” (Gen. 17:21).

Sarah Laughed

When three men appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, Abraham offered them hospitality, and he and Sarah hastened to provide food for them. Only later would Abraham know that one of the three was the Lord (Gen. 18:13), and the other two were angels (Gen. 19:1). They asked Abraham, “Where is Sarah thy wife?” (Gen. 18:9). Abraham told them she was in the tent, and he was told: “I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son” (Gen. 18:10). The time of life could refer to either the nine months of pregnancy, as some postulate, or to a complete year, as others say.

Sarah was behind the three and heard what was said. Was she eavesdropping? Her listening was not unknown to the heavenly visitors, thus showing the omniscience of the Lord among them. Just here, note these statements:

- “Sarai was barren; she had no child” (Gen. 11:30).
- “Sarai Abram’s wife bare him no children” (Gen. 16:1).
- Sarai told Abram: “Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing” (Gen. 16:2).
- Abraham said: “Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” (Gen. 17:17).
- “Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women” (Gen. 18:11).
- Sarah had “waxed,” or grown, old (Gen. 18:12).
- Sarah was “delivered of a child when she was past age” (Heb. 11:11).

“Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” (Gen. 18:12). As she considered the impossibility of conception according to the ordinary, physical nature of men and women, she laughed with disbelief. Where was her faith? While it seems she did not go as far as mocking or scoffing, she (again as indicated by the Lord’s response) certainly displayed doubt beyond mere skepticism. Why would she laugh? No doubt, she laughed at the idea that God **could** make the impossible possible—because she doubted that God **would** do so. Whereas Abraham was astonished at the power of God that would bring about the fulfillment of God’s plan, Sarah was incredulous that even God in His power

would do so. We can surely understand why Sarah from the standpoint of human wisdom would laugh (cf. 1 Cor. 1:20; 1 Cor. 1:25). How could she have a child? Such an event would be unheard of; therefore, how dare she even entertain the thought of bearing a child?

The Lord (Yahweh) spoke to Abraham, and by so doing, to Sarah, asking: “Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?” (Gen. 18:13) The Lord, who knows the hearts of all men (Acts 1:24), knew Sarah laughed, and He knew **why** she laughed. Did the same Lord **not** know that Abraham laughed (Gen. 17:17)? He did. Did the Lord **not** know **why** Abraham laughed? He did. In order to understand why Sarah’s laugh received a different response from the Lord than did the laughter of Abraham, we must consider the Lord’s question concerning it: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14).

Obviously, the Lord knew that Sarah’s laughter was because of an attitude within her that there was something “too hard for the Lord.” Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Her laughter, although neither malicious nor intended to be heard, indicated unbelief in the power of the Lord, in the promise of the Lord, and in the provision of the Lord. Therefore, she received a reprimand from the Lord. Then, the Lord emphatically declared: “At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son” (Gen. 18:14), thus proving that nothing really is too hard for the Lord, and that there would be no doubt, no question, and no failure concerning what would happen. Sarah **shall** have a son, and Abraham will be the father.

“Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid” (Gen. 18:15). She did laugh, but she was afraid, and she did lie about laughing. What would we have done, were we in the same situation? Yet, the question arises as to why

would she be afraid, and why would she think it necessary to lie, if her laughter were as was Abraham's—an expression of wonder combined with joy. Hers was the laughter of disbelief. So, the Lord replied, "Nay; but thou didst laugh" (Gen. 18:15). We are grateful that the Lord has revealed to us that Sarah moved from this low point to the pinnacle of faith: "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Heb. 11:11).

Conclusion

How may we decipher the laughter? The key is faith. We must have faith in God, in His promises, in His power, and in His provision. We must have faith in God's ability to bring His plan to fulfillment in spite of all obstacles. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" We must not be incredulous. Yes, we may wonder, considering the magnitude of the promise, but knowing the power of God, we know God will fulfill His will; thus, our response to His promises must be that of joyful anticipation, trusting in the One Who cannot lie.

Works Cited

King James Version. Print.

CHAPTER 9

God Remembered Abraham

Brandon Baggett

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah stands as a significant event in the course of human history. For on that mighty occasion, Jehovah outpoured His justice and wrath in destroying five once-thriving cities. We know these cities as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar. In fact, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is so significant that Bible writers used this event to warn those who might reject the Gospel. In 2 Peter 2:6, Peter emphasized how the overthrow of these depraved cities was to serve as an example for those who would live ungodly lives. Even our Lord, in Matthew 10:15, mentioned to the apostles that when people reject their message, God would show less mercy to them than He showed to Sodom and Gomorrah. Unquestionably, what God did regarding those cities was important, and it is worthy of much discussion. But why mention this event when discussing Abraham? The reason for such is because the destruction of these wicked cities has an interesting connection to the man that God called His friend. This connection is seen in Genesis 19:29 when the Bible says that “God remembered Abraham” (King James Version). This statement is connected to what God did with Sodom and Gomorrah. It is also interesting, encouraging, and full of assurance. In this statement are found many powerful and encouraging lessons for us today. However, in order to gain

an understanding of the importance of our statement at hand, we must consider the events leading up to its place in the Scriptures.

It begins back in Genesis 13 when Lot and Abraham separated. At that time, strife arose between their herdsmen, because the land could not physically contain them both. So, Abraham allowed Lot to choose what land he would like to possess. As the Bible records, “Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan...and Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom” (Gen. 13:10-12). However, before long, Lot and his family ended up in the midst of the wickedness and great sins of this city. As a result, as Peter mentioned, Lot was “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked” (2 Pet. 2:7). Yet, even though Lot was in the midst of this depravity, God in His justice determined to destroy these cities. Jehovah acted in a just way by examining the cities and then acting accordingly. In Genesis 18, God graciously informed Abraham about His Divine plans. Thus, Abraham commenced to plead for the inhabitants of the city. No doubt, in his mind, he thought about his nephew and his family in the midst of these cities. So, on account of the righteous, Abraham pleaded for the Lord to spare the cities. At that time, God carried out a search for righteousness. However, not even 10 righteous souls were found. Subsequently, the Almighty God carried out His will and destroyed the cities as recorded in Genesis 19. At the end of the destruction, 5 cities were destroyed, Lot’s wife died, and some of Lot’s own children were overthrown in the destruction. Only Lot and two daughters survived this outpouring of Divine wrath.

As Moses penned the book of Genesis, he switched from rehearsing the destruction to describing Abraham’s perspective. Beginning in Genesis 19:27, the Bible speaks of

Abraham arising early in the morning to behold the wreckage of the cities. As he stood from his previous point of intercession, Abraham took in a picture of complete desolation. He saw the smoke of these once-thriving cities now ascending into the heavens. As far as we know, Abraham had no knowledge that Lot escaped. Unlike our understanding, as far as Abraham is concerned, this had been a complete and total overthrow with no survivors. However, the Bible offers a statement of assurance, comfort, and relief. For in Genesis 19:29, the Bible adds that “it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.” God wants us to understand that He remembered His friend Abraham even in the midst of executing His Divine wrath. He remembered Abraham by graciously and mercifully sending out Lot. It was because of Abraham’s faithfulness, his prayers, and his pleadings that God remembered Abraham, and Lot was allowed to escape.

However, this is not the only time in the Bible where this statement is found. It is also found regarding Noah, Rachel, and Hannah. Overall, this statement speaks of God’s extreme faithfulness. It assures us that God will not turn His back on those who are righteous. Though men and women sometimes turn their back on God, we can be assured that God will never turn His back on us. Just as God remembered Abraham, God can and will remember us. So based upon this encouraging statement, let us make the application to ourselves. Let us consider a few lessons based upon this statement applied to the man God called His friend.

God Knows The Righteous

In the first place, this statement gives us the reminder and assurance that God knows the righteous, and it tells us

that God cares for the righteous. You see, no matter what may be happening in this world, God is aware of those who are following Him. God does not somehow forget about His people. He knows each of them, and He cares for them all.

This point is made evident from our statement at hand, because even though God was destroying these five wicked cities, He did not forget about His friend Abraham. He did not lose sight of Abraham's situation, nor was His attention diverted from the promises that He made. Even in the midst of God's dealings with man, God did not lose focus on those Messianic promises found in Genesis 12:1-3. Even when God's people were in Egyptian bondage, the Bible says that "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Exo. 2:24).

God knew this righteous man. God cared for this righteous man. God did not forget about this righteous man. God remembered Abraham and kept His word to Him.

God Remembered Noah.

Just like God remembered Abraham, God did not forget about Noah. God knew of Noah just like God knew of Abraham. The Bible says in Genesis 8:1 that "God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged." Even though Noah faced struggles and difficulties that we can scarcely comprehend, God was with Noah through it all. He knew the state of this righteous man. Even through all that he faced, Jehovah did not forget about Him.

God knew that Noah was a righteous man who was living in the midst of a world of unrighteousness. For in describing the great world of wickedness in which Noah lived, the Bible says that,

When men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the LORD said, my spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. (Gen. 6:1-6)

Living in a world like that, it would have been easy to feel all alone and forgotten. Perhaps Noah even felt these feelings at times during this ordeal. However, that was not reality, because God was well aware of Noah's situation. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8). The wickedness around Noah did not cause God to overlook Him. God remembered Noah.

God was even with Noah as he preached despite the fact that no one would listen. According to the apostle Peter, Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5) who was allowed to preach "while the ark was a preparing" (1 Pet.

3:20). However, even though Noah preached, no one outside of his family would listen. Imagine the heartache! Imagine the discouragement! Imagine how easy it would have been to feel abandoned and alone. However, God remembered Noah. He did not forget about this righteous man and preacher.

It was also God who even stood beside Noah while He outpoured His wrath upon the world. Noah and His family were able to take refuge in the ark. There, in the ark, they were able to be saved from the wrath and destruction around them. However, one can only imagine how lonely, frightening, and unnerving that long journey must have been. However, God was faithful towards them through it all. God graciously allowed them to escape the destruction. He did not turn his back on this family as they survived in the ark. He even kept them safely through their journey so that they could find safety on dry land. God remembered Noah just like God remembered Abraham.

Why? The answer is because God knows the righteous. He does not forget about the righteous, and He cares for the righteous. And, brethren, we as God's people need to know that God has not forgotten about us. Yes, our world is full of sin. Yes, there are a lot of bad things happening around us. However, God has not lost sight of those who are still faithfully serving Him. He still remembers us. He still cares for us.

God Knows Those Who Are His.

You see, no matter what may be happening around us, nothing is going to somehow cause God to lose sight of who His people really are. Paul told Timothy that "the Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:19). Is that not comforting? Is that not assuring? It surely is. One reason why it is assuring is because it is so easy to think that we have been overlooked by God. It is so easy to feel forgotten. However,

that is totally inaccurate. The great God in heaven knows every child of His. He knows those who are righteous.

God Knows What His People Are Facing.

Not only does God know the righteous, but He is well aware of each struggle, temptation, and trial His children are facing. God is not without understanding when it comes to what we are facing. We are in His knowledge and in His care just like the children of Israel. As God's people were in Egyptian bondage, God remembered them. In fact, the Bible records God saying that "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows" (Exo. 3:7). He knew exactly what they were facing.

In much like manner, the Lord was well aware of what His suffering servant Stephen was enduring. As the enraged mob stoned this Gospel preacher, heaven itself was moved. In Acts 7:54-56, the Bible says that:

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

In Stephen's last breaths, God was well aware of who he was, what he was doing, and what he was facing. We might say that God remembered Stephen.

We also can be assured that God understands what we might face. This is certain because "we have not a high priest

which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Jesus walked in our shoes. He was tempted with the same tactics that the devil uses upon us (1 John 2:16). God knows the righteous, and He knows exactly what His people are facing.

God Knows What His People Are Doing.

God knows our works. God knows our service. God knows our sacrifices. God knows our faithfulness. You see, we might be involved in a lot of good works for the cause of Christ, and it may be the case that our work goes unnoticed by men. However, we can be assured that God is aware of everything that we are doing. God is aware of us. God knows of our situation. God has not forgotten about it, and He has promised to reward us. The comforting words of Jesus come to mind when He taught that “thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly” (Mat. 6:3-6).

As we contemplate God remembering Abraham, we can be assured that God knows the righteous. That is, just like God knew Abraham and Noah, God can and will remember us. We should never feel alone or forgotten, because God has not forgotten about us. He knows each of His children. He knows each situation wherein His children find themselves. He knows every work of service, action of sacrifice, and demonstration of faithfulness wherein His people are involved. What a powerful lesson to be learned from one simple statement applied to the man God called His friend.

God Hears The Righteous

Another lesson to be noted from this encouraging statement is to see that God hears the prayers of the righteous. Not only does this statement indicate that God knows the

righteous and cares for them, but it provides the assurance that God hears them. This point is made clear when Abraham is considered. As identified back in Genesis 19, it was because of the intercessory prayers and pleadings of Abraham that God saw fit graciously and mercifully to allow Lot to escape. God remembered Abraham (Gen. 19:29). He remembered Abraham's prayers, pleadings, and faithfulness. In much like manner, the Bible is scattered with other examples of righteous people who prayed to God, and God remember them and their prayers.

God Heard The Prayers of Rachel.

In the book of Genesis, the interesting account of Jacob and Rachel is recorded. The Bible describes the tremendous love that Jacob had for his beloved Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel so much that he tirelessly labored for her for seven long years. However, because of the way Jacob felt, "they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Gen. 29:20). Yet, the Bible explains how Laban cheated and deceived Jacob. Even though Jacob worked for Rachel, Laban gave his daughter Leah to be his wife. As Jacob's wife, Leah bore her husband 6 sons. She bore Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. In addition to these six sons, Leah bore Jacob's only daughter named Dinah.

However, in the midst of all this, Rachel is given to be Jacob's wife for the price of seven more years of labor. Yet, unlike her sister Leah, Rachel is barren and is unable to bring forth children for her husband. She envied her sister and desired greatly to bear children. So, in her discouragement, Rachel took her problem to the throneroom of God. That is, she opened up her heart in prayer. Interestingly, summed up in four words, the Bible records God's response. The Bible says "and God remembered Rachel" (Gen. 30:22). The Lord heard her prayers. He opened her womb. He gave her a son

who became the influential man named Joseph. Just like with Abraham, God remembered Rachel in hearing her prayers.

God Heard The Prayers Of Hannah.

Hannah found herself in a similar situation to that of Rachel. Peninnah, the other wife to her husband Elkanah, was able to bear children. However, Hannah was barren. Due to her infertility, she was the object of much criticism, and she felt a tremendous load of discouragement. At times, the Bible even records how she would get so discouraged that she would not even eat. In 1 Samuel 1:6-7, inspiration records that “her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.”

However, like Rachel, Hannah prayed to Jehovah. In her humble prayer, Hannah vowed that if God would grant her a son then she would devote that son to the service of the Lord. According to 1 Samuel 1:19, the Bible says that “the LORD remembered her.” The Lord remember Hannah in hearing her prayers. God gave her a son. Hannah then gave her son to the Lord once he was of age. That young man then grew up to become one of the most influential leaders Israel ever had. We know this man as Samuel.

God Will Hear Us.

Just like God remembered these righteous people by hearing their prayers, God hears the prayers of the righteous today. God knows His people. God knows what His people are facing. God knows what His people are doing. And God hears the prayers of His people.

We might sometimes feel as if God is not listening or that He is so far away from us that He cannot hear us. However, such is not the case. As Christians, we have the privilege of being able to call upon God as our Father. As the

writer of Hebrews noted, “We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16). We are able to approach the very throne of God in prayer. We are able to pour out our heart to God in prayer. We are able to cast our “care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). As God’s children, we can embrace every day with “the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14). Just like God remembered Abraham, Rachel, and Hannah, God will hear the prayers of His people today. He will remember us.

God Rewards The Righteous

One final assuring lesson to be noted from our phrase at hand is the fact that God will eternally reward the righteous. We know that God knows the righteous, what they are facing, what they are doing, and He even hears their prayers. Based upon our statement at hand, we can see that God is faithful towards the righteous. He does not forget about us, and He does not turn His back on us. But, exactly how long will God remember the righteous? You see, the point is that we can go through our lives and know that God will not turn His back on us, but we can also be assured that God will eternally reward and remember those who are righteous.

The Bible makes it clear that if we live for the Lord, then the Lord will not turn His back on us in judgment. Jesus said that “whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 10:32-33). Having lived a faithful Christian life, we do not have to doubt if the

Lord will remember us in the hereafter. As God's children, we will never hear the words "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mat. 7:23). God will eternally reward and remember the righteous.

The Scriptures further point out that a righteous life of service, sacrifice, and faithfulness will not be overlooked in the hereafter. Paul told the Corinthians that our "labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). In stark contrast to a faithful life being of no value, the Revelation letter says that "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). Our works live on after death. They are not forgotten by the Lord. God will eternally reward and remember the righteous.

As a child of God, we can live with the full assurance that God will eternally remember us, and that we will have a home with Him in heaven. This fact is made manifest when the apostle Paul was able to embrace death with assurance of the reward that would follow. In his dying words as it were, Paul pointed out,

I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim.4:6-8)

As God's child, I can find comfort in the Bible saying that God remembered Abraham. This tells me that God has

not forgotten about me. It tells me that God knows who I am, what I am facing, and what I am praying. It tells me that God will remember me in this life, and it reminds me that God will remember me in the world to come.

Conclusion

In Genesis 19:29, we find a short and powerful phrase: *God remembered Abraham*. God remembered the man He called His friend. In that short message, we find a treasurehouse of encouragement and assurance. By its presence in the Biblical record, we are continually reminded of God's faithfulness. This statement causes our minds to reflect upon the fact that God knows the righteous and hears the righteous, and it tells us that God will eternally remember the righteous. Do not think for a moment that God has forgotten about you. God will remember us, but will we remember Him? If we so foolishly turn our backs on Him, let us think of the words of Peter who noted, "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Works Cited

King James Version. Print.

CHAPTER 10

Melchizedek: The Man To Whom Abraham Gave A Tenth

Donnie Debord

In an article titled “Nones on the Rise,” Pewforum.org reports that “One-fifth of the U.S. public—and a third of adults under 30—are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling.” Furthermore, this religion of the nones is on a growth spurt.

In the last five years alone, the unaffiliated have increased from just over 15% to just under 20% of all U.S. adults. Their ranks now include more than 13 million self-described atheists and agnostics (nearly 6% of the U.S. public), as well as nearly 33 million people who say they have no particular religious affiliation (14%).

Christians have an increasingly great commission to fulfill in the increasingly secular and immoral society.

Christians today are witnessing a battle for the souls of individuals and the soul of their culture. Secularism and

Christianity are diametrically opposed to one another. The struggle has intensified with the reception and proliferation of immorality by many of society's leaders. Christianity has been taken out of the public square and many would love to eliminate the practice of the Christian religion.

Too many have given up on Christ, Christianity, and the Christian ministry. Many have left God and turned to nothingness. The futility of the thought! Hebrews is a book devoted to calling Christians who had backslidden and those who were considering leaving the faith back home to safety in Christ. "The author of Hebrews devotes much time and space to building up the value of what the addressees have in Jesus so that they will be the less tempted to throw it all away in favor of the supposed temporal benefits and physical elements of Judaism which they seem to have missed. In 13:13 the readers are exhorted to make a clear break and to come outside 'the camp', which may reasonably be interpreted as the camp of Israel" (Guthrie 688). Christians are encouraged to hold on to Christ and Christianity because He is better than any other option, hope, religion, or Savior.

The seventh chapter of Hebrews begins with a discussion of Melchizedek and tithing. One may wonder what these two concepts have to do with Christ being better than any other religious option. However, upon closer examination the Bible student learns that Abraham's tithing to Melchizedek is evidence of Christ being better than both the Patriarchal and Levitical systems. The Holy Spirit uses the character of Melchizedek to illustrate the superiority of Christ and Christianity over the previous systems which were appealing to these second-generation Christians.

The writer appeals to the Genesis story
(Genesis 14) to bring out certain features

in Christ's priesthood which he intends to demonstrate as being superior to Aaron's. Melchizedek's names are suggestive (peace and righteousness), as is also the strange way in which he appears and disappears from the story (illustrative of Christ's eternal existence), and his evident superiority to Abraham and thus to the later levitical order (Hebrews 7:1-10). (Guthrie 719)

The main emphasis of the chapter is the great character of Christ as the High Priest of the best and final covenant between God and man.

The Superiority of Christianity Affirmed

The superiority of Christ is the great theme of the entire book of Hebrews and is proven in each section of the book.

This...letter to the Hebrews,' offers as sustained argument of exceptional rhetorical sophistication for the eschatological superiority of the Christian message of salvation to the system of atonement described in the Mosaic law. An understanding of their privileged eschatological position...ought to encourage Christians to be faithful to the message of salvation they have heard. (Theilman 585)

Since Hebrews 7:1 begins with the word *for*, it is necessary to examine the preceding verses in order to determine what

is being explained in the seventh chapter. The sixth chapter ends with another claim of greatness for both Christ and Christianity. Hebrews 6:19-20 says:

This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence *behind* the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.
(New King James Version)

These last words of chapter 6 “announce themes which are developed in reverse order...priest after the order of Melchizedek (6:20b; cf. 7:1–17); Jesus forerunner/priest on our behalf in the inner shrine (6:20a; cf. 7:18–10:18); and the hope/confidence that enters the inner shrine” (Elingworth). Christianity is better, the Bible says, because of the better hope which is offered only in Christ (Acts 4:12). This claim of Hebrews 6:19 is demonstrated in Hebrews 7:1-10 and exalted in Hebrews 7:11-28.

Christ, as the anchor of the soul and great High Priest of Christianity, has gone into the Most Holy Place in Heaven in order to intercede continually for His people on earth. This grand theme will be picked up again in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 9:12 tells us that “with his own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” In Hebrews 9:24, the Most Holy Place is identified as being in Heaven as the inspired writer of Hebrews says, “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” He has gone into the Heavenly Most Holy Place so that “now,

once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26).

The greatness of the new covenant of Christ and of Christ Himself supersedes the previous systems which God had used to form relationships with mankind. Therefore, the Hebrews writer says Christians should hold firm to Christ and Christianity. Christianity, the religion of Heaven, is far superior to the man-made religions of this earth. Therefore, all should choose Christianity over the false religions of any day.

Christianity Is Better Than The Patriarchal System

The patriarchal system began with Adam. However, the patriarchal system was replaced by the superior system of Christianity. Hebrews 1:1-2 says: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.” Christians are encouraged to be faithful to Christianity rather than the Old Law by going all the way back to the beginning of God’s dealings with mankind under the patriarchal system and Abraham who stands as the representative of both the patriarchal and Levitical systems.

In order to demonstrate the superior nature of Christianity, the Bible points us back to the mysterious Old Testament figure known as Melchizedek. While not much is known of him, he stands as a foreshadow of Christ who would follow after him being both the Priest and King of God.

Who Is Melchizedek?—Hebrews 7:1-3

Melchizedek was an enigmatic figure who appeared briefly on the stage of human history (Gen. 14:18–20), then disappeared. Centuries later, his name was mentioned by David (Psa. 110:4). Then, after a lapse of additional centuries,

it reappears in the book of Hebrews. One thing is apparent: God arranged the details of his life so that he would be an excellent type of our Lord Jesus Christ (Macdonald).

Notice how Melchizedek is said to prefigure the Christ. First, Melchizedek is “king of Salem” (Heb. 7:1). Psalm 76:1-2 mentions this “Salem” saying, “In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion.” To be king of Salem is to be the king of peace. Westcott says, “The locality of the place does not in any way enter into the writers argument שלם, like שלום, is properly an adj. sound, at peace, but is used (as שלום) here as a subst., peace.” However, Josephus agrees with the more traditional position that “Salem” here represents Jerusalem saying, “That name signifies the righteous king; and such he was without dispute, insomuch that, on this account, he was made the priest of God: however, they afterward called Salem Jerusalem.”

Both Melchizedek and Christ are “priest of the Most High God.” Jesus is both Priest and King. This dual role of demonstrates his total control of every Christian’s life.

Behold, the man whose name is the
BRANCH! From His place He shall
branch out, and He shall build the
temple of the LORD; Yes, He shall build
the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the
glory, and sit and rule on His throne; So
He shall be a priest on His throne, and
the counsel of peace shall be between
them both. (Zec. 6:12)

The picture of Christ as a branch is common in the Old Testament (Isa. 4:2; Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; Jer. 33:15; Zec. 3:8).

Both Melchizedek and Jesus are said to be the “king of righteousness.” The prominent prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 identifies Jesus as the King, “Your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey.” Jeremiah 23:5 likewise says, “I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A king shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.” Isaiah 9:6 rightly describes Him as the “Prince of Peace.”

Furthermore, there is the eternal character of Christ which was prefigured in Melchizedek. Melchizedek is said to be “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually” (Heb. 7:3). While Melchizedek’s genealogy was simply either lost or unknown, Christ truly is eternal-without beginning or end.

Since Melchizedek is greater in quality than Abraham and the patriarchal system, then Christ is better than the patriarchal system. Abraham here is not under the Levitical system, but under the old Patriarchal system. Even at that time, the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood is evident.

Since Melchizedek is a priest and King, we understand that Christ is both priest and king. Furthermore, Christ is the best Ruler possible. Psalm 72 is prophetic of the Messianic kingdom which is the church. In verse seven, the psalm says, “In His days the righteous will flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more” (Psa. 72:7). Isaiah likewise was given a glimpse of the Messianic kingdom which is the church. In Isaiah 9:6-7, the Bible records that in the Messiah’s reign over His church kingdom, He is described as “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it in justice

from that time forward, even forever” (Isa. 9:6-7). Furthermore, Jeremiah 23:5 records the prophecy of the Messiah King: “Behold, the days are coming says the LORD, that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.”

Christianity Is Better Than The Levitical System

Hebrews 7:4-10

The superiority of Melchizedek, and therefore of Christ, over the Levitical system is proven by Abraham tithing to Melchizedek and Melchizedek blessing Abraham.

Levi “tithed” to Melchizedek through Abraham (Heb. 7:4-5). This reminds us of the importance of representation in the Jewish mindset. As the head of the house, Abraham, Levi, and Melchizedek represent and act on behalf of those who follow after them. Similar usage is seen in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 and Romans 5:12-21.

Jesus’ ability to function in the new priesthood is a demonstration of His superiority over the Levitical system. This change in priesthood also demonstrates the importance of the “silence of the Scriptures.”

Jesus’ high priesthood results from God’s own change in the regulations that govern priestly service, and this change implies that the new situation is an improvement over its predecessor. The change is evident both from Jesus’ own origins in the tribe of Judah and from the chronological relationship between the Mosaic law and God’s oath in Psalm 110:4. (Thielman 598)

This is a demonstration of Jesus' better priesthood. George Beals notes the implications of silence in this passage as well:

What about the action concerning which the Bible teaches nothing? Can we engage in it with God's approval or not? Since Christ came from the tribe of Judah, and the referenced words of Moses said nothing about priests coming from this tribe, does this forbid? Was this adequate for concluding that, according to the law, Christ would not be a priest? Notice how the Spirit in Hebrews 8:4-5 answers... The Levitical priests left no room for a non-Levite like Jesus to serve as priest. (Beals 121)

Jesus Is Best!

Jesus Offers Perfection—Hebrews 7:11

“If perfection were available through the Levitical priesthood...what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek?” (Heb. 7:11). This perfection, which was unavailable to mankind through the old systems of religion, has been freely offered to those who are in Christ. “The underlying thought of this verse, as indeed of the whole paragraph, is that the failure of the Levitical priesthood made a different kind of priesthood necessary. Conversely, “if the Law is to attain the end for which it was given (τελείωσις) it requires an authentic Priesthood for its implementation” (Hughes).

This perfection was only a dream under the Levitical system. Hebrews 10:1 says, “For the law, having a shadow

of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.”

For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (Heb. 7:18-19)

This imperfection was replaced by perfection in Christ.

The New Testament affirms the position which Christ attained for his people. Acts 13:38-39 says:

Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Jesus Offers New Law—Hebrews 7:12-14

The Law was good when used lawfully (1 Tim. 1:8), but the people needed a new and better way to God. This better way was paved by Christ, the great High Priest of the New Covenant. Milligan notes the following: “Concede that the priesthood was the basis of the law, the ground on which it rested; and then it follows of necessity that any change in the priesthood must have an effect also on the whole law. Take away the foundation, and the superstructure must fall to the ground” (258).

Here Christians are presented with a Biblical example of the power of silence. The Holy Spirit reminds the people that the Old Law said nothing of a priest arising from any tribe except Levi. What a powerful reminder it is for Christians today who would go beyond “that which is written” (1 Cor. 4:6) to do what is unauthorized before God. God tells us that to do what is unauthorized demands a change of the covenant. Who among God’s people could offer a sound reason for changing the New Covenant of Christ by adding instrumental music, Saturday observance of the Lord’s Supper, or any other innovation? To go beyond the specifics of the New Testament is to change the covenant of Christ and practice a law of one’s own making. God of Heaven is able to do this, but His creation does not have this privilege.

Jesus Offers A Better Example—Hebrews 7:15-18

Like Melchizedek, Christ’s character is exemplary. His priestly reign is not of man’s appointment but is according to “the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16). Psalm 110:4 is quoted to emphasize the permanence of the Messianic priesthood. Just as “there is no variation or shadow of turning” with God (Jam. 1:17), there will be no change in this covenant.

The Levitical priesthood was subject to constant change. No priest of any character could serve forever. Lightfoot rightly says:

The words of the psalm would have no meaning if they referred to the old priesthood. No Levitical priest could be a priest forever—all were mortal. So the Scripture applies to another order of priesthood. The author’s language, as he contrasts the priesthood is characterized

by power. On one hand was a priesthood that was mortal and perishable, having to do with bodily descent. No matter what the man's disposition or the degree of his willingness to serve, he became a priest solely because of who his father and mother were. On the other hand, the new priesthood owes its existence to one in whom resided intrinsically "the power of a life that cannot be destroyed (NEB)." (143)

The indestructible life of Christ makes the Christian system supreme because "he ever lives to make intercession for the saints."

Jesus Offers Better Hope—Hebrews 7:19

Christ offers "the better hope through which we draw near to God." While the Levitical system offered a program whereby one could be holy unto The Lord, the system was based on separation. There was separation between the priesthood and the people. There was separation between the temple and the common ground. There was separation between the various parts of the temple (the Holy Place, the Most Holy Place, and the exclusivity demonstrated in them).

The New Covenant of Christ was not based upon separation but upon unity. Jesus' great promise was that "where I am there you may be also" (John 14:3). The old Temple in Jerusalem was replaced with a dwelling place for God in the midst of His own people. Paul asks, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). Again the fellowship with God is used as an appeal to personal holiness by Paul saying:

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19). Paul continues his exposition of this hope in Romans 5:1-2, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

The inability of the Old Law to perfect the people of God is replaced by the New Law which does perfect God’s people through the once and for all sacrifice of Christ. Hebrews 9:11-14 says:

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The inabilities of the Old Testament were replaced with the incomprehensible riches of the New Testament of Jesus Christ through whom God has blessed Christians with “every spiritual blessing in the Heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3).

Jesus Offers A Better Guarantee—Hebrews 7:20-22

A man's word should be a guarantee. The Word of God is an unshakable guarantee. In Psalm 110:4, God the Father made an oath to the Son and the hopeful world that Jesus would be the "priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." This promise of God is brought up again to reinforce the Christian's confidence in the spiritual promises of Christianity.

In Hebrews 5, the writer had already alluded to this promise as a demonstration of the surety of God's promises. There the Spirit says: "And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest 'according to the order of Melchizedek'" (Heb. 5:9).

Jesus Offers A Better Priesthood—Hebrews 7:23-24

Jesus continues forever in His priesthood. While the Levitical priests were accustomed to cycles of short service (Luke 1:8-9), yet Christ's ministry is permanent. The value of the permanence of His ministry is highlighted in Hebrews 9:27-28, "And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment; so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation" (ASV).

Jesus Offers Better Intercession—Hebrews 7:25

Since Jesus' ministry is permanent, based upon the oath of God, and the better hope of the Christian age "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). The permanent priest is able to save "to the uttermost" (NKJV). The original word *παντελες* causes debate as to whether the Bible is saying Jesus is able to save everyone (qualitative) or at all times (temporally). While

both are true, the context seems to point to the chronological significance of the atonement which Christ alone offers the lost world. There is no time in which Christ is unable to save. Furthermore, His sacrifice affects all time and eternity.

First Timothy 2:5-6 reminds the grateful Christian that “there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.” “This word *mediator* is defined as “(derivative of *μεσιτεύω* ‘to bring about an agreement,’ 31.21) one who causes or helps parties to come to an agreement, with the implication of guaranteeing the certainty of the arrangement—‘go between, mediator” (Lowe and Nida). Christ is the Mediator; He is the only One who is able to reconcile sinful man to the perfect God (Rom. 5:1-11; Eph. 2).

Jesus Offers A Better Sacrifice—Hebrews 7:26-28

Not only is Jesus the King of kings and the greatest High Priest, He is also the perfect Sacrifice. Just as the Old Testament required perfection in the sacrifices offered, Jesus Himself is perfect. He is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26). Not only is He perfect, but He is highly exalted having “become higher than the heavens.” This perfect sacrifice did not offer something for another, but rather He offered Himself. Therefore, His sacrifice is preeminent and he “does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Heb. 7:25).

The sacrifice of Christ and resurrection of Christ together form the highlight of Scripture. Jesus was “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). First John 2:2 says, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” Hebrews 9:11-12 says, “Christ came as High Priest...Not with the blood

of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered into the Most Holy Place once for all having obtained eternal redemption.” 1 Peter 2:24 says that Jesus “bore our sins in His own body on the tree...by whose stripes you are healed.” 1 Peter 3:18 says, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.”

The sacrifice of Christ changed the course of human history and made Heaven attainable for those who come to the great High Priest. Concerning the sacrifice and exaltation of Christ, Lightfoot says:

God has qualified the Son to come before Him in priestly action, and He has done this on the basis of the Son's suffering (2:10) and because of the Son's obedience (5:8-9). The Son, therefore, is the Perfect High Priest, His perfection being crowned and sealed by His exaltation to heaven. He is the only High Priest capable of qualifying others that they, too, might come directly before God.(Hebrews 7:19; 10:14).

What a cause for Christians to count their blessings and appreciate the wonderful and unexplorable depths of God's love.

Practical Applications

While reading the lofty portions of Scripture, it is vital to remember that these passages are written for our everyday living. This passage teaches us that Christians should respect the change of God's law from the Old Testament to the New

Testament. Christians should value the sacrifice of Jesus. Christians should value the intercession of our High Priest. Christians should value the blessed position of being a child of God.

Christians are offered two options: flourish in faithfulness or fall into spiritual failure. Which should we choose? Should we give up and choose nothingness?! Should we go back and choose the patriarchal system which God has abandoned? Should we go back to the Levitical system which God says is obsolete? Or should we stay with Christianity? Should we not stay with Christ? Instead of going “back into perdition,” let Christians rather “Hold to God’s unchanging hand.”

Works Cited

- American Standard Version*. Print.
- Beals, George F. *How Implication Binds and Silence Forbids*. Ann Arbor: PC, 1998.
- Ellingworth, Paul. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: a Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Carlisle: Eerdmans; Paternoster, 1993. Print. New International Greek Testament Commentary.
- Guthrie, Donald. *New Testament Introduction*. Revised Edition. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1990. Print.
- Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987. Print.
- Lightfoot, Neil. *Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*. Abilene: Bible Guides, 1976. Print.
- Louw, Johannes and Eugene Nida. *Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: United Bible Society, 1988. Print.
- MacDonald, William. *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. Arthur Farstad, ed. Nashville: Nelson, 1995. Print.

- Milligan, Robert. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989. Print.
- New King James Version*. Nashville: Nelson, 1982. Print.
- Pew Research Center. "Nones on the Rise." *Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project*. Web.
- Thielman, Frank. *Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005. Print.
- Westcott, Brooke Foss, ed. *The Epistle to the Hebrews the Greek Text with Notes and Essays*. 3d ed. London: Macmillan, 1903. Print. *Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament*.

CHAPTER 11

Sitting Down With Father Abraham

Mark Teske

Several years ago, I was spending time with my uncle and he posed an interesting question to me, “If you could sit down and share a meal and an evening of conversation with anyone from history, who would you choose and why?” We talked about the subject for nearly an hour, and I have thought about it many times since. Many of the figures we discussed were from secular history, but the conversation was even more interesting when we discussed people from the Bible. While the Bible contains all that we need in this life (2 Tim. 3:16-17), we would still like to ask many questions. We could ask Lazarus about his experiences of death (John 11), Jonah about the conditions inside the whale (Jon. 1), or Paul about his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10). The list could be nearly endless!

At the top of my list would be spending time with Father Abraham. Abraham is exalted throughout Scripture for his faithfulness (Rom. 4:9-16; Gal. 3:7-14; Heb. 11:8; Heb. 11:17) even being called “the man of faith” (English Standard Version, Gal. 3:9). The Jews held Abraham in very high esteem, clinging to their physical lineage through Abraham (John 8:33). When Jesus attempted to describe paradise to a Jewish audience in Luke 16:22, he used the phrase “Abraham’s

bosom” to describe it (King James Version). Muslims try to trace the lineage of their false religion back to Abraham, as well. Truly, Abraham is one of the most fundamental personalities of ancient history and well worthy of our attention.

In Matthew 8:11 (the text assigned), Jesus explained that many Gentiles would have fellowship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in paradise, while many Jews would be left out. The text states that they would sit down with them, which was a part of that reward. What a great reward that will be! But as we struggle at times through this life, what types of things would these great patriarchs say to us (like some did to Jesus—Mat. 17:1-3) as we journey along our way? Let us spend some time imagining some subjects where Abraham could provide some excellent advice.

Coming From A Non-Christian Family

Abraham came from an idolatrous family (Jos. 24:2; Gen. 31:19). When God called him (Gen. 12:1-3) and told him to leave his family and his father’s house, a part of that separation would require a removal from the idolatry of his own family. Thus, when Abram was called by God, he had to turn his back on his family’s religion and what he had known while growing up.

Those who have had to renounce the religion of their youth in order to obey the Gospel could surely use words of advice and encouragement from father Abraham. For these Christians, the cross that they bear on a daily basis is misunderstood by many and they suffer in unique ways, often for the rest of their lives. Jesus told that this would happen to some today in Matthew 10:34-37. What a blessing it would be to sit with Abraham and discuss the issues that these situations have in common and learn from one who has experienced this and prevailed.

Abraham did a masterful job of leaving his family's false religion without forsaking his family. We never read of Abraham struggling with the idolatry of his family; thus he appears to have made a complete break from his family religiously. But when it came time to pick a wife for his son, he sent his servant back to his homeland to pick a wife from among his kindred (Gen. 24:4). Thus, Abraham still had respect for his family even though he rejected their false religion.

In conversing with Abraham about this topic, we would certainly find that he would understand the struggles that many have today. His encouragement would be generous, thoughtful, and useful even though he lived thousands of years ago. The relationships and pressures of families that do not share a common faith in the one, true God have not changed over the years. Our struggles were his struggles and his solutions can be our solutions.

Living in a Wicked Society

Abraham could look at the people of the land of Canaan and see that they were especially evil, to the point that God had already destroyed some for their wickedness (Gen. 19). Abraham knew that such wicked influence would be destructive to his son of promise and he demanded that Isaac not marry one of the women of the land. He also knew that one could come to a faithful relationship with God while living in his ancestral home (as he did) and saw that it was the best choice for his son. Abraham's respect for his family continued and he trusted that a suitable wife would come from this family.

Abraham sojourned into a land that was filled with sin and wickedness that was only going to get worse as the years progressed (Gen. 15:16). Things had gotten so bad in Sodom

that homosexual gang rape of visitors by all of the men of the city was commonplace (Gen. 19:1-7). We in the 21st century do not have a monopoly on wickedness by any stretch of the imagination! Due to our free will and the commonplace of giving in to fleshly desires, sin will always be in the world. Abraham's world was as debased and evil as the world in which we live today.

When Abraham and Lot separated, they headed in two opposite directions. Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom (Gen. 13:12) while Abraham dwelt in the land of Canaan. Surely Abraham could give us great encouragement on how to keep oneself unspotted by the world—when you see it coming, head in the opposite direction (Gen. 39:12; 1 Cor. 6:18). He probably had many more experiences in dealing with the sin and wickedness that are not even recorded for us in Scripture and the advice that he could give would be timeless.

I am sure that Abraham would marvel at some of the immorality of our day that is passed off as entertainment—and some Christians even pay money to entertain themselves with sin. At times, it seems that the world around us is becoming more and more immoral. Alcohol, drugs, immodest apparel, sexual promiscuity, and many other vices have blossomed in our country in the past century. These sins are not new; they are just coming back into fashion again. The same strategy that Abraham followed would be helpful for us—pitch our tents in the plain and insulate ourselves and our families from the wickedness as much as we can.

Living Faithfully with Great Riches

Scripture gives us several glimpses as to the amount of Abraham's wealth, and his possessions were indeed great. After being told that Abraham was very rich in gold, silver,

and cattle (Gen. 13:2), his flocks increased even more (Gen. 13:6). His number of servants born in his household was at least in the hundreds, as he was able to lead 318 men into battle when the need arose (Gen. 14:14). By any measure you use, Abraham was a very wealthy individual.

However, Abraham was not a greedy man. He did not take any possessions for himself after his army defeated the invaders who had carried away many captives (including his nephew Lot). Upon the victory, he first gave a tithe of all to Melchizedek, King of Salem (Gen. 14:20). We do not read of any requirement or compulsion for this gift, but Abraham did it willingly and humbly (Heb. 7:7). Later, when the king of Sodom offered Abraham the goods that had been recovered, Abraham refused to accept even a sandal strap (Gen. 14:23). When unexpected strangers arrived, Abraham was eager and willing to utilize his best to provide for their needs, even though it was not his mealtime (Gen. 18:1-8).

Jesus explained how difficult it was for a wealthy man to enter into the kingdom (Mat. 19:24), and Abraham certainly would qualify as wealthy. Abraham was not overcome by his own personal wealth, but he saw far beyond what he owned. He did not see his own personal wealth as the ultimate goal, but he looked forward to the blessings of heaven (Heb. 11:9-10). He knew that earthly treasure is like a vapor (Jam. 4:14) that vanishes away.

I believe that in a conversation with Abraham about this topic, he would be amazed at the wealth of today. We all have routine luxuries that he could not even imagine in his day. Yet, the spiritual challenges are the same and the approach that he took would be helpful for us as well. We need to realize that the riches of this world are indeed short-lived and try to heap up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Mat. 6:20). We must ensure that we do not “sell our soul” for earthly riches

(Matthew 16:26) and ensure that we do not love the world or the things of the world (1 John 2:15-16).

Reasoning from the Scriptures

One of the most fascinating accounts in the Old Testament is the description of Abraham's faith when he was told to offer up Isaac (Gen. 22). What God had requested Abraham to do was unprecedented and clearly condemned in later Scripture (Lev. 20:1-5). The Hebrew writer tells us that Abraham concluded that God would raise him up from the dead (Heb. 11:19). How then did Abraham reason through this process?

Abraham was told by God that Isaac was the son through whom all of the promises that had been made would be fulfilled (Gen. 21:12-13). Since Isaac was just a lad at the time, he did not yet have the offspring through whom the promise would be fulfilled. Abraham also knew that God always keeps His word; thus when He said that something is to happen, it will indeed happen. Abraham properly concluded that Isaac could not permanently perish through the sacrifice.

Abraham properly reasoned from the word of God and he could teach many people about proper reasoning today. So many are confused about how to interpret and apply what God has taught properly, and Abraham could certainly help many people figure it out. Use the same reasoning in religious matters that you use in every other aspect of your life and you will get it right.

Conclusion

It is interesting to imagine the type of information and assistance that Abraham could give to us if we could engage him in a conversation today. However, God has not left us without great advice and encouragement today; we have His

church to support and encourage us along the way. While we may not have the name recognition of Abraham, we can and should provide support and encouragement for our brethren.

Works Cited

English Standard Version. Print.

King James Version. Print.

CHAPTER 12

Fully Persuaded

Wade L. Webster

Although Abraham was not the first man—or the only man—mentioned in Faith’s Hall of Fame, more verses are dedicated to him and to his faith than to any other, including Moses. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Abraham was earlier in Paul’s sermon than some of the other heroes of the faith. As has happened to all preachers, time would eventually fail Paul (Heb. 11:32). However, it could also be that it simply took more verses to talk about Abraham’s faith than the faith of the others. After all, he is not known as “the father of all them that believe” for nothing (King James Version, Rom. 4:11).

Outside of Hebrews 11, it is likely that no other chapter speaks as much of Abraham’s faith as does the fourth chapter of Romans. It is in this chapter that we find the words that are the focus of this study—“fully persuaded” (Rom. 4:21). While these words clearly speak of Abraham’s faith, they are not the only words to do so. Consider other statements from the context that also speak of Abraham’s faith:

- “Abraham **believed** God” (Rom. 4:3).
- “**Faith** was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness” (Rom. 4:9).
- “A seal of the righteousness of the **faith** which he had yet being uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:11).

- “That he might be the father of all them that **believe**” (Rom. 4:11).
- “The steps of that **faith** of our father Abraham” (Rom. 4:12).
- “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of **faith**” (Rom. 4:13).
- “But to that also which is of the **faith** of Abraham” (Rom. 4:16).
- “Before him whom he **believed**” (Rom. 4:17).
- “Who against hope **believed** in hope” (Rom. 4:18).
- “And being not weak in **faith**” (Rom. 4:19).
- “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in **faith**” (Rom. 4:20).

Clearly, faith permeated Abraham’s life. He was not almost persuaded. He was fully persuaded. The expression *fully persuaded* comes from a single Greek word (plerophoreo) which means “fully convinced or assured” (Thayer and Smith, “Plerophoreo”).

It is interesting to consider the song “Almost Persuaded” by Phillip P. Bliss in connection with Paul’s statement about Abraham’s being “fully persuaded.” Please consider the words of the song with me:

“Almost persuaded” now to believe;
“Almost persuaded” Christ to receive;
Seems now some soul to say,
“Go, Spirit, go Thy way,
Some more convenient day
On Thee I’ll call.”

“Almost persuaded,” come, come today;
“Almost persuaded,” turn not away;
Jesus invites you here,
Angels are ling’ring near,
Prayers rise from hearts so dear;
O wand’rer, come!

“Almost persuaded,” harvest is past!
“Almost persuaded,” doom comes at last!
“Almost” cannot avail;
“Almost” is but to fail!
Sad, sad, that bitter wail—
“Almost,” but lost!

I especially like the first line in the song: “Almost persuaded, now to believe.” To be almost persuaded is to stop short of belief; at least, it is to stop short of a faith that will save. It is to believe like the devils (Jam. 2:19). I also like the words, “Almost’ cannot avail; ‘Almost’ is but to fail!” Almost persuaded will not get the job done. As you likely know, the song “Almost persuaded” is based off King Agrippa’s words to Paul. We read, “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). Paul acknowledged that King Agrippa believed. He said, “I know that thou believest” (Acts 26:27). However, it was an “almost persuaded” faith instead of a “fully persuaded” faith. Almost is from a Greek word (olimos) that means “little, small, few... short, light, slight” (Thayer and Smith, “Olimos”). Agrippa had a lite (light) faith. It is interesting that Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary gives the following as one of its definitions of lite: “diminished or lacking in substance or seriousness” (“Lite”). This is a pretty good definition of Agrippa’s faith – diminished and lacking in substance. Paul expressed his

desire that Agrippa and all the others that heard him were both “almost, and altogether” such as he was; that is, that they were Christians. Altogether comes from a Greek word (polus) that means “many, much, large” (“Polus”). Instead of a little faith, Paul wanted Agrippa and the others to have a large faith. He wanted them to have the full version and not just the 30-day trial version.

It seems clear to me from a study of Abraham’s life that the patriarch was fully persuaded of three things concerning God. He was fully persuaded of God’s power, God’s purity, and God’s provision.

The Power of God

Abraham was fully persuaded or convinced that what God had promised, He was “able” to perform (Rom. 4:21). Able comes from a Greek word (dunatos) that means “powerful, mighty, strong...excelling in something, having power from something” (“Dunatos”). Two chapters in the New Testament reveal the great faith that Abraham had in the power of God.

Birth from the Dead (Rom. 4)

In the context of Romans 4, Abraham believed that God could give him and Sarah a son in their old age. “Against hope” Abraham “believed in hope” (Rom. 4:18). It would have been easy for Abraham to have “considered” his body “dead” (Rom. 4:19). Considered comes from a Greek word (katanoeo) which means to “fix one’s eyes or mind upon” (“Katanoeo”). Every time that Abraham looked into a mirror or saw his reflection in something, he saw an old man. However, Abraham did not focus on his weakness. He focused on God’s strength. Someone has noted that “obstacles are what we see when we take our eyes off of the goal.” In this case, obstacles were what Abraham would have seen had

he taken his eyes off God. Dead comes from a Greek word (nekroo) that means “worn out” (“Nekroo”). It is a word that is used to describe “an impotent old man” (3499). In addition to his own deadness, it would have been easy for Abraham to have considered the “deadness” of Sarah’s womb (Rom. 4:19; cf. Heb. 11:11). Deadness comes from a Greek word (nekrosis) that refers to “the dead state.” It refers to the “utter sluggishness of bodily members and organs” (“Nekrosis”). Clearly, apart from God’s intervention, Abraham and Sarah had no hope of having a child. Yet, Abraham believed that God could bring forth life from that which was dead. Although his body was weak, his faith was “strong” (Rom. 4:19). Rather than murmuring against God, as some of his descendants would later do, Abraham magnified or gave glory to God (Rom. 4:20).

Back from the Dead (Heb. 11)

In the context of Hebrews 11, Abraham believed that God could bring his son back from the dead. It required a great faith for Abraham to believe that God could give him a son in his old age. However, it required an even greater faith for the patriarch to believe that God could raise that same son from the dead. Yet, Abraham was fully persuaded that God could do this. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we read, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Heb. 11:17-19). Accounting comes from a Greek word (logizomai) which means “to reckon, count, compute, calculate...count up or weigh the reasons...to determine...decide” (“Logizomai”). Abraham decided (persuaded himself) that God was going to raise his son from the dead.

He believed that God was going to do something that He had never done before—raise someone from the dead. Although many had died prior to Abraham’s offering Isaac as a sacrifice, none of them had been raised from the dead. It is one thing to believe something that has been done before. It is quite another to believe something that has never been done before. When one considers exactly what God had told Abraham to do, it becomes even more amazing. God had told Abraham to offer Isaac as a “burnt offering” (Gen. 24:2; Gen. 24:3; Gen. 24:6; Gen. 24:7; Gen. 24:8; Gen. 24:13). A burnt offering required Isaac to be killed and then burned. Abraham not only believed that God was going to bring Isaac back from the dead, he believed that God was going to bring his son back from the ashes.

What about us? How persuaded are we in the power of God? Do we focus on our weaknesses or on God’s strength? Repeatedly, in the New Testament, we are encouraged to realize that God is “able.” Consider six things that God is able to do:

- He is able to save (Jam. 4:12; Heb. 5:7; Heb. 7:25; 1 Cor. 10:13; Dan. 3:17; Dan. 6:20).
- He is able to steady (2 The. 3:3; Rom. 14:4).
- He is able to supply (2 Cor. 9:8; 2 Chr. 25:9).
- He is able to secure (Jude 24; Rom. 8:39; John 10:29).
- He is able to subdue (Phi. 3:21).
- He is able to succor (Heb. 2:18).

The problem is never a lack of ability on God’s part. The problem is a lack of faith on our part. God is able to keep that which we commit to Him. To Timothy, Paul wrote, “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am

persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). In fact, God is able to do “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

The Purity of God

Abraham was fully persuaded or convinced of the purity of God. When God was preparing to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Abraham did not ask this question out of doubt, but rather out of conviction. He was “fully persuaded” that God would do right. He was convinced that God would not destroy the righteous with the wicked. Twice Abraham noted that it was “far” from God to do “after this manner” (Gen. 18:25). Far is from a Hebrew word (*chaliylah*) that means “far be it (from me), God forbid that, let it not be” (“*Chaliylah*”). Manner is from a Hebrew word (*dabar*) that means “business, occupation, acts” (“*Dabar*”). Abraham was saying that God, because He is holy or righteous, would not do business this way.

Abraham was convinced that there were righteous souls in Sodom. After all, his nephew Lot and his family were there. He would have certainly counted them among the righteous (2 Pet. 2:7-8); however, he was way off on his estimate of how many righteous people remained in Sodom. As you recall, Abraham started his discussion with God at fifty souls (Gen. 18:24). Clearly, he believed this to be a good starting point. Amazingly, even when he was forced to go down in his estimates, he went down in increments of five (Gen. 18:28). He must have thought that he was pretty close at fifty. However, he wasn’t. Finally, he gave up at ten (Gen. 18:32). As you know, only four souls departed with the angels from the city—Lot, Lot’s wife, and two daughters. Of course,

one of these four, Lot's wife, perished outside the city (Acts 19:26). Abraham thought there were fifty, but there were barely four, and one of them, fell from grace shortly after leaving the city.

Although Abraham may have been wrong in his estimation of some men as righteous, he was not wrong in his estimation of God. God is righteous. Repeatedly, he is so described in the Old Testament (Ezra 9:15; Psa. 7:9; Psa. 116:5; Dan. 9:14). In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses declared of God, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deu. 32:4).

What about us? How persuaded are we in the purity of God? Are we convinced of the righteous judgment of God? For sure, like Abraham, we likely have those that we are concerned about as we contemplate the coming judgment of God. We, too, may be wrong in how many righteous people are left—likely fewer than we think (Mat. 7:13-14). However, we can rest assured that God is righteous and that He will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:30-31; cf. Rom. 2:5; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 16:7; Rev. 19:2). The wheat (the righteous) will be gathered into the barn to be saved and the tares (the wicked) will be put into the fire to be burned (Mat. 13:30).

The Provision of God

Abraham was fully persuaded or convinced of the provision of God. As he was climbing the mountain where Isaac would be offered, Isaac asked, "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Gen. 22:7). Isaac knew the ingredients of worship. He knew that three items were needed for a burnt offering—fire, wood, and a lamb. He recognized that the last of these three—the lamb—was missing. Of course, it was not really missing.

He was the lamb. However, at this point, he did not know that. When Isaac asked about the lamb, Abraham assured him that God would “provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen. 22:8). Although Abraham did not know how God was going to do this, he was confident that God would provide. Provide is from a Greek word (ra’ah) which means “to cause to see, show” (“Ra’ah”). Of course, in the mount, God did show Abraham the lamb (Gen. 22:13-14). As you recall, after Abraham was stopped from slaying Isaac, he lifted up his eyes, and saw a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. God had provided himself a lamb, just as Abraham had confidently affirmed that He would. Of course, we know that a Lamb, God’s own Son, had already been slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Just as a ram took Isaac’s place on Mount Moriah, the day was coming when Christ would take the place of every man on Mount Calvary (Heb. 2:9). By faith, Abraham was privileged to see that day and rejoice (John 8:56).

What about us? How persuaded are we that God will provide for us? Are we confident that in time of need that God will give us what we need? Paul affirmed that we should be. He wrote, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16; cf. Heb. 13:6). Boldly is from a Greek word (parrhesia) meaning “boldness” or “assurance” (“Parrhesia”). This sounds a lot like “fully persuaded,” does it not?

In the fourth chapter of Romans, Paul encouraged the saints to walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham (Rom. 4:12). He wanted their faith to be as strong as Abraham’s faith. He wanted them to be as “fully persuaded” of the power, purity, and provisions of God as Abraham was. Of course, the same holds true for us today. May we be “fully

persuaded” that what God has promised He is able also to perform (Rom. 4:21)!

Works Cited

- Bliss, Philip P. “Almost Persuaded.” *Timeless Truths*. Web. 29 June 2014.
- Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius. “Chaliylah.” *Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 29 June 2014.
- . “Dabar.” *Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.
- . “Ra’ah.” *Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.
- King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.
- “Lite.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Web. 29 June 2014.
- Thayer and Smith. “Dunatos.” *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.
- . “Katanoeo.” *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.
- . “Logizomai.” *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.
- . “Nekroo.” *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.
- . “Nekrosis.” *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.
- . “Olimos.” *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 29 June 2014.
- . “Paarhesia.” *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.
- . “Plerophoreo.” *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 28 June 2014.

—-. “Polus.” *New Testament Greek Lexicon—King James Version*. *Biblestudytools.com*. Web. 29 June 2014.

CHAPTER 13

The Day that Abraham Saw All the Way to Calvary

Morne Stephanus

I appreciate so much the invitation to speak on this lectureship and the opportunity to pen a few words about the father of faith. On May 29, 1953, Sir Edmund Percival Hillary hoisted the British flag on the apex of Mount Everest. At that time, Sir Edmund and his group of explorers became the first human beings ever to climb to the top of the world (Wikipedia). This group meticulously and strategically calculated the climb, stockpiled supplies, and spent long hours in training. The expedition was fraught with danger, discouragement, and the ever-looming threat of death as these men fought their way to the top (Salvato). What a magnificent feat in human history; the perseverance and determination of these men paid off when they stood 29,029 feet above sea level. Another mountain—in the land of Moriah—was once scaled by a man named Abraham. This magnificent achievement also deserves a place in the annals of history and should be celebrated for generations to come. This mountain was not nearly as high as Everest, but the climb to its summit was costlier, heavier, harder, and more rewarding. The success of this mountaineer was not celebrated by hoisting the flag of one country but rather hoisting the banner of faith that would affect all nations. It is

my task and privilege to write about the day Abraham saw all the way to Calvary. The account in question is found in the Genesis 22. When I considered the title of this lesson, I was faced with two questions: How did Abraham see all the way to Calvary? Did he literally see Calvary from the mountain on which he was? Some Bible scholars aver that the mountain on which Abraham offered Isaac is the same place where the Christ was crucified. Such a conclusion has hardly any sustainable evidence. The exact location of the mountain on which Isaac was offered is unknown. Therefore, to conclude that Abraham literally saw Calvary would be ambitious conjecture. Did Abraham perhaps intellectually see Calvary afar off? While Abraham was going through this test, did he have in mind the Christ and His sufferings on Calvary? Did he accomplish his sacrifice of Isaac in view of Calvary? Did Abraham have *full knowledge* of what would transpire on Calvary's Hill? Once again, there is no evidence to reach such a conclusion. The prophets knew God was planning something great but did not have complete knowledge of everything (1 Cor. 2:9-10; Eph. 3:8-11).

So how did Abraham see all the way to Calvary? Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (New King James Version, John 8:56). Certainly we cannot deny Abraham saw the day of Christ but the question is How? Allow me to suggest two ways in which Abraham saw Calvary afar off: 1) revelation and 2) illustration.

Revelation

Notice the following statement made about Abraham.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested,
offered up Isaac, and he who had received

the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “in Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (Heb. 11:17-19)

The Hebrews writer says Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham exhibited a strong confidence in carrying out God’s commands. Some Bible scholars have alleged that Abraham readily obeyed God because he was familiar with the practice of human sacrifice that permeated the area in which he lived (Exell and Spence-Jones). Was Abraham’s confident obedience based on the ungodly practices of pagans? If so, Abraham walked by sight and not by faith. His faith would not have been based in God’s ability to raise Isaac from the dead but rather in what was seen around him. The confident obedience of Abraham is obtained by affirmation or promise. One cannot have confidence in something without the presence of a promise. God’s promises prompt us to obey His commands. God made Noah a promise to save him and his house (Gen. 6:13-14). Because of that promise, Noah moved with fear and prepared an ark to the saving of his house (Heb. 11:7). God promised the Hebrew nation a city that flowed with milk and honey (Exo. 3:8). Therefore, the Israelites walked around the walls of Jericho because they had a promise (Jos. 6). If no promises are attached to God’s commands, our obedience is senseless and foolish (1 Cor. 15:19). If heaven is not our reward or if we cease to exist when we die, what would be the purpose of being righteous? We are obedient to God because we have something in view, a reward when this life is over. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been

approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (Jam. 1:12).

Abraham confidently obeyed the command of God to offer up his son because he had Calvary in view. He had received a promise from God and he desired to see that promise fulfilled (John 8:56). This confidence prompted Abraham to obey God in all sincerity. His confidence in God was exemplified in the following actions:

His Readiness

“So Abraham rose *early in the morning* and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him” (Gen. 22:3, emphasis mine, MWS). Abraham was about to perform one of the hardest things imaginable: offering up his son. However, the Scriptures say that he arose early in the morning. He did not put it off till later; he did not hesitate; he did not say maybe tomorrow we will go. When God told Abraham to offer his beloved son, his only begotten son (Gen. 22:2), he rose early in preparation for it.

His Resolve

In Gen. 22:3, we are also told that Abraham split the wood for the sacrifice before he left the house. Here we see a man who has resolved to obey God. He was preparing himself ahead of time to keep this command. When one resolves to follow God, he does what is necessary to follow God. Abraham left no room for excuses; he made sure nothing got in the way of his obedience to God. The Christian who exhibits this type of resolve will surely hear the words “well done good and faithful servant” (Mat. 25:23).

His Reasoning

“And Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and *we*

will come back to you” (Gen. 22:5, emphasis mine, MWS). Abraham reasoned that he *and* Isaac would be back. He had a confident expectation this would take place. Abraham’s confidence in obeying God stemmed from revelation he received from God about Calvary. He can see all the way to Calvary because God sketched him a word picture of that magnificent advent. “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Gen. 22:18). Adam Clarke concluded the following on these verses:

In thy posterity, in the Messiah, who shall spring from thee, shall all families of the earth be blessed; for as he shall take on him human nature from the posterity of Abraham, he shall taste death for every man, his Gospel shall be preached throughout the world, and innumerable blessings be derived on all mankind through his death and intercession.

The apostle Paul would later affirm the seed of which God tells Abraham is indeed the Christ. “Now, to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘and to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘and to your seed,’ who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). Abraham received a veiled glimpse of what is fully known by us today (Eph. 1:7-10). Christ is the answer; in Him lies all blessings (Eph. 1:3); in Him every person that has ever lived and will ever live can have salvation (Acts 4:12). In Christ man can have everlasting peace (Phi. 4:5-9) and enduring joy (Phi. 4:4). He is the captain of our

salvation (Heb. 2:10), the way to the Father (John 14:6), and in Him, we have the hope of eternal life (1 John 5:11). All of this is made possible by the events that took place on a hill called Calvary. Abraham's view of Calvary is not complete; he does not possess full knowledge of everything that would transpire at that time. However, he has a veiled glimpse of Calvary given to him by revelation. Everything Christ would do for mankind is summed up in the revelation "in thy seed shall all the nation of the earth be blessed." He rose early in the morning, he split the wood for the sacrifice, he journeyed for miles to the place of sacrifice, and He responded to his son's question with great confidence. Abraham could do so because on that day he saw all the way to Calvary by faith and not by sight. If Abraham, who received just a glimpse of what was to happen, responded with such great faith, how should we respond having received all revelation of what happened (2 Tim. 3:15-17)? Abraham looked forward to Calvary and obeyed God with confidence; as we look back to Calvary are we doing the same?

Illustration

In the Old Testament, various prophets received veiled glimpses of the advent of Calvary. Daniel writes about the Kingdom, the same Kingdom which was bought by the blood spilled on Calvary (Dan. 2:44; Acts 20:28). Isaiah penned his memorable fifty-third chapter about the Suffering Servant, the Christ. However, the events of Moriah are fraught with illustrations of Calvary. Aside from the day Isaac was offered, other comparisons can be drawn between Isaac and Christ:

Prophesied Births

The event of both their births was prophesied. "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah

shall have a son” (Gen. 18:14). “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us” (Mat. 1:23).

Miraculous Conception

Both Isaac and Christ were conceived in ways that defy natural law. Sarah bore Isaac when she was well of age. “And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him” (Gen. 21:1-2). The Christ was born to a virgin:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. (Mat. 1:18-20)

Are all these comparisons coincidence or are they the work of God? The Bible makes no mention that everything that Isaac went through should be compared to Christ. Thus, we must be careful not to draw unwarranted conclusions. However, we cannot deny the great correlations that can be drawn from the day Abraham was tested:

The account of Isaac's life reaches a climactic point when his father, Abraham, takes him to the top of mount Moriah to offer him as a sacrifice before God (Gen. 22). In that scene one can move down the stream of time and see Christ Jesus being offered on Mount Calvary. Some have called the scene on Mount Moriah an Old Testament Calvary or a dress rehearsal for Calvary. (Grider 27)

The events that took place on the day Abraham went to offer up his son are vivid illustrations of the advent of Calvary.

A Divine Calling

Abraham did not decide to offer up his son because he had a *feeling* it was the right thing to do. He did not offer up his son in keeping with the pagan traditions in the land in which he lived (Keil & Delitzsch). Abraham's offering was of Divine origin; the command to offer his son came directly from the sovereign God of heaven. "Now it came to pass after these things that **God tested Abraham**, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am'" (Gen. 22:1, emphasis mine, MWS). The chief priest and elders of the Jews plotted the demise of Jesus. "When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death" (Mat. 27:1). His own friend and disciple betrayed Him to His enemies. "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver" (Mat. 26:14-15). A Jewish crowd sanctioned his death. "Pilate answered and said to them again, 'What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?'"

So they cried out again, ‘Crucify Him!’ Then Pilate said to them, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’ But they cried out all the more, ‘Crucify Him!’” (Mark 15:12-14). All these people no doubt had a hand in Jesus’ death, but His sacrifice was purposed, planned, and permitted by God. “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death. (Acts 2:22-23)

Both Isaac and Christ were called to be sacrificed by the God of Heaven.

An Only Child

Isaac was not Abraham’s only son, he also had a son called Ishmael. However, the Lord speaks of Isaac as Abraham’s only son. “Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’” (Gen. 22:2). One commentator explained it in the following manner:

For, though Ishmael was his son, he was
a son by his maid, by his concubine,

and not by his wife; Isaac was his only legitimate son, his only son by his lawful wife Sarah; the only son of the promise, his only son, in whom his seed was to be called. (Gill)

Jesus, too, was God's only begotten Son. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). These facts should not be glanced over without reflection. We attribute worth to certain things based on their availability or quality. Endangered animals are greatly protected and one-of-a-kind products are very expensive. How much more the life of your one and only son? At no point must we conclude that Abraham's confidence in obeying God and God's love for us negated the heartache of sacrificing their only sons. It is the love Abraham had for his son and the love God has for Jesus that makes their sacrifices so awe-inspiring. Also, the love Abraham had for God is illustrated in his obedience and sacrifice. We cannot say we love God if we are not willing to obey and sacrifice (John 14:15; 1 John 2:4; Mat.16:24). John 3:16 should impress upon our minds how great the sacrifice was made on our behalf. Even though it was purposed and planned by God, it could not have been easy to watch your only son be murdered by the very people you are trying to help. God did not take from His abundance; He sacrificed all that He had and gave it to us; that is love.

The Carrying Of Wood

One must be careful not to take an account and ascribe spiritual meaning to every word in it. We are told Nicodemus

came to Jesus by night (John 3:2) and many try to speculate why he came by night or if there was a meaning behind his actions. Accounts in the Bible contain facts but not every fact has significant, spiritual meaning. I find it very hard to ascribe the following comparison to mere coincidence, but I will concede that it very well may be. When Abraham could see the place of sacrifice in the distance the Bible reads as follows: “So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together” (Gen. 22:6). Isaac carried the wood that would be used in his sacrifice. The instruments of his demise were placed on his back as they journeyed up the mountain. In the same fashion, we read of Christ being compelled to carry the device of His death up Calvary’s hill. “Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha” (John 19:16-17). One commentator speculated as to the meaning of the wood on the back of Isaac:

In this also he was a type of Christ, on whom the wood of his cross was laid, and which he bore when he went to be crucified, John 19:17; and this wood may be also a figure of our sins laid on him by his Father, and which he bore in his body on the tree, 1 Pet. 2:24. (Gill)

Whether it was the fact Abraham could not carry the wood by reason of old age, whether it was mere coincidence or God pointing towards Calvary, the comparison to Christ carrying His cross is remarkable.

The Complete Submission

Another astounding correlation between Isaac and Christ is their complete submission to their fathers with regards to being sacrificed. We read nothing in the way of Isaac refusing to be sacrificed or protesting with his father:

Even if it should be allowed that Isaac was only twenty-five, it is obvious enough that an old man of that age plus a full century, unaided, would have been unable to subdue Isaac and compel his obedience. Hence, the conclusion that Isaac willingly consented to be bound and to submit to the death which Abraham was ready to inflict. (Coffman)

From the time Isaac was laid on the altar to the time when his father held the dagger aloft to end his life, Isaac refused none of this. He willingly laid down his life as an obedient son. We know not what went through Isaac's mind at that time, but his obedience must have stemmed from trust in his father to do that which was right. Speaking to the Philippian brethren about humility, the apostle Paul mentions the same about Christ:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled

Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Phi. 2:5-8)

Neither the Jews nor Pilate nor Judas had any power over Christ. Their murderous actions would have been futile if the Christ had resisted His sacrifice. Jesus even intimated this much:

But Jesus said to him, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mat. 26:52-53)

Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father. (John 10:17-18)

What we see on the cross is a son’s complete submission to His Father’s will. He would lay down His life at his Father’s request. “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’” (Mat. 26:39). Not only do we see the obedience of Christ, we see the love He has for His creation as well. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

The comparisons between Isaac and Christ stop with Isaac on the altar but the illustration of Calvary continues. When Isaac asked his father about a sacrifice Abraham replied: "And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.' So the two of them went together" (Gen. 22:8). The lamb in this verse is not Isaac, even though Abraham at the time might have thought so. When Abraham lifted up his hand to end his son's life the Lord intervened:

And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Gen. 22:10-12)

At that moment Isaac ceased to be a type of Christ but rather became a type of mankind. Isaac was the one who was supposed to be offered; he was to die at the command of God. But the Lord God Almighty provided a substitute to take his place:

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called

the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen. (Gen. 22:13-14, KJV)

At that time the ram caught in the thicket became the type of Christ, the substitute for Isaac. In the culmination of this account, we readily see a picture of Calvary illustrated to Abraham. Mankind represented by Isaac should have died because of the law of sin and death. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (KJV, Eze. 18:20). “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). However, because of God’s love, we have been given someone to take our place:

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. (1 The. 5:9-10, KJV)

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (1 Pet. 1:18-19, KJV)

Jesus took our place; He carried our sins and was nailed to a tree on our behalf. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (KJV, John 15:13). One cannot read this account of Abraham without falling prostrate before God with words of praise and thanksgiving. The events that took place at Moriah are proof of how God purposed and planned *our salvation* long before we were even born. “O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods” (Psa. 95:1-3, KJV). By divine illustration Abraham received a view of Calvary unlike any other.

Conclusion

Abraham received veiled glimpses of Calvary through God’s revelation and illustration. The Lord said Abraham was glad; he rejoiced when he saw it (John 8:56). Abraham looking forward to Calvary acted with great obedience and was rewarded for such (Gen. 22:16-17). We have received more than just a veiled glimpse of Calvary. We have the full picture, a complete illustration in the pages of Scripture. Therefore, we must obey accordingly and live sacrificially. Our faith in God must be on par with that of Abraham on the day he saw all the way to Calvary.

Works Cited

- Clarke, Adam. “Genesis.” *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible*. Meyer, Rick. e-Sword Software. Franklin: Meyers, 2000-2014. Digital file.
- Coffman, James B. “Genesis.” James Burton Coffman Commentary on the Bible. *StudyLight.org*. StudyLight. Web. 25 Apr. 2014

- “Edmund Hillary.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation Inc., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2014.
- Exell, Joseph, and Henry Donald Maurice Spence-Jones, eds. “Genesis.” *StudyLight.org*. StudyLight. Web. 27 Apr. 2014
- Gill, John. “Genesis.” *John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*, Meyer, Rick. e-Sword Software. Franklin: Meyers, 2000-2014. Digital file.
- Grider, Barry. “Isaac: Submission Personified.” *Shadows of Good Things*. Ed. Keith A Mosher, Sr. Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 2010. 27-35. Print.
- Keil, Karl, and Franz Delitzsch. “Genesis.” *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, Meyer, Rick. e-Sword Software. Franklin: Meyers, 2000-2014. Digital file.
- King James Version*. Meyer, Rick. e-Sword Software. Franklin: Meyers, 2000-2014. Digital file.
- New King James Version*. Meyer, Rick. e-Sword Software. Franklin: Meyers, 2000-2014. Digital file.
- Salvato, Rob. “From Moriah to Calvary.” *Calvary Vista*. Calvary Vista Church, n.d. Web. 23 April. 2014.

CHAPTER 14

Ye Are My Friends If Ye Do Whatsoever I Command You

Mike Baker

Friendship comes at various levels today, but very few friendships are actually close. Many of our friends are really acquaintances. Deep and lasting friendships occur less frequently in life and are certainly to be treasured. God desires a lasting friendship with us that will enable us to better do His will and draw closer to Him.

Several friendships in the Bible are described as very close: David and Jonathan; Ruth and Naomi; Paul and Timothy; and Jesus, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. These enduring relationships go well beyond a mere acquaintance.

Abraham has the distinction of being called the *friend of God*. In the following verses, we see how the inspired writers display this relationship.

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God. (New King James Version, Jam. 2:23)

But you Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen. The descendants of Abraham My friend. (Isa. 41:8)

Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham, Your friend forever? (2 Chr. 20:7)

God chose Abraham for a special purpose and offered His friendship (Gen. 12:1-4). At this time, Abram (as he was known until God changed his and Sarai's names in Genesis 17:5 and Genesis 17:15) was dwelling in Haran, was seventy-five years old and was married to Sarai, who was barren. God called him to leave his country and his family and journey to a place of God's choosing. God also had promised to make Abram a great nation.

Abram accepted the friendship of God by obeying what he was told to do. Joshua 24:2 tells us that Abram's father, Terah, and others were serving other gods before God spoke to Abram. He had a choice either to obey God or continue to follow the gods of his country. He chose to obey God.

In the New Testament, James addressed this choice we all must make. "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jam. 4:4).

This choice is left up to us. I do not want to be an enemy of God, but what does it mean if I am a friend of God and Jesus?

Johnson Oatman, Jr. (1856-1922) wrote the song, "I'll Be a Friend to Jesus," (1922, public domain) along with 5,000

other hymns (Oatman). Although the verses of this song are directed toward Jesus, the main thoughts can also be applied to our relationship with God.

Following the verses and refrain of this song, we will examine Abraham's friendship with God, and our friendship with Jesus from these five aspects: 1) needed, 2) difficult, 3) demonstrated, 4) shared, and 5) forever.

Friendship With God Is Needed

Have you noticed the ways in which our country appears to be going against God? Good and evil have always been enemies, but evil seems to be winning more of the battles lately. We are not permitted to speak of God in our schools and when we use the Bible to show that certain actions are wrong in God's eyes, we are quickly criticized for being judgmental and hateful.

God needs friends in the world, especially when the world actively turns against Him. We need to be God's friends, to show the world what He has done for our salvation.

God chose Abraham and their relationship demonstrated true friendship. One sign of that friendship was that God confided in him.

Note that when God was preparing to destroy Sodom, He said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" (Gen. 18:17). As Abraham stood before God, he inquired of God if He would destroy the righteous people along with the wicked. What follows is an amazing exchange of bargaining as Abraham moved God down from saving Sodom for fifty righteous people to only ten righteous people (Gen. 18:16-25).

God had great faith in Abraham that he would be faithful and lead his children to follow the Lord. Abraham's concern for the few righteous people in Sodom demonstrated his

shared concern with God for man to have opportunity to turn to God. When God has friends who share His purpose, then His will can be accomplished.

Consider now the first verse of “I’ll Be A Friend To Jesus” (Oatman).

They tried my Lord and Master,
With no one to defend;
Within the halls of Pilate
He stood without a friend.

Just as God desired the friendship with Abraham, Jesus desires friendship with us today. This world is in real need of Jesus and the message of salvation. We need friends of Jesus to stand on the truth of the good news and to become beacons of hope in a dark world of sin.

When Jesus stood before Pilate, He seemingly had no friends at all. The disciples scattered soon after His capture. Judas had betrayed Him and Peter was denying that he ever knew Jesus at all. When we see our culture put God and Christianity on trial today, do we see Christians standing up for Jesus as His friends?

What does it mean to be a friend to Jesus? Note how Jesus connects love, sacrifice, friendship, and obedience together in John 15:13-14. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”

The greatest demonstration of love is to lay down one’s life for a friend. Jesus had mentioned this voluntary sacrifice earlier in John 10:17-18,

Therefore My Father loves Me because
I lay down My life that I may take it up

again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. This command I have received from My Father.

Jesus was willing to give the ultimate gift of love for a world that desired to kill Him. In exchange, He desires that we become not His servants, but His friends. To be a friend to Jesus, of course, means that we are willing to do whatsoever He commands us to do. Our friendship with God will not survive if we are not willing to do all that He commands us.

Friendship With God Is Difficult

Friendship with God and Jesus can be demanding and difficult. As one grows in faith, it is not uncommon to encounter times of hardship, doubting, and even lapses of faith.

Abraham suffered through some difficult situations in his journey of faith. When facing danger, he did not always tell the whole truth. Twice (Gen. 12:11-20, Gen. 20:1-18), he said that Sarah was his sister instead of his wife so his own life would be spared.

As he grew impatient with God, Abram tried to adopt Eliezer as his heir (Gen. 15:2-3). When he was convinced that God would not bless Sarai with children, he agreed to take her maidservant, Hagar, as his wife (Gen. 16:1-4). That union produced Ishmael and the ordeal created a great problem between Abram and Sarai.

When Abram was ninety-nine, God made a covenant with Abram, telling him that he would be a father of many nations. God changed their names from Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah. But when God mentioned that Sarah

would be the mother of nations, Abraham fell on his face and laughed (Gen. 17:17-18).

Abraham was committed to obey God but was tempted to take matters into his own hands rather than trust God's schedule. His faith grew through these challenges as he learned to have confidence in God's plan. Friendship with God for Abraham was difficult.

Now let us consider the second verse of "I'll Be A Friend To Jesus" (Oatman).

The world may turn against Him,
I'll love Him to the end.
And while on earth I'm living,
My Lord shall have a friend.

Except for Judas, the apostles were firmly behind Jesus. In the last hours before the betrayal, Jesus told them that He would be taken and they would be scattered. Peter spoke boldly, proclaiming that even if he had to die, he would not stumble because of Jesus. The other apostles said the same thing. But Peter was told instead that he would deny Jesus three times (Mat. 26:31-35).

Friendship with Jesus was difficult even for the ones who were closest to Him. How much more difficult is our friendship with Jesus today for those of us who have not walked with him in person?

However trying our friendship and obedience may become, Jesus shows us that our momentary failure at times is not something that keeps us from Him permanently. Luke's account of the exchange with Peter shows that Jesus was looking beyond his time of denial to the time when Peter would stand to strengthen the brethren (Luke 22:31-34). Jesus knows that faithfulness and friendship with Him is

difficult at times. But He has faith that we can remain faithful to Him.

Friendship With God Is Demonstrated

Abraham demonstrated his faith in God by obeying what he was told to do. The first example of this is found in Genesis 12:1-5 when God told Abram to leave his country and father's house and follow God to a new place. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8).

A second example of Abraham's demonstration of his faith and friendship involved the sacrifice of his son, Isaac, as God had instructed (Gen. 22:1-14). Abraham waited twenty-five years for the son of promise to be born. And now God was asking Abraham to kill his son willingly. Obviously this makes little sense, but having learned to trust God, Abraham went forward with the plan.

As they left the servants behind, just father and son continued up the mountain. Isaac asked where the sacrifice was and Abraham simply replied that God would provide, which He did. Abraham was fully prepared to sacrifice Isaac, but God stopped his hand before the final act can be completed. His faith had been proven.

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God" (Jam. 2:21-23).

Further evidence of his demonstration of trust in God is found in Hebrews 11:17-19. "By faith Abraham, when he

was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."

Abraham had grown in his faith to the point where he fully trusted God's plan. Despite no history of ever seeing someone who was raised from the dead, Abraham trusted that God could restore life to Isaac in order to keep His plan alive.

Here is the third verse of "I'll Be A Friend To Jesus" (Oatman).

I'll do what He may bid me;
I'll go where He may send;
I'll try each flying moment,
To prove that I'm His friend.

How do we demonstrate that we are obedient to Jesus? The Bible records many who followed Jesus and enjoyed the blessings of His miracles. But at times His teachings caused many to turn back and not follow any longer (John 6:66).

Few of us would be able to consider seriously offering our child to God as an act of obedience. But what of following other commands of God. Does it really matter how large or demanding the task is?

When Jesus instructed the rich young ruler (Mat. 19:16-22) to sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor, he would not do so because he treasured his possessions more than eternal life. This is an example of doing a great thing.

In the Old Testament account of Naaman the leper (2 Kin. 5:1-19), we find a great example of someone choosing

not to obey God's direction because his own logic made more sense. He thought that the instructions he received were not great enough. If they had been more demanding, he was apparently prepared to do them. Luckily for Naaman, his servants were able to keep him on task and see that no matter how great or small, the main thing was to obey God.

To be a friend to Jesus is to do the things that He commands (John 15:14). Of course, not all will be willing to do so. Jesus dealt in person with those who claimed to be His but would not follow His teachings. "But why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Mat. 7:21).

John 15:12 repeated a common theme in John's Gospel. Love one another. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Friends of Jesus need to be prepared to follow all of His commands, from loving neighbors to loving our enemies. Easy or difficult, our friendship with Jesus needs to be demonstrated through our actions.

Friendship With God Is Shared

As a friend to God, Abraham became an ambassador for God. He built altars to God on several occasions (Gen. 12:7; Gen. 13:4; Gen. 22:9). He continued to teach his family to honor God and he became a father of nations who would follow God.

Friends, when we realize what God has done for us, we simply cannot keep His story to ourselves. We must share the good news of God's redemptive plan.

Here is the final verse of "I'll Be A Friend To Jesus" (Oatman).

To all who need a Savior,
My Friend I'll recommend;
Because He brought salvation,
Is why I am His friend.

Choosing God over the world makes us enemies of the world. Wearing the name of Christ puts a target on us. The world rejects righteousness and loves lawlessness. But for those of us who have tasted the freedom of sin through Jesus, we simply cannot go back to the world.

Since the first sin that separated man from God, our Creator has been working to redeem us from the consequences of our sin. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10) and gave Himself for us demonstrating God's love (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8).

Our friends in the world may not even know that they are indeed lost. But as friends of God and Jesus we have an opportunity, yes even an obligation, to share that good news of salvation with them (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

We recommend, endorse, support, and promote Jesus as our only path to the Father and salvation. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Friendship With God Is Forever

Some will see a friendship with God or Jesus as only a short-term proposition, lasting at least until the current crisis is averted. However, God desires His friendship with us to continue for an eternity.

Abraham and others understood that when they entered into a friendship with God, it was for life and beyond. As his faith grew, he became less concerned with his earthly

conditions and more concerned for the eternal conditions for himself and others.

Abraham's promises were not just for this world, but also for eternity. Speaking for the people of faith in Hebrews 11, the author says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13).

Lastly, here is the refrain of "I'll Be A Friend To Jesus" (Oatman).

I'll be a friend to Jesus,
My life for Him I'll spend;
I'll be a friend to Jesus,
Until my years shall end.

As friends of God, we stick close to His side. "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Pro. 18:24b).

Imagine for a moment that you have a child who is drowning in a stream. A stranger comes along, jumps in, and saves the child from certain death. How do you think you would feel toward that stranger?

I am certain that you would revere that person for the rest of your life, recalling his heroic efforts to anyone who would hear you. Any time you would see that person you would likely hug him, thank him and ask once again if there was anything you could possibly do to repay him.

Now think of what God and Jesus have done for you. God sent His Son to die in our place. Jesus willingly laid down His own life in order for us to have the hope of eternal life. They have saved us.

Is not our friendship with God and Jesus such that it demands a lifetime of faithfulness? Abraham spent his life in service to God looking heavenward for his true home. Our service to Jesus needs to be for a lifetime as well. “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10b).

Works Cited

- New King James Version*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996. Print.
- Oatman, Johnson, Jr. “I’ll Be a Friend to Jesus.” *Hymnary.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 May 2014.

CHAPTER 15

Let There Be No Strife... For We Be Brethren

Paul Meacham, Jr.

The Bible uses a variety of methods to show us the characters of the people it discusses. Sometimes a person's character is described by a single life-changing event. Consider the courageous resolve of Jael who dealt with Sisera by taking "a nail of the tent, and...an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died" (King James Version, Jud. 4:21). Sometimes a person's character is explained by a series of actions that demonstrate his character on a day-to-day basis. Remember Obadiah, governor of wicked King Ahab's house. "Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly: For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water" (1 Kin. 18:3-4). Occasionally, we are privileged to observe a single person's character through the lens of a lifetime: individual acts of bravery (the killing of Goliath, 1 Sam. 17), the righteous leadership of others (forbidding his men to harm King Saul, 1 Sam. 24:1-7), faithful commitment to personal relationships (David's friendship with Jonathan, 1 Sam. 18:1-3; 2 Sam. 9:1-7), weakness in the face of temptation (David's sins regarding

Bathsheba, 2 Sam. 11), and humility when repentance is required (2 Sam. 12; Psa. 51). Such a comprehensive portrait allows us to feel that we really know and can relate to the person.

Apparently, God wanted us to know about and be able to relate to Abraham. Relatively speaking, we know much about the character of Abraham, friend of God (Jam. 2:23), as he is described to us in all of the above ways. Additionally, God has seen fit to describe Abraham within the context of his family.

Abraham: A Family Man

Assessing Abraham's character within the context of his family is right and proper. On the eve of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction, Jehovah chose to tell Abraham of His imminent judgment on the cities of the plains because of what he knew about Abraham as a father, teacher of his children, and ruler of his family (Gen. 18:19). What does the Bible tell us about Abraham within his family structure? Abraham had the distinction of being one of the few people who was renamed by Jehovah. And yet both of his names recognize his place within a family structure. Abram, his name at birth means high or lofty father (Hitchcock, "Abram"), and his God-given name, Abraham, means father of a multitude (Gen. 17:5-6) (Hitchcock, "Abraham"). Abraham's birth was announced within the genealogy of his family (Gen. 11:26-27). Abraham's departure from the land of his birth was, initially, a family exodus (Gen. 11:31-32). God's call to Abraham was expressly intended to remove him from his extended family and their idolatrous influences (Gen. 12:1; Jos. 24:2). Part of Jehovah's promise to Abraham was couched in family language including our obtaining of eternal life as a promised inheritance (Gen. 12:2; Gen. 17:5-

6; Gal. 3:29; 1 John 2:25). Of additional special interest to Christians, Abraham is described as the “father of all them that believe” (Rom. 4:11), the “father of circumcision” (Rom. 4:12), and the “father of us all” (Rom. 4:16) who through faith and grace come to God.

Abraham and Lot

I have taken the time to lay the above foundation because our understanding of the assigned topic and text, “Let There Be No Strife Between Us: For We Be Brethren (Gen. 13:8)” hinges upon the family relationship between Abraham and Lot (Gen. 12:5). The fact that they were related appears to be only marginally responsible for the tension that arose. However, the fact that they were brethren was instrumental in finding a solution to maintain harmony between them.

Abram and Lot’s Genealogy

Abraham’s father, Terah, was Lot’s grandfather and the eighth generation to spring from Shem (Gen. 11:10-24). Terah had three sons named in the record: Haran, Abram, and Nahor (Gen. 11:27). Notice that this author ordered Terah’s sons differently than does the Sacred Text. I did so because it appears that Haran was Terah’s oldest son, born to him at age 70 (Gen. 11:26). That Abram was not the oldest is made clear by the fact that he departed from the city of Haran when he was 75 years old and that his departure was after Terah’s death (Acts 7:4). Those facts, combined with Terah’s age at his death—205 years (Gen. 11:32)—means that Abram was not born until Terah was 130 years old. Therefore, either Haran or Nahor was born to Terah 60 years before Abram was born.

The evidence seems to support that Haran was the oldest of Terah’s sons. First is the fact that Nahor took his cousin Milcah, Haran’s daughter, to be his wife (Gen 11:29),

probably indicating that Haran was a generation older than Nahor. Second is the fact that Haran died before the family left Ur (Gen. 11:28). Man's life expectancy had been steadily declining since the flood, and by Terah's and Abraham's time, a life of 200 years was considered to be a long life. Terah lived to be 205 years old (Gen 11: 32), and Abraham lived 175 years which was described as being "a good old age, an old man, and full of years" (Gen. 25:7-8). If Haran was Terah's oldest, he could have lived to be as much as 140 years old and still have died before Terah took the family out of Ur. Considering that Nahor, Terah's father (not to be confused with Nahor, Terah's son), lived to be 148 (Gen. 11:24-25), and Sarah died at 127 years old (Gen. 23:1), Haran being the oldest fits with the life spans of his contemporaries.

Abram's and Lot's Travels Together

Putting together all the pieces, we conclude that 200-year-old Terah, in response to his son's divine call, "took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife" (Gen. 11:31) and moved them from Ur of the Chaldees to an area just east of where the Euphrates River turns southeast and begins its trek to the Persian Gulf. This is the area most cartographers mark as Paddan-aram and where they locate the city of Haran, doubtlessly named for Terah's oldest, by-then-deceased son. Here Abram's journey to Canaan is interrupted for about five years. Scripture does not tell us why they stopped in Paddan-aram, but Stephen's account tells us that Abram resumed his journey after Terah died (Acts 7:4). This might indicate that Terah was not able to continue the journey to Canaan due to his age.

Regardless of the reason for sojourning in Haran, upon Terah's death, "Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered,

and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came” (Gen. 12:5). The family remained intact as they journeyed into Canaan, during a brief excursion into Egypt to avoid a famine (Gen. 12:10), and as they settled in the southern part of Canaan (Gen. 13:1).

Abram’s and Lot’s Wealth

While Lot’s age is not given to us, it is noteworthy that Abram and Lot were at least contemporaries in age, and it is entirely possible that Lot was older than Abram. If Lot was born to Haran at any point before he was 60 years old, Lot would have been older than Abram. However, irrespective of their relative ages, Abram had been firmly established as the family’s patriarch, and Lot appears to have accepted the new family structure, continuing to travel as part of the family community.

We are not told how large this community was, but we are given clues. The first clue comes in the description of Abram’s and Lot’s wealth. By this point “Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. 13:2). Lot also “had flocks, and herds, and tents” (Gen. 13:5) of his own. In describing the substance of Abram and Lot, great riches are described, but no language is used to indicate a disparity of wealth between them. The second clue comes through an off-handed description of the number of people in Abram’s household. After Abram and Lot separated, geographically, Lot was captured in a battle and Abram came to his rescue. The rescue party was comprised of 318 armed, trained servants, all of whom had been born into Abram’s own household (Gen. 14:14). Considering that Abram would also have had female servants, male servants who were too old or too young to be useful in such a campaign, and servants who had been purchased into his household, one does not

have to stretch to conclude that Abram's household might have included more than 1,000 people. If Lot's household was of comparable size, this family community was great indeed, so great that "the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle" (Gen. 13:6-7).

Abraham: Strife and Harmony

Wealth often travels in the company of strife. So, what must be said about great wealth? Abram and Lot were very rich, and Satan used their wealth as a door to bring strife into their family. When strife arose between his herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen, Abram was wise enough to see the potential danger and address the issue before it could hurt the family.

The Text never says that strife existed between Abram and Lot. It says the strife was between their herdsmen. In fairness to their herdsmen, the Text also says the land was not able to bear the greatness of their combined substance. It may be that the herdsmen on both sides were just trying to do their jobs and felt they had to compete for the limited resources of the land. Regardless of what motives might have been behind the strife, Abram was wise enough to see that what started in the fields could find its way into the family and that a house divided against itself could not stand (Mat. 12:25).

Abram's behavior indicates that he already knew the truth of what David would write in song years later, that it was both good and pleasant "for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psa. 133:1)! If dwelling together geographically in unity was a possibility, then that would be pleasant indeed. However, if the land could not bear them, it would be far

better to separate physically while maintaining the unity of the family bond. This was the import of Abram's statement "for we be brethren."

Maybe strife would have been inevitable and even acceptable if Abram had been dealing with a rival herder, but a different standard applied in dealing with family. When dealing with brethren, our concern must be for the greater good of the family, not just for our individual rights. Jehovah later codified this preferential treatment of family in Moses' Law. Debts between brethren were forgiven on a seven-year cycle, but the debts to foreigners were not forgiven (Deu. 15:1-3). Money lent to a poor brother was to be loaned without interest whereas a loan made to foreigners could require the repayment of principle and interest (Exo. 22:25; Deu. 23:19-20). This family-like treatment was even extended beyond the bloodline to the stranger and sojourner who made their permanent residence among the Israelites (Lev. 25:35-36). Abram knew that in dealing with the issues he needed to protect all the family, even those with whom strife might arise.

When potential turmoil arises in the church, we need to use Abram as an example. Abram's handling of the matter with Lot exemplifies the apostles Paul's teaching to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 6:1-8). "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints" (1 Cor. 6:1)? Abram was aware that he and Lot, while constituting a vast family, were only one family in the midst of nations. How they treated each other would be a public statement of the character of their family and a reflection on their God. Jesus taught that the world would be able to recognize His disciples by our love for each other (John 13:35). He prayed that we would be one with each other and united in Him and the Father so that "the world

may believe that” the Father had sent Him (John 17:21). It is the unfeigned love of the brethren (1 Pet. 1:22) that shines as something special in the world. Abram and Lot dealt with their matters in such a way that all the nations around them saw was two extremely wealthy men living peaceably and giving both their business interests room to grow.

Paul’s observation of the Corinthian brethren was that “brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers” (1 Cor. 6:6). Abram did not go before a Canaanite tribunal. He did not even take the matter to the family. Abram went to Lot. He did not go to Lot to fight it out or deliver an ultimatum. Abram went to Lot in the pursuit of harmony between brethren. Paul challenged the Corinthians “Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren” (1 Cor. 6:7-8). Abram came seeking harmony even at the cost of asserting his personal rights. Hence his offer to Lot, “Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left” (Gen. 13:9).

Notice, however, that although Abram came to Lot to ensure harmony within the family and was willing to be wronged in the process, the Text does not indicate that Lot harmed or took advantage of Abram. Yes, Lot chose the well-watered plains of Jordan (Gen. 13:10), and he may have had greedy motives in doing so, but Abram gave him that choice. As the patriarch, Abram held the power in the family. When he gave the choice to Lot, it was right for Lot to express his choice. The fact that Lot chose unwisely does not indicate that it was wrong for him to choose.

Abram could have chosen summarily who would go where and who got what. Instead, he pursued the higher

ideal of a resolution that ensured harmony. Christians in the spirit of letting brotherly love continue (Heb. 13:1) might well follow Abram's example as we go about "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Conclusion

How important is it that in times of unrest we take into consideration the needs of the family? How important is it that we extend preferential treatment to those in the body just because they are family? David speaks to these questions in the fifteenth Psalm. There he asked the question, "LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" (Psa. 15:1). In the four short verses that follow, David answered that question 11 times. The tenth of those answers is "He that putteth not out his money to usury" (Psa. 15:5). This attribute harkens back to the God-given requirement that family be treated better than everyone else. By putting the family of God above ourselves, we "know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

Works Cited

- Hitchcock, Roswell D. "Abraham." *Hitchcock's New and Complete Analysis of the Holy Bible*. New York: Johnson, 1870. PCStudyBible. Version 5. Seattle: Biblesoft. 1997-2008. CD-ROM.
- . "Abram." *Hitchcock's New and Complete Analysis of the Holy Bible*. New York: Johnson, 1870. PCStudyBible. Version 5. Seattle: Biblesoft. 1997-2008. CD-ROM.
- King James Version*. PCStudyBible. Version 5. Seattle: Biblesoft. 1997-2008. CD-ROM.

CHAPTER 16

When Abraham Got Taken To The Woodshed For Lying

Chuck Webster

We often call Abraham the Father of the Faithful, and in so many ways, he models for us what it means to walk by faith (New King James Version, cf. Heb. 11:8-12). Yet, we should never ignore that the man whom God called to be the father of a great nation took several missteps in his journey of faith, not the least of which being his intentional misleading of two different kings about the identity of his wife. The first of those involved Pharaoh, and it happened shortly after God called Abraham. This short story holds valuable insights into the nature of God and how He leads His people. In this chapter, we will first look closely at the text itself, then consider several theological implications, and finally reflect on the practical lessons from the story.

The Text

Abraham's Instructions To Sarai (Gen. 12:10-13)

Abraham's departure from Canaan to Egypt was precipitated by a famine in Canaan. Because Canaan's productivity depends on rainfall, it is subject to famines. In

contrast, Egypt is less susceptible to a shortage of rainfall because of the annual flooding of the Nile (Walton 395). Egyptian inscriptions show that people from other regions often sought relief from starvation in Egypt, so Abraham was doing what many of his contemporaries did (Westermann 103). In fact, archaeologists and geologists have discovered evidence of a significant three-hundred-year drought cycle that took place around the time of Abraham (Walton 395).

It is interesting that Abraham would leave Canaan so soon after arriving, even in the face of a difficult famine, leading to speculation about the strength of his faith in God at this point. Ross suggests that *dwell* (Gen. 12:10; “sojourn,” ESV, NASB) meant that he intended to stay there only temporarily during the famine; he was not abandoning the promise (275; cf. Hughes 190). McKeown points to the strong language of the famine’s severity and hints that this clears Abraham of any blame in his decision to leave Canaan (80). The text does not indicate that God told Abraham to go to Egypt, however, as He later would with Jacob (Gen. 46:3-4). Consequently, *dwell* probably implies something more substantial than a temporary stay, perhaps an indefinite settlement in Egypt (McKeown 82; cf. Wenham 287). Regardless of how long Abraham intended to stay in Egypt, it seems certain that he went there without consulting God, following the common knowledge that Egypt might offer respite from Canaan’s drought. It is interesting that God never interacts directly with Abraham in this story at all, suggesting His disapproval. God had previously favored Abraham with His voice, but the only voice directed to Abraham in this passage comes in the form of Pharaoh’s rebuke, a stark contrast with the call of Abraham in the first part of Genesis 12 (Waltke 212). Baldwin suggests that Abraham’s trip to Egypt seems to have been a flight of unbelief because of unfavorable circumstances,

an abandonment of his faith in favor of accepted wisdom (37). At the very least, this segment of Abraham's life seems incongruent with the implications of the covenant that he had so recently embraced. Hughes writes, "He did not deny God; he simply forgot him. He forgot how great God is" (190).

Abraham's fear for his safety was probably not unfounded. Asiatic infiltrators had caused political problems in Egypt decades earlier, and foreigners were still likely viewed with suspicion (Baldwin 38). Abraham would have no rights in Egypt, and he knew that powerful Egyptians might kill him so that they might have Sarai.

Sometimes readers stumble over the text's description of Sarai as "very beautiful" since she was at least 65 years old (Gen. 12:11; Gen. 12:14). Instead of regarding this as a textual error, Walton suggests that it likely says more about the distortions that our culture brings to our perspective (397). We often connect beauty with "sensuality, nobility, youth, and certain facial and bodily features," while all cultures are not "so superficial in their assessments of beauty as ours is" (Walton 397). Wenham observes, "Ideas of feminine beauty in traditional societies differ from ours: well-endowed matronly figures, not slim youthful ones, tend to represent their ideal of womanhood" (288). Her beauty lay more in her dignity and countenance (Walton 397). It is also likely that Sarai aged more slowly during that time—she lived to be 127 (Hughes 191).

Abraham's request of Sarai and her subsequent abduction have led to speculation about his regard for her. Some seek to interpret Abraham's actions in the best light, suggesting that by positioning himself as Sarai's brother instead of her husband, Abraham might be able to negotiate with any would-be suitors (cf. the important role brothers played in their sisters' marriages in the patriarchal age—Gen. 24:29-60; Gen. 34:13-

17; Gen. 34:25-29; Hartley 138). He could then be a difficult negotiator, thereby gaining time in which he and Sarai might escape (Hartley 137-138; cf. Ross 275; Hughes 192; Wenham 288). Others find it difficult to defend this perspective in view of the fact that the text suggests Abraham took what amounted to a bride-price without any recorded objections (Walton 396). Baldwin sees not only a “brutal disregard” for Sarai, but a “deliberate deception” that enabled Abraham to “escape danger and incidentally to enrich himself” (38). In other words, Abraham was willing to sacrifice Sarai in order to save himself and acquire riches through a bride-price. A simple reading of Abraham’s reasoning in Genesis 12:13 seems to support Baldwin’s interpretation: “Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you.” It also does not help Abraham’s case that he got exactly what he had hoped for: safety and riches (cf. Gen. 12:16; Gen. 12:20). Unfortunately, the text does not state what sociological realities may have led Abraham to this decision, and the author seems unconcerned with either defending or accusing Abraham here. In his view, the story happened, and it contributes to his overall purpose: to show how God preserved and saved His people in view of—and sometimes in spite of—the choices they made.

Pharaoh’s Abduction Of Sarai (Gen. 12:14-17)

As Abraham suspected, the Egyptians were indeed impressed with Sarai’s beauty, using the same words that Abraham had used: “she was very beautiful” (Gen. 12:14; Ross 275). If the patriarch had been planning on delaying by tough negotiations, his plan was thwarted when Sarai was taken into Pharaoh’s harem. The Pharaoh did not need to negotiate with anyone (Ross 276).

Ironically, the text says that Pharaoh treated Abraham “well” for Sarai’s sake (Gen. 12:16), the same word used in

Abraham's instructions to Sarai to use deceit so that it might be "well" with him (Hartley 137). A lexical tie exists between "very beautiful" (Gen. 12:14) and Abraham's becoming "very rich" (Gen. 13:2), perhaps contributing to the irony. Abraham became wealthy—not through anything inherent within him but rather because of Sarai's beauty (Mathews 122-23). Though Abraham may not have intended to become wealthy from his lie about Sarai, Pharaoh's gift—probably an elaborate dowry—is extremely generous. The large number and diversity of the animals suggest that Pharaoh viewed Abraham as nobility (Hartley 138-39). The fact that female donkeys and camels were included in the gift suggests how expensive the gift was. Female donkeys were preferred by the rich for riding, and camels had only recently been domesticated and were therefore rare (Hughes 193; cf. Hartley 141; Wenham 289).

The Hebrew wording indicates that the plagues were extremely severe (Ross 276). Ross suggests that Pharaoh's household was probably overwhelmed with plagues while Sarai was untouched, which is how Pharaoh discovered Abraham's deception (276). It is possible that these plagues were in some sense sexual in nature, as Waltke asserts (215). However, the term *plagues* refers to skin diseases in Leviticus 13, and its verbal form describes Uzziah's leprosy in 2 Kings 15:5, pointing to the likelihood that God inflicted some kind of skin disease on Pharaoh's household (Mathews 128).

Pharaoh's Expulsion Of Abraham (Gen. 12:18-13:1)

Some scholars believe that the text indicates actual adultery between Pharaoh and Sarai (cf. Wenham 289). Several translations record Pharaoh's words as "I took her for my wife" (Gen. 12:19, ESV, NASB, NRSV, NIV), leading Hamilton to write, "This is doubtless a case of actual adultery

between Pharaoh and Sarai...Sarai is not only asked to engage in deception, but in the process she becomes vulnerable and is eventually forced into cohabiting with one other than her husband” (382). More likely, Pharaoh’s words do not imply that there had been sexual contact with Sarai; to convey intercourse, the text would usually be more specific, such as Genesis 34:2 (“and violated her”) or Genesis 38:2 (“went into her”) (Waltke 214). In a royal household, a significant length of time often passed before a woman would come to the monarch in a sexual relationship (cf. Esther’s preparation, Est. 2:12) (Ross 277). Furthermore, “here is your wife” strongly suggests that Pharaoh was returning her to Abraham untouched (Ross 277).

It is interesting that Pharaoh did not kill Abraham for his deception, nor did he ask for the return of the animals and servants. Instead, he rebuked him for his irresponsible behavior and ordered him to leave the country, accompanied by a group of men who no doubt made certain that Abraham left and also that nothing bad happened to him. Pharaoh probably wanted to avoid instigating further plagues in Egypt from Abraham’s deity (Hamilton 384-85). When the text says that Pharaoh “sent [Abraham] away,” it means that Abraham was expelled (Ross 277). The “royal anger is conveyed in the rapid succession of accusatory questions and the brusque expulsion order” (Wenham 289).

Theological Observations On The Text

Before we reflect on the text’s implications for today, it is helpful to study why God chose to include this event in Scripture and what it may have meant to its original audience. At first glance, it may seem merely to be an irrelevant story that has no significant connection to God’s promises to Abraham or the subsequent events of the patriarch’s

family. On closer inspection, however, we find that the text actually reflects important theological implications for God's covenant people—both Israel and the church.

Parallels With The Garden Episode And Fall Of Genesis 2-3

The two stories share many parallels (Mathews 123): the backdrop of food (plenty or famine) is crucial to the story; deception is involved; the wife is portrayed in a critical role; following the discovery of the deception, there is the interrogation of the parties (by God/Pharaoh), admission of the deed (by Adam/Abraham), and expulsion of the parties (from Eden/Egypt); and subsequent stories tell of family schism (Cain-Abel/Lot-Abraham). The stories also share important lexical connections: “What is this you have done to me?” (Gen. 12:18) and “What is this you have done?” (Gen. 3:13); “Why did you not tell me?” (Gen. 12:18) and “Who told you?” (Gen. 3:11) (cf. Ross 277); “I know” (Gen. 12:11) and “God knows” and “like God knowing” (Gen. 3:5); “that it may be well [good] with me” (Gen. 12:13), “He treated Abraham well [good] for her sake” (Gen. 12:16), and “good and evil” and “good for food” (Gen. 3:5-6); “The princes of Pharaoh **saw** her...and the woman was **taken**” (Gen. 12:15) and “when the woman **saw** the tree was good for food...she **took** of its fruit and ate” (Gen. 3:6).

According to Mathews, the significance of reading these two events together is the stark contrast in outcomes (123). Adam and Eve lost their place in the garden because of their sin, but the outcome is reversed in the incident with Abraham and Sarai. The latter emerge from Egypt wealthy because Pharaoh fell for the deception. The outcome does not excuse Abraham's behavior, of course, but it points to the ongoing work of God to undo the results of the Fall—a subtle nod toward the work of the coming second Adam who would replace the curse of the Fall.

Foreshadowing Israel's Experience In Canaan And Egypt

The exodus of God's people from Egypt is the most pivotal event in the Old Testament, used often in psalms of praise to God (cf. Psa. 160:9) and also by the prophets in their exhortations to the people (cf. Hos. 13:4). But even before that, in this story of Abraham's descent into Egypt, the exodus is foreshadowed. Wenham observes, "This interpretation of Abraham's experiences in Egypt as prefiguring those of Israel seems to be confirmed by 15:13-16, where the Egyptian bondage is specifically prophesied" (291). Notice the parallels (Ross 273): a severe famine in the land (Gen. 12:10; Gen. 43:1; Gen. 47:4); a sojourn in Egypt (Gen. 12:10; Gen. 47:4); killing of the males (Gen. 12:11-13; Exo. 1:16); bondage (Gen. 12:14-15; Exo. 1:11-14); great wealth when leaving Egypt (Gen. 12:16; Exo. 12:36; cf. Mathews 123); plagues on Egypt (Gen. 12:17; Exo. 7-11); summons: "Take...go" (Gen. 12:19; Exo. 12:32); the use of the same Hebrew word (*send*) (Gen. 12:20; Exo. – "Let my people go"); and journey to the Negev (Gen. 13:1; Num. 13:17; Num. 13:22). Wenham summarizes:

Scripture wished to foreshadow in the tales of the patriarchs the history of their descendants....In the account of how Abraham went down to Egypt, what befell him there and how he went forth from there, the Torah presages as it were, the migration of the Israelites to Egypt after they had settled in the land of Canaan, their servitude and their liberation (291, quoting Cassuto).

Wenham also sees Abraham's descent into Egypt as an example of the typology that is found in many other Old

Testament narratives (291-292). Isaiah 40-55 compares the Babylonian exile with both Israel's exodus from Egypt and Abraham's call (cf. Isa. 41:8-9; Isa. 41:18-19; Isa. 43:1-2; et al.). The same typology is seen in Jesus' being taken to Egypt as a baby but then being brought back to Canaan (Mat. 2:14-15). Waltke sees echoes of Jesus' temptation here (216). Abraham and Jesus were tested with choosing famine and stones within God's will or bread outside of it. Abraham failed the test, but Jesus did not. In a similar way—and just as Israel did—we fail to live according to the demands of law, but Jesus' obedience is reckoned to our account. All of this points to the interesting conclusion that Abraham's trip to Egypt and subsequent return to Canaan is a typological representation of the story of redemption: humanity falls and walks away from God, Who intervenes to bring them back to safety and salvation.

Practical Observations On The Text

Our actions and words—including “half-truths”— have consequences, often for generations to come.

If Abraham had known everything that would happen because of his short trip to Egypt, he almost certainly would never have gone. Just before he fled there, God had told him His plan for him to be a blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:1-3). At this point, though, the patriarch actually becomes the very opposite of a blessing, not only for the Egyptians but also for himself and his entire family. The immediate effects were certainly felt by his wife Sarai. The text fails to satisfy our curiosity, but she must have been extremely anxious when she was taken into Pharaoh's harem. She did not have our luxury of knowing how this story would turn out, and she probably lay awake at night wondering what her life would be like as one of Pharaoh's many wives.

Pharaoh's household was also punished because of Abraham's choice when God sent plagues; instead of being a blessing to the nations as was intended, Abraham had become the vehicle for a curse (Goldingay 150). Because of God's intervention, Abraham himself was able to escape most of the immediate negative consequences, but the implications of this event would follow him and Sarai back to Canaan. The text indicates that Lot went with Abraham to Egypt (Gen. 12:5; Gen. 13:1), and lexical markers suggest that what happened in Egypt led to the consequent familial strife between Lot and Abraham (Gen. 13:5-7). It seems that the wealth Abraham gained from the debacle with Sarai led to his dispute with Lot. Furthermore, though not explicitly stated, Hagar was probably one of the "female servants" given to Abraham by Pharaoh (Gen. 12:5; Gen. 16:1: "an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar"). Hagar then became part of Abraham's and Sarai's well-known attempt to circumvent God's plan for giving them a son, leading to suffering and strife that are still being felt in the world today (Gen. 16:1-4). It is not an exaggeration to suggest that Abraham's fateful trip to Egypt changed the course of history.

We ought to take seriously the implications of Abraham's deceit in Egypt. One of Satan's favorite tactics is to convince us that since a sin is only a "small" one—Abraham's lie was partially true (Gen. 20:12)—we will avoid any potentially serious consequences. This principle would certainly apply to lies that are often considered harmless, as well as other sins we are tempted to commit. Many who have briefly entertained lustful thoughts, for example, eventually regret the devastating consequences of adultery and divorce. An executive who sees little harm in the slight falsification of quarterly reports sometimes cannot envision the harmful

effects of his choices. Sin—even when it almost seems justifiable—leads to results we do not want.

God's promises depend on His call, not our conduct (Mathews 122).

It is sometimes disconcerting to readers of Old Testament narratives to discover that the writers usually do not make ethical evaluations about the conduct of their characters. This story fits that pattern—nothing is explicitly said about the rightness or wrongness of Abraham's deception. Though God does not leave us wondering about His will for us, these omissions in the narratives help us see that the focus is on God, not us. This should help us avoid reading the Old Testament as little more than a collection of stories that give us good and bad examples of how to live (Goldingay 149). We find those, of course, but they are never the main point of the text. The story of God as told throughout the Bible is about His fulfilling His purpose in the world. He works through the good and bad choices of His people and even through the actions of godless nations in order to accomplish His redemptive mission. Nothing—not the poor choices of the patriarchs or the valiant attempts of people led by Satan—can thwart His plan. That ought to comfort us in our walk with Jesus today. We recognize the importance of obedience, but we should remember that the completion of God's will never depends on what we do. From a human perspective, Abraham risked the fulfillment of the covenant by putting Sarai in the hands of godless people and risking her defilement. From God's vantage point, there was never any risk at all, because Pharaoh was powerless against God's omnipotence and sovereignty. In a similar way, we know that God will accomplish His will in our families, in our lives, and in our churches. He continues to tell His story of redemption that began so long ago.

Sometimes God brings trials into the lives of His children in order to test—and therefore strengthen—their faith in Him.

We see this pattern often in the lives of God's people. Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal and witnessed God's miraculous confirmation of his prophetic office. But as soon as he descended from Mount Carmel, he found himself fleeing from Jezebel, facing his greatest challenge as he tried to save his life but then finally asked God to let him die (1 Kin. 18-19). Jesus' Sonship was confirmed at His baptism when the Holy Spirit descended as a dove and the Father spoke His approval, but Jesus was immediately driven into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan (Mark 1:9-13). In a similar way, Abraham received the life-changing call of God, but then soon had to decide if he really believed God would provide for him in difficult times (Baldwin 37). The same will be true of us. Satan viciously attacks new Christians and hopes to dampen their faith as they take their first few faltering steps. Gospel preachers know that temptations often follow periods of accomplishment, and wise elderships recognize that church success—a growing membership or building expansion perhaps—will often lead to a period of testing. Triumphs can cause us to relax, making us more susceptible to challenges to our faith. Our attention ought to be on Christ, who overcame the devil's temptations with perfect obedience. Like Elijah and Abraham, we will be overwhelmed by trials if we are not sustained by God's strength.

Jesus is the One who brings us out of Egypt.

As noted above, Abraham's descent into Egypt and subsequent return to Canaan typologically looks back to the Fall and ahead to the exodus, but especially to the ministry of the second Adam and new Moses. Jacob (Israel) went down to Egypt as the result of a famine, and God sent Moses to bring His people out of Egypt to Canaan. Jesus also went to Egypt,

but He was called back to Canaan as God's Son to redeem His people (Mat. 2:14-15). Through His perfect obedience He became the second Adam, bringing life instead of death, and the new Moses, bringing grace and truth (John 1:17). When God miraculously rescued Abraham from Egypt, He was foreshadowing the work of Moses in the exodus, but especially the work of Christ in paying our redemptive price. We need to think often of the grand story of Scripture and thank God for what He is doing within us.

All of God's heroes have flaws. From Moses' prideful striking of the rock to David's adulterous liaison with Bathsheba, at times they took their eyes off of God and looked momentarily at the fulfillment of the flesh. Abraham, though faithful, is no exception. He was a good man, a man of conviction, a friend of God, but he was a man nonetheless. He was for a time unconvinced that God would take care of him in the land God had chosen, so he walked by sight instead of by faith. His consequent trip to Egypt and deceitful attempt to protect himself through human efforts failed miserably. Yet, as so often happens, God used the event to demonstrate His power and sovereignty, and He gives us a glimpse of what He wants to do in each of us.

Works Cited

- Baldwin, Joyce G. *The Message of Genesis 12-50. The Bible Speaks Today*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986. Print.
- Goldingay, John. *Genesis For Everyone. Part One: Chapters 1-16*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010. Print.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990. Print. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*.
- Hartley, John E. *Genesis*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000. Print. *New International Biblical Commentary*.

- Hughes, R. Kent. *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing. Preaching the Word*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2004. Print.
- Mathews, Ken. *Genesis 11:27-50:26*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005. Print. New American Commentary Vol. 1B.
- McKeown, James. *Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. Print. The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary. *New King James Version*. Nashville: Nelson, 1982. Print.
- Ross, Allen P. *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988. Print.
- Waltke, Bruce K. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. Print.
- Walton, John H. *Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. Print. The NIV Application Commentary.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *Genesis 1-15*. Waco: Word, 1987. Print. Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1.
- Westermann, Claus. *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*. Trans. John J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985. Print.

CHAPTER 17

Archaeology And Abraham

DeWayne Bryant

That the Bible is a myth seems to be the default position of many people in our society today. At one time, people assumed that the Bible was truthful in all it claimed. No one dismissed Biblical figures such as Abraham, Moses, and David because they were understood to be historical. Indeed, the very book that told the stories of the great heroes of faith was none other than the inspired Word of God Himself. Times are very different now.

When discussing the historicity of the Bible, the patriarchs make a tempting target for critics. Many may be willing to accept that persons in the New Testament were historical persons, but they are far less willing to concede the same for the Old Testament. This is especially true the farther back into Biblical history one goes. While the names of kings of Israel and Judah may be found in the archaeological record, the same cannot be said for the names of the patriarchs. We have no artifacts with any personal connection to Abraham and his clan, nor do they seem to be mentioned in any historical source as far as we have been able to determine.

Believers want to know whether the Biblical record is trustworthy. The available evidence indicates that it is. As we shall see, archaeology has quite a lot to say about the times and culture in which the patriarchs lived. When we see this evidence compared to the Biblical account in Genesis, we

find two things: 1) The Biblical evidence matches what we know from the ancient world, and 2) Archaeology fills in details about the world of the patriarchs, which gives us a better picture of how they must have lived.

What is Archaeology?

The term *archaeology* comes from two Greek words: *arche* (“ancient”) and *logos* (study or discourse). Scholars often differ on the precise definition, although we might define it as the scientific study of the past through the systematic excavation, analysis, interpretation, and publication of the material remains of human civilization. It might be helpful to examine this definition so that we can arrive at a fuller understanding of the discipline before we see how it impacts our study of Abraham and the patriarchal age.

When we say that archaeology is concerned with the material remains of human civilization, we can mean anything from architecture and monuments to skeletal remains. In the Middle East, libraries of texts written on clay tablets are a highly coveted discovery, and some of those found at the ancient cities of Mari and Nuzi have contributed to our understanding of the Bible. Texts written on papyrus are usually found only in Egypt; other manuscripts written on parchment (leather) have been discovered in numerous places (the Dead Sea Scrolls being some examples). Artwork—like the paintings on the tombs of Egypt, beautiful frescoes found at the city of Pompeii, and mosaics found in numerous Greco-Roman sites—gives us a glimpse into daily life in antiquity. Essentially, archaeologists “read” objects in much the same way that historians read texts.

Archaeology is not often well understood, perhaps in part because of its depiction in film and video games.

Oftentimes people think that it is a kind of treasure hunt. Ironically, a fairly accurate description may be found in the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*:

Archaeology is the search for fact, not truth. If it's truth you're interested in, Dr. Tyree's philosophy class is right down the hall. So forget any ideas you've got about lost cities, exotic travel, and digging up the world. We do not follow maps to buried treasure and "X" never, ever marks the spot. Seventy percent of all archaeology is done in the library.

Although Indiana Jones frequently travels to exotic locations in the pursuit of fantastic relics and treasures from the past, his disclaimer holds true. It is not a treasure hunt, nor it is the kind of puzzle-solving quest viewers frequently find in historically- and archaeologically-themed documentaries and television shows. The work of the archaeologist is often dull, even boring at times. He or she may spend days excavating a square only to find that their efforts have borne no fruit whatsoever. But occasionally a spectacular find is uncovered that makes the dull moments worthwhile.

Abraham's Absence from the Historical Record

Archaeology does have its limitations. Not all sites will be able to be excavated, and not everything from the ancient world has survived long enough to be discovered. Archaeologists will not excavate any given site completely—only enough so that they feel they have gathered the vital information (archaeology is an expensive, labor-intensive, and time-consuming enterprise). Since recovered artifacts

and their contexts can only provide so much information, some finds may generate quite a bit of discussion.

As we discuss Abraham and the patriarchal age, we must understand that we have no direct information about the patriarchs from outside the Bible. This may come as a surprise to some Christians, especially those who may have heard of archaeologists having discovered a tomb or relics connected to Abraham. This is no cause for despair! What we do have is an abundance of information that demonstrates the factual and historical accuracy of the Bible with regard to the world of the patriarchs. Further, we find information that goes against the assumptions of critics who claim that the stories of the patriarchs were later fictions.

Critics often assume that Biblical figures should be mentioned in the historical narratives of the period in which they lived. This is commonly assumed in the cases of Jesus, David, and Abraham. The reason for such expectations is fairly obvious. Jesus was the Son of God who taught revolutionary religious concepts and entreated people to live a different kind of life; David was an ancient Near Eastern king who played a role on the international scene; Abraham was a man of staggering wealth who made contacts with figures as great as the king of Egypt. Just because they are important figures in Scripture does not mean that they would have made the international scene. Ancient evidence will be limited to some degree.

The available evidence does not always satisfy critics. Because the evidence can be quite slim, critics often take this absence of evidence as evidence of absence—that is, because the proof that exists is deemed insufficient, then the Bible must be labeled as fiction, mythology, or something in between. What we should remember, however, is that the bigger picture must be kept in view.

If the Bible is true, then, why does Abraham not appear in the historical record? He was an incredibly wealthy and powerful person. Both he and his son Isaac were able to gain a personal audience with the king of Egypt. Could a man of such reputation really escape the notice of ancient writers? The answer is yes. We must realize that the ancient record is fragmentary. Many ancient records have perished with the passing of time. More importantly, scribes were employed in the royal palace, in the military, and in the temples. Keeping track of the wealthy and influential was not part of their business. Today, people may be accustomed to following the lives of their favorite stars, some of whom are famous for no other reason than the fact that they are wealthy and socially well-connected. This was not a concern of those in antiquity. A nomadic figure like Abraham could easily slip the notice of scribes in the ancient Near East

Some may be tempted to think that since evidence is not forthcoming, then the patriarchal narratives must be fictitious in nature. If the Bible is a fiction, then we should expect to see radical disagreement with the historical record. It would be similar to someone in the 21st century attempting to write a fictional biography of a figure from the past. Without adequate research, such an attempt would quickly be detected as the work of an amateur. Without knowledge of the culture—including names, places, customs, and languages—an author could not hope to write a fictional biography and pass it off as genuine. The fraud would be detected quickly. The same holds true for the Biblical record, which often provides an astounding level of accurate detail about the ancient world. To quote a famed Jewish scholar,

It may be stated categorically that
no archaeological discovery has ever

controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries. (Nelson Glueck 31)

Archaeology and the Patriarchal Narratives

While we understand that Abraham's absence from the historical record is not an indictment against either his historicity or the Bible's reliability, what remains to be said about the man himself? The archaeological record offers quite a lot of evidence to support the Bible's portrayal of the patriarchs, as well as shed light on the world in which they lived. We will examine several important pieces of evidence: camel domestication in the ancient world, chronological peculiarities in the patriarchal period, and onomastics (the study of personal names).

Camel Domestication

If the book of Genesis was composed between the 11th and 6th centuries B.C. as critics often claim, then we would expect to see an abundance of anachronisms. Later authors from as much as a millennium after the time of the patriarchal period would be unable to portray the culture of the time in any convincing way. What we find is precisely the opposite.

One of the common arguments against the patriarchal narratives is to claim that the presence of domesticated camels is an anachronism. Some scholars put the domestication of the camel as early as the third millennium B.C. Others put the date closer to the ninth century B.C. Egyptologist Donald Redford states, "Camels do not appear in the Near

East as domesticated beasts of burden until the ninth century B.C. (277). Similarly, archaeologists Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman state, “We now know through archaeological research that camels were not domesticated as beasts of burden earlier than the late second millennium and were not widely used in that capacity in the ancient Near East until well after 1000 B.C.E.” (37).

The views of camel domestication in the ancient Near East range from the early third millennium B.C. to the ninth century B.C. Those skeptical of the historicity of the Biblical narratives generally believe that camels were domesticated far too late to have made an appearance during the time of the patriarchs. Even W. F. Albright, who was a staunch defender of the Bible, stated, “The domestication of the camel cannot antedate the end of the twelfth century B.C.” (1951, 207).

The use of camels during the first millennium is well attested. Assyrian monarchs mention using them as transportation and receiving them as tribute from their vassals. That they were used in the early first millennium is unquestioned. The difficulty lies in trying to determine whether they were used in the early second millennium.

Scholars know that camels were present in the ancient Near East dating back to the dawn of the great civilizations. In Egypt, for instance, scholars have concluded that the camel appears at least as early as the beginning of the third millennium. Other references in ancient texts go further still. An early text found at the city of Nippur makes an allusion to camel milk (Archer 17). Clearly, one does not go out and milk a wild animal. Another text from the city of Ugarit dating to the Old Babylonian Period (1950-1600 B.C.) mentions camels in a list of domesticated animals suggesting that it was domesticated as well (Davis 145). An 18th century fodder list at the city of Alalakh makes a mention of camels as

well (Wiseman 29). Wild animals do not need feeding; they are able to obtain food on their own. If camels were being given fodder, it was because they had been domesticated. Finally, archaeologists discovered a camel burial at the ancient city of Mari dating to roughly 2400-2200 B.C. This implies that the camel had been domesticated, as ancients buried what they considered valuable, including animals. We should note that these three texts all date to roughly the same time as the patriarchs.

The evidence demonstrating the domestication of the camel at least as early as the patriarchal age is limited but clear. The book of Genesis indicates that both Abraham (Gen. 12:16) and Jacob (Gen. 30:43; Gen. 32:7; Gen. 32:15) owned camels. The patriarchs (Gen. 24:10-64; Gen. 31:17; Gen. 31:34) and the Midianites both used them for travelling. The Egyptians used them as transports (Exo. 9:3). The small number of references seems to indicate that the camel was not widely used. This, too, fits with the historical record, as camels were much more common later in the ancient Near East. "Many who have rejected this reference to Abraham's camels seem to have assumed something which the text does not state. It should be carefully noted that the biblical reference does not necessarily indicate that the camel was common in Egypt at the time, nor does it evidence that the Egyptians had made any great progress in the breeding and domestication of the camel. It merely says that Abraham had camels" (Free 191). Indeed, the fact that domesticated camels appear rarely may indicate that only wealthy individuals like Abraham may have owned them.

Onomastic Evidence

Some of the data involves the names of the patriarchs themselves. The names of Jacob, Ishmael, and Isaac have been found in the archives of the city of Mari, along with the name

Benjamin as a tribal name (Hoffmeier 42). These names have an *i/y-* prefix (known as the Amorite imperfective). They were most popular during the Patriarchal age and quickly fell into less common use afterward.

In Hebrew, the names Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Ishmael begin with an *i/y-* prefix. To make it easier to see for those unfamiliar with Hebrew, we can transliterate these names into English as *Yitzchak*, *Ya'akov*, *Yoseph*, and *Yishmael*. These West Semitic names appear in documents from the ancient world most frequently during the patriarchal period. By the second half of the second millennium, these usage of these names drops by a staggering 55 percent (Hoffmeier 42). Like many parents even today, the patriarchs used some of the most popular names at the time.

We must quickly note that the names of these figures could not have appeared in the work of a later writer. Not only are these names at home in the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2100-1550 B.C.), the fact that they disappear over time makes it difficult to believe that a later writer would have used them for fictional accounts. An author writing centuries later would not have known which names to use to give his account the appearance of being ancient and would have most likely used contemporary names with which he was more familiar.

Abraham's Travels to Egypt

Archaeology does not merely help confirm the trustworthiness of the Biblical record. It also sheds light on the customs and practices from Biblical times. Beni Hasan, Egypt, is home to over three dozen tombs from ancient times. One of these belonged to Khnumhotep II, a high-ranking government official from the 12th Dynasty (1985-1773 B.C.). In his tomb, a painting depicts thirty-seven merchants from Canaan going to Egypt (this event can be dated to ca. 1862 B.C.). This representation fits in with other evidence showing

that foreigners often travelled to Egypt quite freely, often during times of famine. When times were lean, people would often travel to the fertile northeastern section of Egypt to settle temporarily.

The painting gives us a picture of what the patriarchs may have looked like. Paintings of the master artists depicting the patriarchs in voluminous clothing suitable to a colder, European climate are obviously anachronistic. Such attire would be totally unsuitable for the much hotter areas of Palestine and Egypt. Instead, the Beni Hasan tomb painting shows the merchants in colorful clothing suitable to the environment of the ancient Near East. Some are armed with weapons such as bows, spears, and axes. Men have beards but no mustaches, and women have long, flowing hair. The group is led by a man identified as a “foreign chieftain” named Absharru (meaning “the Father is king,” whose name is of the same type as Abraham, “the Father is exalted”). While the Beni Hasan tomb painting does not depict the patriarchs, it does give us a glimpse into what they must have looked like.

Laws Concerning Adoption and Inheritance

Parenthood is always attended by uncertainty. Humans have virtually no control over what the gender of their children will be or if they will be able to have children at all. Not surprisingly, the ancients had their own solutions for infertility. If a couple could not have a child naturally, then a substitute could be found.

Abraham, distraught that he could not produce an heir, complained that his servant Eliezer would inherit his wealth (Gen. 15:2-3). Despite being told by God that he would indeed have a son (Gen. 15:4), Abraham and Sarah take matters into their own hands. Following the custom of the times, Sarah provides her maidservant Hagar to serve as a surrogate (Gen. 16). This practice is followed by Jacob’s wives

Rachel and Leah (Gen. 30:3-12). Texts from ancient Babylon also wrestled with the legal quagmire of a childless couple adopting a child in this manner, only to have children of their own at a later date. In one case from the Old Babylonian period, an adopted heir had his position legally guaranteed (Kitchen 325).

The Value of Archaeology for Studying the Patriarchal Age

As we have seen, archaeology not only confirms the details of the Biblical text, but it helps readers understand the customs and practices of the patriarchs. What this information does is underscore the fact that the patriarchal narratives are not mythology or legendary creations of later writers, but are the real stories of actual lives. Ancient mythology had little or no concern with these kinds of details. In contrast, the patriarchal narratives are intimately concerned with fine details of culture and even geography that did not concern the creators of ancient myth.

As William F. Albright put it, “So many corroborations of detail have been discovered in recent years that most competent scholars have given up the old critical theory according to which the stories of the Patriarchs are mostly retrojections from the time of the Dual Monarchy (1957, 241). He also noted that “the picture in Genesis is historical, and there is no reason to doubt the general accuracy of the biographical details [of the patriarchs]” (1963, 5). Albright’s student G. E. Wright affirmed Albright’s general position when he wrote, “We shall probably never be able to prove that Abram really existed, that he did this or that, said thus and so, but what we can prove is that his life and times, as reflected in the stories about him, fit perfectly within the early second millennium, but imperfectly with any later period” (40).

Can archaeology *prove* the existence of the patriarchs? Unfortunately, it cannot. Then again, to assume that it should be able to do so is to hold the Bible to a double standard to which no other ancient literature is held. Scholars often assume the historical trustworthiness of an ancient document unless there is reason to do otherwise. The Bible should receive the same treatment. Archaeology shows that it—like any other literature from the past—should receive the benefit of the doubt.

Works Cited

- Archer, Gleason. "Old Testament History and Recent Archaeology from Abraham to Moses." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:505 (1970): 3-25. Print.
- Albright, William F. *The Archaeology of Palestine*. New York: Penguin, 1951. Print.
- . *From the Stone Age to Christianity*. 2nd ed. Garden City: Anchor/Doubleday, 1957. Print.
- . *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*. New York: Torchbooks/Harper & Row, 1963. Print.
- Davis, John J. "The Camel in Biblical Narratives." *A Tribute to Gleason Archer: Essays on the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody, 1986: 141-150. Print.
- Finkelstein, Israel and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed*. New York: The Free Press, 2001. Print.
- Free, Joseph P. "Abraham's Camels." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 3.3 (1944): 187-193. Print.
- Glueck, Nelson. *Rivers in the Desert*. New York: Grove, 1960. Print.
- Hoffmeier, James K. *The Archaeology of the Bible*. Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2008. Print.
- Kitchen, Kenneth A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Print.

- Redford, Donald B. *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*. Princeton: Princeton University P, 1992. Print.
- Wiseman, Donald J. "Ration Lists from Alalakh VII." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 13 (1959): 19-33. Print.
- Wright, G. Ernest. *Biblical Archaeology*. Rev. ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962. Print.

CHAPTER 18

Abraham: A Man Whose Wife Obeyed Him, Calling Him Lord

Glenn Colley

For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. (New King James Version, 1 Pet. 3:5-6)

Here, the action of a single, simple wife, Sarah, is elevated as being *good* in the eyes of God. In the verses which precede this compliment, the Spirit's commendation of Sarah is given in a unique context: the marriage of a Christian woman to an unbelieving husband. We should not assume she is in this "mixed" marriage because she chose to be; it may have simply been that both she and her husband were unbelievers when they married, and she learned the truth and obeyed the Gospel without him. Now there is conflict. Her husband did not adopt the same value system as she, and he finds

her new Christian ways to be strange and burdensome. Furthermore, he has rejected her invitations to come to the worship assemblies and hear the Gospel preached. He is simply disinterested. What can she do?

This scenario has been repeated thousands of times over the years in the church of Christ. In fact, it would be rare to find a congregation where there were no women who could personally relate to this passage. Such women may have people all around them in worship, yet they are still alone. When worship is finished, they drive themselves home.

Amazingly, it is in this context that we are told that Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him *lord*.

Sarah's First Mention

The first two chapters in Genesis mentioning Sarah paint her in a submissive role to her husband, Abraham.

Then God said to Abraham, As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. (Gen. 17:15)

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart, Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child? (Gen. 17:17)

God said, No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him. (Gen. 17:19)

But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year. (Gen. 17:21)

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal! Knead it, and make cakes. (Gen. 18:6)

Observe four pertinent details about the marriage of Abraham and Sarah:

1. Abraham, as husband, implemented Sarah's new name.
2. Sarah bore *Abraham* a son. She bore the child, but the child was Abraham's.
3. Abraham named the baby.
4. Abraham instructed Sarah to prepare food for his guests, and she complied.

Limits of Obedience

How far is a wife's obedience to her husband to go? Are there Scriptural limits?

Years ago, I read a well-meaning author who was explaining just how far the "obey your husband" law goes in the Scriptures. The assertion was that the number of places in which Sarah is shown actually obeying Abraham are rare, and two of them reference Sarah agreeing to her husband's sinful schemes. The author asserted that Abraham was thus somewhat God-like to his wife, and she was right to follow him even in doing wrong.

Now there was a famine in the land,
and Abram went down to Egypt to

dwell there, for the famine *was* severe in the land. And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “Indeed I know that you *are* a woman of beautiful countenance. Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This *is* his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say you *are* my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you.” So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she *was* very beautiful. The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh’s house. He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. And Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What *is* this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she *was* your wife? Why did you say, ‘She *is* my sister’? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take *her* and go your way.” So Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had. (Gen. 12:10-20)

And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She *is* my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Indeed you *are* a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she *is* a man’s wife.” But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, ‘She *is* my sister’? And she, even she herself said, ‘He *is* my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.” And God said to him in a dream, “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who *are* yours.” (Gen 20:1-7)

Whatever else it true about these instances, these things must also be true:

1. It is a sin to lie (Rev. 21:8).
2. Sarah was a partaker in this sin (1 Tim. 5:22).
3. Sarah was to obey Abraham, but not to the point of sinning. A woman is to be submissive to her husband

except when what he requires of her violates the law of Christ (Acts 5:29).

The New Testament makes plain statements to wives, requiring them to submit to their husbands in *everything* (Eph. 5:24), even if their husbands are not Christians (1 Pet. 3:1). And yet, I would argue that all of this presupposes that she is *first* faithful to God (Mat. 6:33), and that in the event that her husband requires something of her which violates the law of Christ, she should obey Christ. Christ comes first.

This truth becomes abundantly clear when you take the matter to an extreme. If a wife is to obey her husband even when he, as Abraham, requires something sinful of her, would there be any scenario in which she should disobey him? Could not the husband require her to abandon her faith altogether? Would she be bound to do that? Of course not. I have always believed the scenario of a husband's requiring his wife to forsake the Lord was what Paul had in mind in 1 Corinthians 7:15-16: "But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife?"

We are sometimes told that Paul's meaning here adds another acceptable scenario of divorce and remarriage to the one Jesus gave in Matthew 19:9; that if a Christian's unbelieving spouse departs, the Christian is thus free to remarry without adultery occurring. But such logic is flawed and is opening doors which God intended to keep closed. First Corinthians 7:16 is key to understanding what Paul is saying. What he has just said in 1 Cor. 7:15 is, in his mind, associated with *saving* the unbelieving spouse. It is unreasonable to

think that leaving your unbelieving spouse and remarrying would somehow convince him to become a Christian. Here is the more reasonable meaning: The unbelieving spouse presents to the Christian spouse an ultimatum. He cannot abide his wife's devotion to Christ any longer, and he is putting his foot down. "You either stop this constant devotion to your Christ, or I'm leaving!"

She responds, not with divorce documents, but with this gentle attitude: "I'm your wife and I love you. I want us to stay married, but if you make me choose between you and my Lord, I must choose Christ. Please stay with me and I'll be to you the best wife I can be." If her husband leaves, she is not under bondage to obey him and forsake Christ. Furthermore, if he does leave, knowing that she is remaining single and waiting for his return, her sincere devotion to her Lord will be apparent to him in a profound way, perhaps even moving him to want to obey the Gospel himself.

Take all that you know about the spousal role of Mrs. Abraham and then consider 1 Peter 3:5-6, "For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good." In these few words Sarah is heralded as a role model for women in two things: that she obeyed her husband, and that she called him "Lord." Let us face it—passages such as these are troubling to people, not because we do not understand them, but because we *do* understand them. Spousal roles in marriages have so shifted that merely reading such passages may shock listeners. Bear in mind that this passage elevating Sarah's manner is not tucked away in a dark, forgotten tent in Old Testament history. It is brought center stage in the law which today obligates all people. This is for now.

For the new law, the Christian law, God did not change His mind. As you read through these verses, mentally put them into your own words, making sure to apply the same weight to a wife's submission as the text does.

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Cor. 11:3)

For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. (1 Cor. 11:8-9)

Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives. (1 Pet. 3:1)

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Eph. 5:22)

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband. (Eph. 5:33)

Be impressed with the clarity of these passages. No ambiguity exists. In a variety of ways, the Holy Spirit is plainly telling us that the husband is to be his wife's leader.

A study of this subject without seeing the entire Biblical picture of marriage may make some shrink back from the Scripture in disappointment, feeling that this teaching is unreasonable. But see it in the context of two major realities and see God's wisdom.

First, notice God's balance in marriage roles. Multiple passages strongly teach male leadership and female submission in marriage, but abuse is never endorsed. God never extends unlimited authority to man, but instead always tempers authority with safeguards. As masters rule their slaves, they are to remember they have a Master themselves (Eph. 6:9). A civil authority is to remember that he only has this authority because the God of Heaven gave it to him (Rom. 13:1-6), and he is to operate within God's will. Elders have authority in the church (Heb. 13:17) but are to first examine themselves to insure their hearts and actions are pleasing to God (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). And husbands are to love their wives enough to die for their wives: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25). He is to live with his wife with understanding, giving honor to his wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). A man who will not *live* sacrificially for his wife would surely not die for her. He must love her as his own body and as he loves himself (Eph. 5:33).

Second, consider the power God gave women in marriage. Typically, a wife has two kinds of power—one damaging and one beneficial—at her disposal. The hurtful kind of power involves exploiting a husband's wants and needs to manipulate him into doing her will. Almost any wife is able to make her husband's happiness conditional on his submission to her preferences. She knows what he wants—a cheerful, warm, loving, feminine wife who respects him and

welcomes him home every day. She may reason, “I’ll give him what he wants whenever he does what I want him to do.” Such manipulation seldom works well in the end. It creates a less-than-pleasant atmosphere for the marriage in which spouses settle for a mediocre relationship, never reaching the true happiness God intended. A man is not really motivated to be the best man he’s capable of being by his wife’s persistent criticism and complaining.

The fact is, a wife has a “magic” (the second kind of power) in the marriage that a husband does not have. The Proverbs writer mused that there were a few things too wonderful for him to grasp, one of which was “a man with a maid” (Pro. 30:18-19).

A man is like a dog, and a wife is like a cat. A cat’s personality is more independent. She loves her owner but does not necessarily respond quickly to his wishes. If he comes home from work, he will pet her only if she wants to be petted. If she is not in the mood, she will ignore him and go hide under the sofa just beyond reach. She will stay there until she is ready to come out, despite the fact that her master would like to see her and enjoy her company. A typical dog is simply different and different in that he’s simple. It is not in his nature to ignore his owner when he comes home from work. The master can call him to his side if he wants, but it is not necessary because the dog is eager to be with him.

The two animals are different for one reason: God made them that way. The differences are deep in their make-up. God made man with response triggers, and unless something has dramatically altered his thinking, he will respond to particular stimuli from his wife. Naturally sexuality has a role to play in this, but it is not just that. Like that family dog, he is programmed to respond to a wife who is gentle, feminine, kind, supportive, and who sincerely respects her man. This

kind of atmosphere in the home will drive him to be the best man he's capable of being. He will want to be the great man his wife believes him to be.

This difference between the genders in marriage does not naturally go both ways. When Peter wrote to believing wives, he explained how they could motivate their unbelieving husbands—husbands who would not go hear the preaching of the Gospel—to become Christians. How? By living submissive, faithful, devoted lives before their husbands. Peter taught that when an unbelieving husband sees that it is Christianity that makes his wife treat him so well, he may just want to become a Christian himself.

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. (1 Pet. 3:1-4)

This approach to influencing a spouse who will not listen to preaching is Scripturally applied to a Christian wife wanting to convert her unbelieving husband; it is not presented in the reverse genders. This is presumably because a wife has a special means of influence not possessed by a typical husband.

Occasionally people will reference a marriage “made in heaven.” The kind of life Sarah chose to live with her husband—a submissive life—was both pleasing to the Maker and happiest for both spouses.

To live this way is a decision wives make. It may involve a great adjustment for some who were not raised by parents who modeled this relationship well. It will be difficult for those who have bought into the modern American feminist mentality. But when we make ourselves pliable to His will, Jesus will change us. Faith is not merely saying to God, “Here’s what I want and I’ll be patient until You give it to me!” Faith, which comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17), is to say to God, “You know better about living this life and making wise decisions than I do. Even when my will disagrees with Yours, I’m going to do it Your way.” That is faith, and without it you cannot please God (Heb. 11:6).

A husband will never be forced into loving his wife. Wives, adore your husbands as you did when you accepted that engagement ring. Respect his judgment. Resist the temptation to become crabby and correcting of every little thing. Be his loving wife. The Proverbs writer said, “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband,” (Pro. 12:4, KJV). Ask yourself, “What makes my husband delight in me?” Be that woman to him. In this way, you’ll be a daughter to Sarah who “obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.”

Works Cited

King James Version. Print.

New King James Version. Print.

CHAPTER 19

Shall Not The Judge Of All The Earth Do Right?

John DeBerry

Of all of the praise and tribute which can be given a man, there is none greater than to be called within the Scripture “The Friend of God.” This unique recognition was awarded to only one person in the Old Testament—Abraham. While the Inspired Writ reveals God’s close and abiding relationship with many of His faithful and obedient servants, none received equal acclaim of being “God’s Friend.” From the Greek word *teknon*, the word *friend* denotes someone beloved, close, and endeared. It denotes one who knows and **understands** a person much better and more intimately than a passing acquaintance.

Ezra, who is considered to be the inspired penman of the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, recorded for our learning God’s esteem for Abraham. Included within the text of Jehoshaphat’s righteous prayer for Israel’s merciful deliverance, is a note of Abraham’s friendship with God:

Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? (King James Version, 2 Chr. 20:7)

While the prophet Isaiah lived about 1300 years after the time of Abraham, still he employed the same sentiments as Ezra when he recorded his own passionate intercession for Israel; “But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham **my friend**” (Isa. 41:8, emp. mine JD). This is certainly a great and well-deserved testimonial to the righteousness and fidelity of this great hero of the faith.

Abraham’s faithfulness and friendship with God did not go unnoticed within the New Testament. James gave a great inspired oration on the behavior of obedient faith recorded in James chapter two. Therein he gives the relationship of faith and works that clearly explain God’s part in salvation as well as man’s part. Included in the text is a note about Abraham:

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.
(Jam. 2:23)

Therefore, according to James, Abraham’s faith was accounted for righteousness because his obedient faith demonstrated **confidence** and **trust** in God’s fidelity. Abraham’s name has become synonymous with sacrifice and faithfulness. Most employed by God in the Scripture are rightly called servants; Abraham, however, shared something with God, which sealed his place as God’s friend: “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son” (Heb. 11:17).

Abraham’s rationale was to obey, knowing that God’s purpose must be fulfilled. His trust was in God who would

“raise him up [Isaac] even from the dead” (Heb. 11:19). After careful consideration, it becomes obvious that God is sending the message that **He** and **Abraham** share something in common. Before the foundation of the world, God knew that He also would offer up His only begotten son to fulfill His purpose:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Only Abraham would be able to understand completely the helpless, unselfish sacrifice of a precious only begotten son.

And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. (Gen. 22:12)

As God’s **friend**, Abraham is not only given the privilege of serving as a typological example of the sacrifice of God the Father and His begotten son Jesus Christ, he is also given the opportunity of foreknowing the intimate plans of God. It is within this aspect of the relationship that we derive our topic of discussion, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

God Gave His Friend Disturbing News

Because Abraham had an exceptional bond with God, we see a unique back-and-forth communication between God and a man at one of the most conclusive divine interventions

in human history—the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. According to Moses’ record, written in retrospect, the twin cities were scheduled by God to be removed from the earth by fire. The record shows that they had become so vile, so grievous, and abominable that their sins called out to God for righteous judgment, basically daring him to respond:

And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. (Gen. 18:20-21)

Of course, the God of all knowledge and power needed no exploratory trip, no fact-finding tour to gain information. But in his patient discourse with his friend Abraham, God demonstrated His willingness to stay His hand, even in the face of such arrogant transgression. It is evident that it was Abraham’s friendship with God that gave Sodom a chance at redemption and survival: “And the Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” (Gen. 18:17). God chose to include Abraham in this process and the attempt at redemption. Therefore, Abraham’s bond with God constrained God to tell Abraham his friend—the blessed recipient of his covenant—what He was about to do. God had no obligation, of course, to tell Abraham of His sovereign decision; however, the prayers and petitions of the righteous are precious to God. Of course, God already knew the hearts of every person residing in Sodom. He already knew that none of them would repent. God also knew that none of those vile, wretched souls would be touched by Abraham’s earnest

and sincere pleas. But Abraham's plea did have an obvious effect on God who, with pity, tolerated this statement from his friend: "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25).

This is an unprecedented and extraordinary accusation by a mere man that takes liberties that mankind has rarely taken with God. Of course, Abraham was not reprimanding or judging God but was calling upon His goodness and nature as the Holy and Righteous Creator to be merciful. Abraham courageously puts himself and his relationship with God in potential jeopardy to save these sinful people. He speaks to God as though God had not already been more than longsuffering and had not already explored all possibilities to salvage the defiant people of these two sinful and ruined cities.

Abraham Depends On God's Nature

When Abraham makes his remarkable request of God, he is mercifully calling upon the Godhead's divine nature to intercede and halt this terrible destruction. By faith, he knew that the infinite wisdom and love of God is manifest in His longsuffering and pity. Abraham must, therefore, appeal to the very qualities and attributes of character that make God as far above man as the heavens are above the earth. God's very perfection is patient with our imperfection. Therefore, Abraham knew that God took no delight in the destruction of the wicked; even the Scriptures show that God takes offence to any implication that He is some type of mean, ogre-like, demi-god who just loves to zap, stomp, and destroy people. For example, when the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, God defends his righteous judgment:

But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. (Eze. 18:21)

At a time when judgment was being brought upon Israel, God clarified that the same people who gladly accepted his blessings, now had refused his law and commandments. Still, in spite of man's defiance and obstinacy, God takes no pleasure in the loss of a soul, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked shall die? Saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" (Eze. 18:23).

The Judge of the Earth

Too many of us misunderstand God's capacity for love and forgiveness. As human beings, we tend to lose sight of the fact that it is a blessing to have God to be the Judge of the Earth. Man by his very nature is totally incompetent in judgment. Man's personal and collective character failures and flaws create an atmosphere filled with envy, jealousies, bias, prejudice, hatred, covetousness, and just plain ole meanness. The book of James is often called the *Gospel of Common Sense* and written within in the book, James documents a list of faults which clearly show humanity's inability to be fair and impartial, absent the influence of God and His Word:

But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual,

devilish. For where envying and strife is,
there is confusion and every evil work.
(Jam. 3:14-16)

According to James, confusion and evil works are the results of man's inadequate knowledge, understanding, and ability. From the vantage point of man's ability, we would all be judged by the superficial, the irrelevant, and the inaccurate. God, on the other hand, can penetrate the ornamental façade, good or bad, and find the truth written in our hearts. The Scriptures record that from Jessie's house, searching for a new king, Samuel had to learn the difference between God's penetrating judgment and man's superficial judgment:

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. (1 Sam. 16:7)

At this juncture, God let Samuel know he would not judge by what man saw. God clearly expressed that he alone is qualified to be the Judge of the Earth.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, saith the
LORD. (Isa. 55:8)

To all the inhabitants of the earth the Psalmist expressed God's divine jurisdiction,

O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth. Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. (Psa. 96:9-10)

Three verses later, he wrote: “Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth” (Psa. 96:13). Righteous and impartial judgment can only be dispensed by God (Eze. 18:25).

The Question

Upon close examination of Abraham’s questions to God, we realize that God also had questions for Abraham. In this incredible discourse between God and man are housed two very important and revealing rhetorical inquiries. Neither revealed anything new about the character of God, but both emphasized His eternal immutability and fidelity.

As we read the narrative of Genesis 18, we find that God’s intention was to enact righteous judgment upon very grievous sinners (Gen. 18:20). Abraham, on the other hand, was attempting to halt the execution of that judgment just long enough to search for a reason to terminate it. As earlier stated, God was in no rush to destroy, especially when one he loves like Abraham “drew near” to him in humble petition (Gen. 18:23). However, the tone of the discussion had been set earlier when God had promised the elderly couple of Abraham and his wife, Sarah, that in their advanced age, they would have a child. God detected Sarah’s laugh even though

it was her private thoughts. I am sure it was humbling for God to let them both know, “I can hear your thinking.”

And the LORD said unto Abraham,
Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall
I of a surety bear a child, which am old?
(Gen. 18:13)

Even though Sarah became afraid after discovering that God knew her thoughts and doubts and denied the laugh (Gen. 18:15), God had already asked the first of the two important rhetorical questions:

Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At
the time appointed I will return unto
thee, according to the time of life, and
Sarah shall have a son. (Gen. 18:14)

God demonstrated to these two skeptical senior citizens that He could do what man considers impossible. God promised to rejuvenate both of them, to return them to child-bearing prime, to accomplish His purpose.

Second Question

Having established his power and authority over any of the essential, discretionary affairs of man, God now revealed to Abraham the plan to incinerate Sodom and Gomorrah. This gives rise to the second rhetorical question which is the subject of our discussion. Armed with God’s earlier question and affirmation of power, Abraham asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Abraham asked as though he was saying that only God, Who can do anything, could have the capacity to have mercy on such

wretched sinners. On examination, Abraham's rhetorical petition seemed to be, "Though it be hard, the right thing to do is let me try." I also believe that the Old Patriarch still believed that the enlightening power of God's word and God's love would change even these deluded people. The record of course reveals that Abraham was wrong, and as always, God was right. Many years later, the apostle Paul voiced our dependence on God doing right. For only He, Who can do anything, is capable of just and merciful judgment:

But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? (Rom. 3:5-6)

Paul presented clarity on this issue—the purity and righteousness of God—that man cannot comprehend nor demonstrate. Therefore, man is never in a position to question the sincerity or validity of God's judgment.

No One Had To Die In Sodom

Abraham did not convince God to spare Sodom; God wanted to spare them. It was God's choice even to reveal to Abraham His plan. God was not then and is not now accountable to man for His righteous decisions, especially when God has only been working to secure man's ultimate redemption. Paul revealed God's unconditional love to the brethren at Ephesus, attempting to explain grace and truth:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved. (Eph. 2:4-5)

Why did he do this? He did it because no one has to be lost; that is not God's intention or desire.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

Shall Not The Judge Of All The Earth Do Right?

Have you considered who God is? Have you learned the attributes of His nature?

- God will always extend mercy. "For thou Lord art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Psa. 86:5).
- God will always be just. "For the word of the Lord is right; and all his works are done in truth, He loveth righteousness and judgment; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord" (Psa. 33:4-5).
- God will always show love. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1).
- God will not punish the righteous with the wicked. "The soul that sinneth it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the Father, neither shall the Father bear the iniquity of the Son: the righteousness of the

righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Eze. 18:20).

Therefore, because of the very nature of God, He will always do right. He will always allow man to exercise his free choice and free will to obey or disobey His commands, and then by righteous judgment, He will reward him accordingly.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecc. 12:13-14)

God is right, because the Gospel has been benevolently preached to the whole world. He will therefore judge the world by the Gospel: “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel” (Rom. 2:16).

Conclusion

The nature of God is to do all possible to save man. From the beginning, He created paradise, and gave man only that which was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). It was man who violated God’s justice, took for granted his goodness, and strained the relationship (Gen. 3:1-24). Man chose to accept the word of God’s enemy over that of his Creator. Therefore God, Who created us, takes possession of all souls and takes possession of the right to determine their eternal destiny based on their behavior and adherence to His Word:

Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.
(Eze. 18:4)

The Devil, on the other hand, is a usurper and a liar. He endeavors to take and control souls which do not belong to him. He lies and promises man what he cannot receive from him. Therefore, the aging apostle Peter fervently admonished the brethren to be aware of their opponent and accuser:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Pet. 5:8)

God has done right by us and looked beyond our faults and saw our needs. Just as he did with Sodom, God patiently gives us more than enough opportunity to reconcile ourselves to him. His mercy, grace, justice, forgiveness, his unconditional love has been freely dispensed to every accountable person. God did right by us even when we refused to do right by ourselves. Paul taught that great truth to the Roman church: “But God commended his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Man did not merit or deserve God’s mercy; it was given by a righteous God.

Think about it. If God gave the human race what they deserved in lieu of what they need, it would be tragic and overwhelming. Abraham was fully aware of what they deserved down in Sodom; he was an important spiritual as well as political figure. He knew the reports and rumors were true and the destruction that God planned was well deserved

and well overdue. Therefore, in the end, Abraham was not contesting God's decision that this was the right time for justice and judgment. He was making the argument that this was also the right time for mercy and grace. Therefore, this great man, God's Friend, drew close like he was whispering a private admonition, to advise or encourage someone you love and said, "Surely God is big enough to show a little bit of mercy; my friend, **that is the right thing to do.**"

God, who is plenteous in love and mercy, has agreed that is the right thing to do for all of us

Works Cited

King James Version. Print.

CHAPTER 20

Leaving Home For Parts Unknown

Chad Dollahite

In modern times, people tend to view heroes as those who are larger than life, who are almost superhuman, and/or who are virtually inaccessible to regular people. Sometimes this assessment is correct, at least as pertaining to modern heroes. For example, many athletes display such skill in their sport that everyday folk could only dream of possessing such skill, and those athletes are seemingly superhuman in the use of those abilities at times. Also, it is very difficult for the average person simply to call up his favorite professional athlete and schedule a meeting of some kind; for the most part, such is impossible, as these people are, for all intents and purposes, inaccessible to everyday men and women. But, this modern view of heroes is dangerous when it comes to Bible heroes, for it tempts us today to view heroes of the faith, such as Abraham, as being some kind of superhuman, far better than “regular Christians” like us, and it may cause us to err in our thinking of them. The Bible makes it clear that the heroes we read about in its pages are like us—regular men and women, complete with all the flaws and frailties common to all humanity (with the one exception of Jesus Christ, Who was wholly perfect, Heb. 4:15, New King James Version).

One thing (among many) that makes the Bible so unique is its realistic portrayal of its heroes. It is common to read books that put the hero or heroes on a pedestal, making them much like the heroes of modern time: larger than life, superhuman, inaccessible to everyday folk, and just generally not very realistic. One gets the feeling that he/she could never be like such a person(s). But the Bible never attempts to do so with its heroes, showing us that, while accomplishing great things for (and through) the Lord, these men and women also had weaknesses, much as people to this very time have weaknesses and face trials, suffering, etc. that challenge our faith. One great example of this is Abraham. We often remember Abraham as “the father of the faithful,” “the friend of God,” and (as in this specific study) the man who “left home for parts unknown.” What can we today learn from Abraham to help us serve God better? Four points stand out concerning Abraham’s faith, and these will be the bulk of this study on Abraham’s leaving home for parts unknown.

Abraham’s Faith Was Going

How would we respond if called on to leave home with all its comforts and familiarities? Well, where are we going? might be the first response. Perhaps the thought of going somewhere exciting, someplace beautiful and fun, might make the thought of leaving home more palatable. But what if the only explanation given was, Just go? Most would be reluctant to leave at that point. Yet, such was Abraham’s situation; he was told by God to leave home, with no other explanation than “to a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). Abraham did not argue with God; he did not demand to know where God was taking him, but rather, “he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8).

Abraham's Faith Was Going Forward.

When Abraham left his home and his family, he did not seek to return. Hebrews 11:13-15 states (in the context of Abraham's faith, as well as others): "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return." There is no record that Abraham ever "called to mind" that country he left behind; rather, he followed God, always looking forward. "But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Heb. 11:16). In the Christian dispensation, through Jesus Christ His Son, God calls all men to leave their former sinful lives and selfish service to embark on a spiritual journey—Christianity. When one begins this spiritual journey, he must go forward following Abraham's example. Jesus Himself once said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Later, the inspired apostle Paul would write, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phi. 3:13-14). The Christian's journey, like Abraham's, is forward, not backward!

Abraham's Faith Was Going Freely.

Abraham did not have to be coerced into heeding God's call. Instead, Genesis 12:4 begins quite simply, "So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him." Abraham was a man who truly believed God! Nothing else can account for

his prompt obedience to God's commands every step of his journey of faith. It is no wonder Abraham is still known today as "the father of the faithful." Today, Christians are often referred to as the Lord's army, based on such passages as Ephesians 6:10-17, 1 Timothy 6:12, 2 Timothy 2:3-4, and others. However, it must be noted that the Lord's army has no draft; soldiers in the army of God enlist freely. Jesus' invitation to "come to Me" (Mat. 11:28) is free to be accepted or rejected as each person chooses. Like Abraham, the Christian's faith must go forward, but it must do so (like Abraham) freely. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

Abraham's Faith Was Going Faithfully.

Abraham began his journey of faith by heeding God's call and going, but not just going; he went wherever God told him to go. God told Abraham things that would seem difficult, if not impossible, to believe, as well as things beyond Abraham's comprehension, stating, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3). Genesis 12:4 tells Abraham's response to God's call—"So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him." Abraham's faith was a "going" kind of faith, in that he went faithfully wherever God told him to go. Like Abraham of old, Christians today are not told exactly what all is going to happen to them in the journey of faith (Christianity). All God tells us is that if we are faithful, heaven will be our home (Rev. 2:10; 1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; et al). Like Abraham, we must have a faith that simply follows God wherever He leads, simply because He is God.

Abraham's Faith Was Knowing

Over and over in Hebrews 11, the phrase *by faith* is repeated. This emphasizes that the men and women recognized in the chapter are not acting on intuition, instinct, or intelligence, but by faith. Romans 10:17 is a divine commentary on the actions of those in Hebrews 11: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." While Abraham was not acting on supernatural knowledge, he was not acting on blind faith, either. He knew God, and he knew that God is faithful and able to do what He says He will do.

Abraham Was Commanded To Believe Things Inconceivable.

On his journey of faith, Abraham was asked to believe things that, humanly speaking, were simply impossible. God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son, which was physically impossible, since Abraham and Sarah were both far past the age of child-bearing (Gen. 17:15-17). But Abraham knew that God is faithful and able to do what He says He will do. Paul gives further inspired testimony concerning Abraham, "And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform" (Rom. 4:19-21). By faith, Abraham believed God could accomplish the impossible! Like Abraham, Christians' faith today ought to be a knowing faith. Biblical faith is not a blind leap into the darkness, but is based upon evidence. Paul made it clear to the Galatians that what he taught was not based upon opinion or collaboration with other apostles, but upon revelation from Jesus the Christ (Gal. 1:12; 1 Cor. 14:37). Peter assures all men of all times, "For we did not

follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). Today, there is no reason for any child of God to have faith that is not knowing. Between the plethora of Old Testament testimony, the testimony of the eyewitnesses of Jesus, and the testimony of other inspired writers, we have today “a more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:19, King James Version)! As such, when called upon to believe things that may seem impossible, we can follow Abraham’s example and know that God can accomplish the impossible. How does God remit sins when we are baptized into Christ (Acts 22:16)? We do not have to know how, just as Abraham did not know how God was going to cause Sarah to conceive a child at ninety years of age; we simply have to believe Him and obey Him!

Abraham Was Commanded To Do Things Inconvenient.

On his journey of faith, Abraham was asked to do things he did not want to do. Having received his promised son, Isaac, God later commanded Abraham, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen. 22:2). Would anyone dare think this command was pleasant to Abraham? Amazingly, however, Abraham obeyed, without question: “So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him” (Gen. 22:3). That must have been one of the longest trips of Abraham’s life, in his mind, at least! The Hebrews writer tells us later, however, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed

shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (Heb. 11:17-19). By faith, Abraham believed God (even by means of a command so obscure and undesirable at the time) could accomplish great things and fulfill His earlier promise (Gen. 12:1-3)! Sometimes, living the Christian life may be inconvenient; it may mean changing jobs, changing friends, changing habits, or other such life-altering decisions. Jesus never apologizes for commanding things inconvenient; He only promises that the reward will be worth whatever conveniences are sacrificed. Jesus taught that truth sometimes divides, even setting a man at variance with his family (Mat. 10:34-38). While division is not something convenient (nor should it be explicitly desired), Christians must follow Abraham's example, knowing that compromise is unacceptable, and God rewards His faithful servants. Jesus once had a conversation with Peter:

Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You." So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life." (Mark 10:28-30)

On another occasion, after miraculously feeding a multitude, Jesus began to teach things that were

not convenient (John 6). Many of his disciples even murmured, “This is a hard saying” (John 6:60). As a result, many of Jesus’ disciples turned away (John 6:66). Jesus never cried, “Wait! Come back, and we will talk this over!” He allowed them to walk away; that was their choice. But Jesus has all authority (Mat. 28:18), and all men must stand before Him in judgment one day (2 Cor. 5:10). Like Abraham, following Jesus will sometimes mean inconveniences in our lives, but God is faithful to reward our service to Him in such a way that any earthly inconvenience will seem as nothing in the eternal bliss of the heavenly reward! “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). The psalmist reminds us, “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psa. 84:10). Like Abraham, Paul had a knowing faith: “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim. 1:12). Through God’s Word, men and women today can also **know** God, know His Son Jesus, and know how to obtain an eternal home in heaven.

Abraham’s Faith Was Showing

James asked the question, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” (Jam. 2:14). James would go on in that same context to use Abraham as an example of faith that manifests itself in works of obedience to God (Jam. 2:21-24). Abraham showed his faith by his works on numerous occasions.

Abraham Surrendered His Pedigree.

Abraham's faith was showing in that he surrendered his home, leaving when God told him to do so, never questioning God. In like manner, Abraham showed his faith in surrendering his family when God told him to leave home (later, Joshua told by inspiration how Abraham's family was idolatrous, which was at least partly why God told Abraham to leave his family, Jos. 24:2). Like Abraham, when one becomes a Christian, he surrenders all to his Lord Jesus Christ. One's personal country and allegiance thereto is surrendered for that heavenly country. Paul wrote, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phi. 3:20). One's personal, physical family must sometimes be surrendered for Jesus (Mat. 10:34-36). Jesus also said, "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (Mat. 12:50). Today, men and women must sometimes surrender their "pedigree" to follow Jesus, leaving home and/or family (whether figuratively or literally). No doubt, many reading this manuscript can attest (either personally or of those they have known) to the fact that Christians, as a result of choosing to follow Jesus, have sometimes had to sever family and home ties in order to do so. Abraham's example is worthy of following in this regard; when called upon to surrender his family and home, he willingly did so for the sake of following Almighty God.

Abraham Surrendered His Proficiency.

Abraham surrendered his own wisdom and judgment, giving his life wholly over to God and following wherever God told him to go. Again, Hebrews 11:8 states that Abraham "went out, not knowing where he was going." This undoubtedly went against every bit of his own human proficiency. "Leaving home for parts unknown" is certainly

not how human wisdom would have achieved all that God promised Abraham, yet he went, faithfully following his Lord. When told he would have a son at an age when he and Sarah were both far beyond child-bearing years, this promise was also beyond all human wisdom. To be a follower of Jesus today, one must surrender his own wisdom and judgment; sometimes God's commandments do not make sense to humans, and sometimes God's commandments go against fleshly wants and desires, but God's commandments are still right, and a showing faith follows Abraham's example and simply obeys.

Abraham Surrendered Personal Privilege.

Abraham surrendered personal privilege when faced with the conflict between his and Lot's herdsmen (Gen. 13:1-12). His attitude of giving Lot first choice showed his great faith that God would take care of him, regardless of where he ended up. Abraham might have pointed out to Lot that he was the uncle and Lot was the nephew, and therefore, demanded that Lot move along somewhere else. Abraham might have pointed out that God's promises were made to **Abraham**, not Lot, and demanded Lot move somewhere else based on those promises. But, instead, Abraham surrendered his personal privilege in the interest of selflessness and trusted in God Almighty to take care of him in whatever situation he found himself. Christians must sometimes surrender personal privileges in order to help save others and/or help keep a weaker brother from stumbling (cf. 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Cor. 8:4-13). In the context of eating meats offered to idols, Paul noted that an idol is nothing, and there is only one true God (1 Cor. 8:4), but not all Christians had that knowledge (1 Cor. 8:7). Paul goes on to say, "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13). Like Abraham, Christians

need an attitude of “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phi. 2:4), realizing that such is the mind of Christ (Phi. 2:5). Abraham’s faith really showed itself when he surrendered his personal privilege, and such is still true in the Christian dispensation. *Abraham Surrendered His Posterity.*

Abraham surrendered his promised son to God when called upon to do so and had he not been told to stop at the last moment, he would have slain Isaac, accounting that God would raise him from the dead (Gen. 22:1-13; Heb. 11:17-19). Remember, this was the son for whom he had waited so long; he finally had his promised son, only to have God instruct him to offer Isaac up as a burnt offering. Yet, Abraham does not debate or argue with God; he simply rose early in the morning the next day to do exactly as God instructed him (Gen. 22:3). Christians are not called upon to surrender our earthly children to God in a physical way, but we are to offer them up to God and point them toward heaven: “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

Abraham Surrendered Purposefully.

Abraham also showed his faith by surrendering to God without hesitation. When God first called Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), Abraham responded by following God purposefully (Gen. 12:4). As already noted, Abraham showed his unhesitating faith by rising **early** the next morning to begin the journey to Mount Moriah when he was called upon to offer his son as a burnt offering there (Gen. 22:1-3). From start to finish, Abraham’s faith was showing itself in his submission to God, obeying God’s commands at every step of the way. Such did not happen by accident; such happened because Abraham surrendered himself wholly to God purposefully.

Like Abraham, Christians today must surrender to God without hesitation, not like Felix, whose infamous reply to the gospel was, “When I have a convenient time I will call for you” (Acts 24:25). Abraham’s faith was not dead; likewise, Christians today must have a living, active faith that manifests itself in following God wholeheartedly! A Christian named Barnabas instructed the brethren in the church at Antioch and “encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23). It is still true in modern times that the faith that is pleasing to God is the faith that **purposefully** stays with God. Abraham’s faith (as well as the faith of Jesus’ followers today) brings to mind the song “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus,” which states at the end of each verse, “No turning back, no turning back” (cf. Heb. 11:15-16).

Abraham’s Faith Was Growing

Perhaps the most applicable aspect of Abraham’s faith for people in subsequent generations is that Abraham’s faith was not perfect; his faith grew as he journeyed with God. As noted previously, the Bible never seeks to cover up the flaws of its heroes. Just like men and women today, Abraham was imperfect, and he made mistakes. However, these mistakes did not define Abraham; they merely mark aberrations in his faithful journey with God. As he followed the Lord, how was Abraham’s faith growing?

When Faced With Famine, Abraham Proceeded With His Own Plan.

Genesis 12:10 states, “Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.” While Bible students must be careful not to presume too much, it does seem significant to this writer that there was no command from God for Abraham

to go into Egypt. When Abraham departed from Haran into Canaan, he did so at God's bidding (Gen. 12:4-5). But there was no command for Abraham to depart into Egypt because of the famine in the south (Gen. 12:9-10). It has often been said that one could follow the path of Abraham by the smoke from the altars where he worshiped God. While Abraham worshiped before going into Egypt (Gen. 12:8) and after leaving Egypt (Gen. 13:1-4), there is no mention of Abraham having worshiped God while in Egypt. Furthermore, while the stay in Egypt seems to have been brief, Abraham ends up right back where he was when he departed for Egypt – the south land. This journey into Egypt seems to have been wholly Abraham's idea, and it proved troublesome for him, as he ends up lying about his wife, along with picking up some baggage that will later cause trouble for him (Hagar the Egyptian, Gen. 16:1ff.).

When Faced With Force, Abraham Paltered.

Having proceeded into Egypt, Abraham knew that his beautiful wife would draw the eyes of the Egyptians, so he instructed her to say she was his sister (Gen. 12:11-13). Abraham's assumption was that if he told them she was his wife, they would kill him to take her for their own. As a result, Sarah was taken into Pharaoh's house, and Abraham was treated well for her sake (Gen. 12:14-16). But God intervened and protected Sarah from being abused by Pharaoh (Gen. 12:17). What resulted was a curious situation in which the heathen Pharaoh rebuked God's servant Abraham for telling a lie and subsequently sent him away (Gen. 12:18-20)! But Abraham's journey into Egypt had lasting results beyond just that rebuke.

When Faced With Failure, Abraham Presumed.

Sarah appears either to have given up on God's promise of a child or, at the very least, wavered in her faith in God's

promise, so she instructs Abraham to take her handmaid Hagar (an Egyptian handmaid; cf. Gen. 12:16) and produce children through her for Sarah (Gen. 16:1-3). The end of Genesis 16:2 is significant—“Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.” Perhaps Abraham deemed, too, that, for whatever reason, God’s promise had failed. Again, we must be careful not to presume too much, but whatever the reason, Abraham listened to Sarah and took Hagar to be his wife. This resulted in Hagar’s conceiving a child, which resulted in conflict between Sarah and Hagar (Gen. 16:4-5). Sarah even says to Abraham, “My wrong be upon you!” (Gen. 16:5). The child that would be born of Hagar, Ishmael, would grow into a great, numerous people, and those people would be a source of conflict for centuries to come (Gen. 16:10-12). Later, Abraham presumed again (though much less strongly on this occasion), saying, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” (Gen. 17:18). This all was the result of Abraham and Sarah’s presumption to take over for God and improvise His plan when they deemed it had failed. Of course, God was on neither Abraham’s nor Sarah’s timetables; His plan had not failed at all!

When Following The Father, Abraham Persisted.

All of these points of reference as to Abraham’s faith having wavered are not mentioned to cast aspersion on this great man of faith, but rather, to point out that, like any mere human in any time, Abraham was not sinlessly perfect. These points also serve to point out that they are anomalies in the life of Abraham, not the norm. Quite the contrary, the bulk of Scripture tells of Abraham’s great, imitable faith. Out of 40 total verses in Hebrews 11, no less than 20% of those verses (8) concern Abraham and/or Sarah. While Abraham seems to have proceeded with his own plan into Egypt, paltered when facing potentially deadly force, and presumed to come

up with a “plan B” for God, those moments do not define Abraham’s life, nor do they define his journey with God. Abraham’s faith was growing, and growing means learning from mistakes. Abraham made mistakes, but he used those mistakes to grow in faith and useful service to God.

Today, Christians often fail; they sin and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8; et al). But, those failures need not be fatal! Like Abraham, we can use those failures, learning from them and becoming better in our service to God. Paul exhorts Christians, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5). When examining one’s self and coming to the realization of sin, such ought to be made right with the Lord and used to become a better servant of God. Peter commands all Christians, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever” (2 Pet. 3:18). Part of growing in grace is learning from mistakes and becoming better, in spite of past failures. Paul described himself as “chief” of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), yet he also wrote, “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phi. 3:13-14). Time and time again, the New Testament reminds Christians that failures need not be fatal! Indeed, John exhorts, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7-9). No person is sinless, nor is anyone called to be; what we are called to be is

faithful, walking in the light of God's Word (cf. Psa. 119:105)! Like God's friend Abraham, may Christians today ever be growing in their faith!

Conclusion

When Abraham left home for parts unknown, he could not have imagined all that God had in store for him, nor could he have imagined how, centuries later, Bible students would spend an entire lectureship studying him and his moniker, the "friend of God." But, because Abraham's faith was **going** where God told him to go, because his faith was **knowing** that God is faithful and able to do what He promises, because his faith was **showing** itself in obedience to God every step of the way, and because his faith was **growing** (even in the midst of shortcomings), Abraham is remembered to this day as God's friend, as well as the "father of the faithful." God Himself sets Abraham forth numerous times in Scripture as an example worthy of following. As noted in this study, Christians today would do well to learn from Abraham and have faith that is **going** into whatever realms of service to which God calls them, faith that is **knowing** that God is real and rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6), faith that is **showing** itself in purposefully cleaving to God, and faith that is **growing** on an ongoing basis as they learn from past mistakes and become better in spite of them. "Leaving home for parts unknown" is more than a catchy title for Abraham's journey of faith; it sums up what defines Abraham as a person. Abraham knew not what lay ahead for him, but he put his faith and trust in God, and he followed God faithfully to the very end of his earthly life. This hero of the faith was not superhuman, nor was he sinless, but he put his life in the benevolent hands of the Almighty God; because of that, his example is etched forever before all men and women

as one worthy of following. And, one day, if we follow that example of faith, we will sit down with Abraham and all the faithful of all time and bask in the eternal glory of God's reward for faithful service (cf. Mat. 8:11). Spiritually, when we leave home for parts unknown, we may not know all that lies ahead in this life, but we do know the final destination—heaven. Truly, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9)!

Works Cited

- “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.” *Church Gospel Songs & Hymns*. V. E. Howard, comp. West Monroe: Central, 1978. Song #109. Print.
- New King James Version*. Nashville: Nelson, 1994. Print.

CHAPTER 21

Finding His Boy A Bride

Cliff Goodwin

It is hard for one to fathom the description “friend of God.” God is truly a transcendent Being. Mortal man is limited, and at his very best, still guilty and imperfect before God. Abraham fits this very description, yet he is called the “friend of God.” Such commendation was, without doubt, linked to the nature of Abraham’s faith. James wrote by inspiration:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. (King James Version, Jam. 2:21-24)

Abraham’s faith prompted works of obedience, and it was manifested in the same. God spoke. Abraham listened. Abraham obeyed. The simplicity of this progression is perhaps surpassed only by its beauty. Abraham lived a

life characterized by taking God at His word and acting accordingly. That is truly beautiful. For this reason, he is often termed “the father of the faithful” even to this day. Perhaps this description comes from Galatians chapter three.

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. (Gal. 3:6-9)

It is obvious from this reading that “the children of Abraham” is an appellation denoting a spiritual kinship—not merely a physical. This is confirmed at the end of the chapter when Paul writes, “And if ye *be* Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). The children of Abraham follow in the steps of their spiritual predecessor, doing the works of God in faith (cf. John 8:39-40).

The thing about true faith is this: it touches, affects, and molds every aspect of a person’s life. This definitely includes one’s family life. Family relationships are cultivated and nurtured in accordance with Biblical teaching. Family responsibilities are likewise discharged. Referring to Abraham once again as an example, one is impressed by the impact his faith had on his family. Obviously, such impact was not perfect, because Abraham himself was not perfect.

Nonetheless, he was faithful before God. Note these words of commendation, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19).

If only such a statement could be made concerning every parent in the Lord’s church today! Every generation needs fathers (and mothers!) who steer, guide, and lead their children in the way of the Lord. Paul wrote, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). This must be priority number one in the home. Abraham obviously took this responsibility very seriously, and God “took note” of that. This present study will focus on how Abraham’s commitment to this responsibility manifested itself in finding a suitable bride for his son, Isaac. One writer recognized the potential benefit in the analysis of this “case study.”

...all marriages—in fact the very institution of marriage—are of special concern to God. For this reason, Christian young people (and their parents) would do well to study carefully the principles guiding the preparations for this marriage as they contemplate their own. (Morris 391)

Many are the lessons along these lines for godly parents today. It has been wisely said that the second most important decision made in life is the selection of one’s spouse. Parents who want their children to go to heaven when this life is over must realize the vast importance of such a decision. They

must instruct, guide, advise, and encourage their children to choose faithful Christian spouses—and all of this with much prayer! Genesis chapter twenty-four contains much instruction pertaining to this subject.

Parental Purpose

It is evident from the opening verses of Genesis twenty-four that Abraham was determined his son would not marry a daughter of the Canaanites. Such a marriage might have jeopardized not only Isaac's soul, but also the very outcome of the Abrahamic promise! One must remember the wording God used, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; ***that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him***" (Gen. 18:19; emp. mine, CG). A lesson becomes clear immediately: godly parents are concerned about whom their children marry, because they want their children to experience God's blessings! Abraham had been blessed to live a life nourished by the goodness and richness of God (Gen. 24:1), and he wanted the same for his son, Isaac.

Continuing into Genesis twenty-four, one reads the specific instructions given by Abraham to his servant. It is important to understand that this servant acts as Abraham's agent throughout the events that unfold in this chapter. In other words, what the servant does in the process of selecting Isaac a bride, Abraham is doing through the agency of his servant. Acting through an agent is still a concept well-known in various aspects of daily life. Morris views this a little differently, stating, "The reason the servant's name is not mentioned is probably that he was going in the name of Isaac, not his own name" (393). Even if the servant went in Isaac's name, he was most certainly *sent* by Abraham.

Two directives stand out most vividly in Abraham's instructions to his servant. These underscore the fact that God's promises do not always preclude man's personal responsibility. First of all, Abraham said, "And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell" (Gen. 24:3). The Canaanites are known in Biblical history for their idolatry and immorality (cf. Exo. 23:23-24). Such an influence would not be suitable in the seed-line concerning the Abrahamic promise. Far too much was at stake, and Abraham obviously recognized this. Parents today must likewise understand the powerful influence spouses exert on each other. Paul's inspired words find application in the home as much as in the realm of friends and acquaintances. "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Secondly, Abraham forbade the servant from taking Isaac out of Canaan into the land of Mesopotamia.

And the servant said unto him,
Peradventure the woman will not be
willing to follow me unto this land:
must I needs bring thy son again unto
the land from whence thou camest?
And Abraham said unto him, Beware
thou that thou bring not my son thither
again. The LORD God of heaven, which
took me from my father's house, and
from the land of my kindred, and which
spake unto me, and that sware unto me,
saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land;
he shall send his angel before thee, and

thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again. (Gen. 24:5-8)

It is interesting to note that verses six through eight contain Abraham's last recorded utterances in Scripture (Whitworth 221). A couple of observations merit one's attention at this point. One, fatherly wisdom knew the inherent dangers in bringing Isaac to the bride. "If Isaac had gone in search of a bride, there might have been too great a temptation for him to stay with her among her own people, rather than to return to Canaan. She must be willing to come to him" (Morris 393). Two, Abraham respected the connection between the land of Canaan and God's promises (cf. Gen. 12:1-9). God had a plan in mind, and that plan included Abraham's descendants *in* the land of Canaan. Ultimately, of course, the Messiah would be born in that land (cf. Mic. 5:2). Again, a lesson can be learned. Wise parents today recognize that marital bliss—in the truest sense—is experienced when couples respect God's plan. Accordingly, godly parents desire godly spouses for their children.

At least one more observation should be made in noting the parental purpose exhibited in Abraham: he was willing to use the material resources at his disposal in order to secure the proper wife for his son.

Abraham's wealth is a prominent feature in this chapter (cf. 24:10, 22, 30, 35, 36, 47, 53), and he gave the command to use his wealth in whatever way necessary to secure for Isaac a good wife. The

patriarch had no pretension of hanging on to his wealth indefinitely, or of taking it with him in death. Nor did he intend to spend it on himself...Rather, Abraham became the father of all those determined to spend their wealth to further the purposes of God. (Whitworth 220)

From the expenses associated with a month-long journey (involving ten camels and multiple men; Gen. 24:10; Gen. 24:32; Gen. 24:59) to the price of a bride's dowry, the trip recorded in Genesis twenty-four was costly in its own right. Nonetheless, money was no object to Abraham when it came to providing his son with a good wife and thereby furthering the seed-line promises of God. Many things in this life are infinitely more important than money. One reaches a great level of spiritual attainment when he realizes this fact. An even higher level is reached when one realizes that the highest and noblest use of material wealth is to discharge and carry out the very will of God.

Christian parents today often incur material expense in order to provide ample opportunities for their children to meet worthy, potential candidates for future marriage. A wise father and mother understand that their child needs to be around faithful Christian peers in order to find one day a faithful Christian spouse. Money is spent on travel and accommodations for youth days and lectureships, not to mention registration fees for Bible camps and weekend retreats. Many parents save and sacrifice greatly in order to send their children to Christian universities. Their desire is not only for a Christian education, but for a Christian *experience* and, yes, ultimately Christian sons-in-law or daughters-in-law! All parents do not have the same resources and cannot

afford the same expenses, but all godly parents are willing to use what they have and to do what they can in helping their sons and daughters to find faithful Christian wives and husbands. Such planning and sacrifice demonstrate the parental purpose seen in Abraham and essential still today.

Prayer and Providence

As daunting a task as spouse selection can be (from a parent's perspective), the prospect of pursuing such without Divine blessing would be unthinkable. Wise fathers and mothers pray fervently to God regarding the future spouses of their children. Such parents often feel like they “need all the help they can get,” and they realize that God's help is the most crucial. At this point in Abraham's later life, he seems much more comfortable in leaving such a momentous decision in God's hands. “[W]hereas the patriarch had struggled to trust God in the past, he seems very much at ease surrendering the marriage of his son to [D]ivine [P]rovidence” (Whitworth 219).

Indeed, Abraham had help in finding a bride for Isaac—both from his faithful servant and, most importantly, from his faithful God. Overjoyed at meeting Rebekah, Abraham's servant bowed his head and praised the LORD. “Blessed *be* the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I *being* in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren” (Gen. 24:27). The faith of the servant is striking in this chapter. Abraham's example of faith and godly influence had clearly left their mark on this man. One remembers that God knew Abraham would “command his children *and his household* after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD” (Gen. 18:19; emp. mine, CG). The faith of the servant demonstrates the truthfulness of this statement. It further underscores

the concept of Abraham's acting through the agency of his servant in these events.

The servant's oath to his master (Gen. 24:9) is followed by the servant's prayer to his God.

And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand *here* by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: *let the same be she that* thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master. (Gen. 24:12-14)

Though chronologically the oath and prayer are separated by at least a month's time, their proximity in the text is thought-provoking. Being bound to his master by an oath, the servant turned to God in prayer, seeking Divine favor and help.

Prayer is at its most effective when coming from a person willing to do all that is within his power. In other words, one "puts legs on his prayers" by doing himself what he can to attain the desired end. Abraham and his trusted servant invested time, energy, and resources in the search for Isaac's bride. Such an investment was crowned by the servant's above prayer. The servant had placed himself in the

proper place for God to answer his supplication, and God responded favorably by supplying not only an answer to his prayer, but also a bride for Abraham's son.

This scenario presents a very practical lesson in this scenario for God-fearing parents today. To help ensure a child's proper selection of a spouse, parents want to do all they can to make sure the child is "fishing out of the right pond." Isaac did not need any "fish" out of Canaan's pond, so Abraham sent his servant hundreds of miles away into Mesopotamia (cf. Gen. 24:4; Gen. 24:10). Consequently, the servant was in the proper place for God to answer his prayer as needed. As noted earlier, parents wisely expend time and money to help put their children in good "fishing waters."

The providence of God shines brilliantly throughout chapter twenty-four, as it does throughout much of Genesis. It is important to note that Providence is used to refer to God's working through His natural laws—including people and events—to provide for His people and ultimately accomplish His purpose. Providence is often contrasted with the miraculous phenomena recorded in Scripture. Whereas providence works through the framework of God's natural laws, miracles actually transcend such laws. It is extremely important for one to note that, even though the miraculous gifts of the first century have ceased (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-10), God has always worked through His providence and still does so today (cf. Rom. 8:28)!

Providence cannot be fully explained by man. How God places the right people in the right places at the right times—all without interfering with man's free will—boggles the limited human mind. It is not the role of God's people to explain providence but rather to simply trust in its existence and effectiveness. The finding of Isaac's bride illustrates these points. One should note the apparent

arrival time of the servant and his entourage outside the city of Nahor (Gen. 24:10-11). Then there is the remarkable fact that Rebekah was the one who came out of the city—before the servant had even finished praying (Gen. 24:15)! Further, Rebekah responded to the servant’s request in the very manner for which he had hoped (Gen. 24:17-20). It is after these events and an essential invitation to lodge with her family (Gen. 24:23-25) that the servant humbly bowed his head before God and thanked Him for prospering his journey (Gen. 24:26-27). What so many in the world often call *coincidence*, the children of God often reflect back on and call *Providence*!

The inspired account records an important note that might easily be overlooked. This point pertains to the fact that, in His providence, God is able to “turn” evil that it might work out for good. The account reads:

And Rebekah had a brother, and his name *was* Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister’s hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the LORD; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels. (Gen. 24:29-31)

It is extremely interesting that the inspired author points out Laban’s taking note of the golden earring and bracelets

(cf. Gen. 24:22). This foreshadows a certain trait in Laban. From what one learns of him later in the Genesis account, it becomes obvious that he could exhibit some greedy, or covetous, tendencies. Many years later, Isaac's son would charge Laban with the following.

Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.
(Gen. 31:41-42)

Obviously greed and covetousness are contrary to God's will (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9-10). In Genesis twenty-four, however, Laban's interest in the rich gifts lavished upon Rebekah seems to have "encouraged" his hospitality (cf. Gen. 24:31). God is NEVER the author of evil, nor is He ever party to it. Nonetheless, in His providence, God is able to "turn" the wickedness of men, causing it ultimately to work out for His own good purpose. One can only imagine how incredibly frustrating this must be to Satan (consider Calvary as the ultimate example!).

Thus, in finding a bride for Isaac, one sees prayer and providence woven beautifully together. The saying has been coined, "One must pray as if it were all up to God and work as if it were all up to himself." Genesis twenty-four seems to illustrate beautifully this maxim. Godly parents today who

are still interested in the spouse selection of their children can take comfort in the relationship between prayer and providence. God answers the prayers of His faithful children! “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jam. 5:16b). One must not *concern* himself with HOW God accomplishes the answering of prayers. Instead, one should *comfort* himself with these inspired words of Paul, “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20).

Prettiness That Permeates

Genesis twenty-four clearly teaches that God provides. What is even more faith-building, however, is for one to note the *nature* of that which God provides. God gives *good* gifts (cf. Mat. 7:7-11). He furnishes that which is needful (cf. Mat. 6:31-32; Phi. 4:19), as well as that which is enjoyable (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17). Both His wisdom and benevolence are reflected in the quality and quantity of His gifts to His children.

Abraham looked to the LORD when it came to finding a bride for his son, and the LORD supplied such beautifully. One cannot help but be reminded of the inspired proverb, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (Pro. 18:22). And again, “House and riches *are* the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife *is* from the LORD” (Pro. 19:14). Genesis twenty-three had closed with the burial of Sarah, Abraham’s wife and Isaac’s mother (Gen. 23:17-20). But as chapter twenty-four closes, the inspired narrative records how God provided Isaac with both comfort and a wife—all in the beautiful gift known as Rebekah (Gen. 24:67).

Godly parents should be concerned with the type people to whom their children are attracted. Often it is

physical appearance that holds sway over a young adult's thoughts and feelings, and physical attraction is a proper need. Solomon noted that excitement and even exhilaration should exist in marriage.

Drink waters out of thine own cistern,
and running waters out of thine own well.
Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad,
and rivers of waters in the streets.
Let them be only thine own, and not
strangers' with thee. Let thy fountain be
blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy
youth. *Let her be as* the loving hind and
pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee
at all times; and be thou ravished always
with her love. (Pro. 5:15-19)

This being said, it is equally true that physical attractiveness alone provides for a very hollow marriage and one whose long-term prospects are not good. Physical beauty will one day diminish with age. What will then be the “glue” holding that marriage together? It is much easier for one to become physically attracted to a person for whom there is respect and admiration of inner strength and beauty. When character and spirituality are the foundation of a relationship, other connections can be established with time. This is a prettiness that permeates the whole personality of an individual (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-6). When one is an ugly person inwardly, however, that ugliness has a way of marring the entire image.

It is important that the Biblical text points out Rebekah's beauty from a number of different perspectives. She was permeated by prettiness—within and without.

And the damsel *was* very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. (Gen. 24:16-20)

The first thing one notices about a person is naturally the outward appearance. It is said that Rebekah was “very fair to look upon.” The reader quickly learns, however, that Rebekah’s outer beauty is not a sham. It is built upon something of real substance. Her moral beauty is then described in terms of her purity, her industry, and her hospitality. All of these are qualities of character that make a difference in life and especially a difference in *married* life!

Conclusion

Godly parents do not (and cannot!) take a *laissez-faire* approach when it comes to whom their children will marry. The decision is too great, and its ramifications are far-reaching. While the final decision will likely be made by the adult child himself (or herself), parents *can* and *must* do much to aid that child in a proper selection—one reaping

blessings both now and in eternity! Selecting a Christian spouse does not guarantee the absence of marital problems in the future—or even marital disasters—but it does afford the best possible start as one enters married life.

Concerned Christian parents meet with the best success in this endeavor when they begin their efforts well before the adolescence of the child. One cannot wait until a child is a teenager to begin stressing the great importance of marrying a faithful Christian. The foundation for such understanding needs to be laid much earlier in life. Before a child reaches puberty, before a child is born, even before a child is conceived, godly parents do well to purpose in their hearts that the son or daughter will one day marry a faithful child of God. Daniel demonstrated the great power that lies in purpose of heart, or “godly determination” (cf. Dan. 1:8).

Works Cited

- King James Version*. e-Sword, version 9.9.1. Digital file.
- Morris, Henry. *The Genesis Record*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993. Print.
- Whitworth, Michael. *The Epic of God*. Bowie: Start2Finish Books, 2012. Print.

CHAPTER 22

Burying Your Better Half

John Daniels

Genesis 23 records the account of Sarah's death and burial. Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years. She is the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is recorded; it gives us some measure of how highly she is regarded in the Bible.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told to look to Mary the mother of Jesus as an example of a godly woman. But twice we are told to look to Sarah as such an example (Isa. 51:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:3-6).

According to Genesis 23:2, Sarah died in Kirjath-Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Abraham felt his loss of Sarah deeply and was not afraid to mourn, though he did not sorrow as those without hope (1 The. 4:13). It is evident that he set himself deliberately to all the functions of a mourner. To weep for a loved one is to show that we have been close, that the loss is keenly felt, that death is an enemy, and that sin has brought this sad punishment upon the human race.

I do not say that I can empathize with Abraham; I cannot! I have buried both my father and mother. I have buried both an older brother and an identical brother. But I have not laid to rest my sweet Nancy. Therefore, I do not have all the answers, but I believe that God's Word has them.

The first thing Abraham had to accomplish was to buy land in order to have a place to bury Sarah. He spoke with the sons of Heth, saying, “I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight” (New King James Version, Gen. 23:3).

Remember, Abraham was a foreigner and a sojourner among these people. Abraham did not feel this way because he came from Ur of the Chaldeans. It was because he recognized his real home was heaven. Moses knew the same and commanded Israel to know it (Lev. 25:23). David also knew this truth (1 Chr. 29:15; Psa. 39:12).

After deliberation with Ephron the Hittite, Abraham purchased the necessary land for the burial. It was there in the cave of the field of Machpelah that Abraham buried his companion. The text emphasizes this property was Abraham’s land by deed, not only by the promise of God. If this was the only piece of land Abraham ever owned in the land promised to him, it showed that he was a real man of faith.

It was also here that Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham (Gen. 25:9). Later, Isaac and Rebekah were both buried here (Gen. 49:31). Jacob buried Leah here (Gen. 49:31), and Joseph buried Jacob here (Gen. 50:13). Truly, the cave of Machpelah (near Hebron) was the great tomb of the Patriarchs.

We may often wonder why God allows suffering, sorrow, heartache, and death. The question is as old as Abraham and is asked everyday. How can a Christian end up in an accident with multiple injuries and fractures without a spouse or parent asking, “Why did God allow such an accident?” In other words, How can Christians rejoice under such trials?

God created this world governed by natural laws, laws of cause and effect, laws of sowing and reaping. “Be not

deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7-8). If we violate these laws, the consequences may be grave.

Satan’s goal is to get us to curse God and die! In other words, blame God for it all as did Job’s wife. The Bible paints the picture of Satan causing suffering.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.

So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord. (Job 1:6-12)

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. (Job 2:1-6)

This is also the case of Christians. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). We can have comfort in knowing that Satan does have his limits!

Suffering Keeps This World From Becoming Too Attractive

As was Abraham, so are we “pilgrims” and “strangers” here in this world (1 Pet. 2:11). The old hymn, “This World Is Not My Home” is as Biblical as any hymn we may sing. God has prepared something better for us (2 Cor. 5:1-7). If there were no suffering, would we want to leave this world? God wants us to desire something better.

Brother George Washington, former elder of the Sevierville church of Christ, went back home to Arkansas to be with his mother prior to her death and to bury her upon that occasion. Her final words to her son were, “This is the day I’ve been living for!” As a faithful Christian, she knew she had somewhere better to go.

I did the funeral of the wife of a gospel preacher, brother Earl Green. Sister Green, dying of cancer, said she was concerned about leaving behind her husband and five children. But her main concern was that she was going somewhere she had never been before. Even at that, she knew she was going somewhere better. Would we desire the “eternal” home if this one were perfect?

Suffering Can Bring Out Our Best

A man whose wife was seriously injured saw constant support of friends and loved ones. The support, encouragement, and help were uplifting. We see this occurring quite frequently. In times of natural disaster—houses burn down, tornados strike, and hurricanes hit—or we find ourselves facing times of terminal illness, this is when one feels alone, scared, and maybe unsure of the future. Paul told the Christians at Rome that tribulations develop character (Rom. 5:3-4). This may be one reason early Christians rejoiced in trials.

Suffering Gives An Occasion To Silence The Enemies Of God

When we reflect on the story of Job, we find Satan wanted to prove God wrong about Job. That he served God only because he was blessed. But Job's patience under suffering silenced Satan!

It is God's desire that we silence "foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:15). The one who says we are only Christians for what good we can get out of it ridicules Christianity. The value of a Christian really shines through by patiently enduring and doing good in times of suffering. In faith, we have that which sustains us and in love we support those who are suffering. This will silence the enemies of God.

Suffering Makes Us Appreciative

All of us receive many good things in life. It is easy to take those things for granted and forget and not be grateful for what we have. Suffering can help us appreciate more fully good health, good friends, and loving families.

A good example of how suffering can make one appreciative is the apostle Paul when he was in prison:

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that

he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. (Phi. 1:3-8)

Suffering Makes Us More Dependent Upon God

Too often, we think ourselves self-sufficient. When dozens of the most skilled men in their profession tell you they have done all they can and its completely out of their hands, we suddenly realize how much we need God! Why is it God is always last to be asked for help? After all, “In Him we live, and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Paul also provided this information for his second writing to Corinth.

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in

infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

Suffering Helps Purify Us

Consider two important passages: Suffering can be like the fire purifying the gold.

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)

Secondly, maturity can develop through trials.

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that

man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (Jam. 1:2-7)

For growth, we must have some suffering!

Suffering Makes Us Sympathetic

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

We do have within us the ability to console others who suffer. Have you ever said, “I’ve been there” or “I know how your feeling”? As I have said, one may think he can sympathize with someone, but until he has been there, he cannot have a true understanding. We are told by Paul to “weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15); therefore suffering better enables us to serve others.

We are to care for each other as a body and in doing so, we develop a Christian friendship.

For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same

care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (1 Cor. 12:24-27)

The strong are to exhort the weak (1 The. 5:14). What is the best way to develop helpful relationships? Take an active part in the family! If we take part in the lives of others, they will also be there for us. If you never visit or care for others, then do not expect it back!

Solomon understood the value of friendship.

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Ecc. 4:9-12)

Suffering Teaches Us How To Pray

We all may be praying people, praying at the right time and praying for the right things. But when we suffer, we begin to understand what it means to pray earnestly and what it means to pray perseveringly.

Have you ever known someone whose prayer life changed because of adversity? As a result, he may have said that his prayers will be different for the rest of his life.

We must develop a communion with God through an active prayer life. The Bible teaches us to pray during suffering. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray" (Jam. 5:13). Our Saviour did this both in the garden and on the cross! The early disciples did this as well.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. (Acts 12:1-5)

Why do we need to pray? So we may receive inner peace to sustain us.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phi. 4:6-7)

But the time to develop our prayer life is now, before suffering comes. “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan” (Jer. 12:5). Why now? So that we will already be a friend with the One who can carry us through the struggles! As one may say, “Don’t wait for the well to go dry before you try to get a drink!”

Suffering May Be The Results Of Our Own Actions!

During our occasions of suffering, we may stop and focus on who or what is responsible for this suffering we go through? Is it the work of God? Is it the work of Satan? Or is it the consequences of a world based on cause and effect?

God created this world governed by a law of nature, laws of cause and effect, i.e., “sowing and reaping.” “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7-8).

If we violate these laws, the consequences may be grave: 1) Step off a ten-story building; 2) Run in front of a moving truck; or 3) Expose oneself to pollution, dangerous chemicals, or contagious diseases. But what hurts more is when someone else violates these laws and we suffer as a result.

Suffering May Be The Work Of Satan!

The Bible does paint this picture as in the case of Job:

Now there was a day when the sons of
God came to present themselves before
the Lord, and Satan came also among

them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord. (Job 1:6-12)

Also, as in the case of Christians: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). As it was with Job, Satan’s goal is to get us to curse God and die. So, why does God allow Satan to cause us to suffer? Peter continues to answer our questions. “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus,

after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet. 5:10). Also, the trying of our faith produces good results according to James 1.

Suffering also makes us depend on God:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

We also can take comfort in knowing that Satan has his limits! “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Suffering May Be The Chastisement Of God

We might ask the question Who has God chastened? He definitely chastened Old Testament people: “My son,

despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Pro. 3:11-12). He also corrected New Testament people:

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (Heb. 12:5-8)

Why would God chasten His people? He does not delight in it (Lam. 3:31-33), but it is often necessary; “Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (Heb. 12:9). This happens so that we might partake of His holiness (Heb. 12:10) and that we might yield peaceable fruit (Heb. 12:11).

When would God chasten us? He chastens us when we fail to correct ourselves: “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:31). When does God chasten? He corrects when we are in danger of being condemned with the world: “But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:32).

How does God chasten His children? In the Old Testament, He used the miraculous at times:

And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto

me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. (Amos 4:6-12)

But, today, through His providence, He may use things or people to wake us up!

Conclusion

How can we prepare for suffering? We can be ready simply by trusting in God, having continual communion with God through prayer, and relying upon our church family. Burdens can either shatter or strengthen our faith. Jesus taught the key to overcoming the storms of life.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not,

shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. (Mat. 7:24-27)

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16)

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9).

May we find the wonderful mercy and grace in our time of need as we are assured that Abraham did when he buried Sarah.

Works Cited

King James Version. Spokane: Olive Tree Bible Software, n.d. Digital file.

New King James Version. Spokane: Olive Tree Bible Software, n.d. Digital file.

CHAPTER 23

The Day That Abraham Heard The Gospel

J. J. Hendrix

The Bible is the most beautiful love story ever told. We find forty writers over a fifteen-hundred-year period, sharing God's personality, plan, and promises without contradiction. The need for a Messiah was known before the earth was created. We see Messianic prophecies earlier in Genesis, but in Genesis chapter 12, we see a promise. This conditional covenant that was made is a benefit to us today and a promise that was kept by God. Our God is a God who keeps His promises.

We are blessed by the decision that Abraham made to accept the promise that God made to him and get up and leave everything behind. This man of faith had to have action. Like mankind today, Abraham had a choice. He could go and the promises God made to him would be fulfilled, or he could stay and continue in the paganism that surrounded him and his family. What were the goings-on during the time period that would have God the Father call Abraham from their midst? Why was Abraham's response to leave appropriate? Bringing light to modern times, what are Christians dealing with? Why is it imperative that we respond to the call to share the Gospel?

The Time

To some people, history is a string of dates designed to test one's memorization skills, but dates should be seen as a tool, a framework on which the events of history can be ordered (Hoerth 56). No matter what time of history the student studies, he or she will see that what we learn from history is that we never learn from history. During Abraham's time, the people left God. We do not know much about the law of the Patriarchs, but we can know that God was not pleased with these people and felt it was time to make promises to start his perfect plan in motion. The time was a pagan time. Abraham's family "served other gods" (Jos. 24:2).

The Ur that is mentioned as being where Abraham resided is accepted as Ur of the Chaldeans. Nehemiah 9:7 and Stephen's speech in Acts 7:2-4 place Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans as well. If Genesis 11 were the only reference to Abraham's being born in southern Mesopotamia there may be maneuverability, but these three passages place Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans. Understanding where Abraham truly was allows us to use Bible archaeology to understand more about the culture of the people at the time. Sir Leonard Woolley excavated portions of Ur dating to the time period of Abraham. The archeologist unearthed relics that allow us to envision some of the city as Abraham saw them. From what has been taken from the digging sites, the people living in Ur, or any other Mesopotamian city, would have been inundated with religion. The Great Ziggurat of Ur could always be seen. These Mesopotamian areas were dominated by belief in thousands of deities. Theologians of the time were charged to create grand genealogies of these deities. Martin Beek (138) states: "The collection of names of gods and the establishment of their genealogical connections...constituted one of the main activities of theologians in Mesopotamia." Much like

our society today, hierarchies were often based on money. Those with wealth could have “major gods” in their home, while the poorer had “lesser gods.” Hundreds of them might be worshiped in a given city. The ever-growing list of deities led to a need for a priesthood to develop methods of worship. The gods had to be “taken care of” and were presented with meals throughout the day.

A number of liquid and semiliquid dishes in appropriate serving vessels were placed on the table in a prescribed arrangement, and containers with beverages were likewise set out. Next, specific cuts of meat were served as a main dish. Finally, fruit was brought in in what one of the texts takes the trouble to describe as a beautiful arrangement, thus adding an esthetic touch...Musicians performed, and the cella was fumigated...to dispel the odor of the food. Eventually, the table was cleared and removed and water in a bowl again offered to the image for the cleansing of fingers. (Oppenheim 188-189)

Plenty of information has been preserved about the pantheon, priesthood, ziggurats, and temples of Mesopotamia. It is important to understand the difference between the systemized theology and the religious practice of the people on the streets. The people had a fear of witchcraft and things of the like. This made their purchasing of materials (like statues) and visiting temple prostitutes important to be safe from demons and infertility, respectively.

Why is this important to know? Joshua 24:2 states, “And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.” Abraham was reared in a society that believed it essential to serve and to fear the ever-growing list of Mesopotamian gods.

For God’s marvelous plan for our salvation to occur, something had to break from the norm. There is only one God. Our loving God desires us to be obedient to Him. It was from this society that God began part of His beautiful plan.

The Call

This step in Biblical history is monumental. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:8, “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.” How important is it for us to know that Abraham answered the Gospel call? Paul thought it was important. Matthew included Abraham’s name in the first sentence of the gospel account. Matthew 1:1 implies the importance of the promise made to Abraham. Jesus Christ is the promised seed! Jesus is the blessing! Abraham was called to leave everything he knew and understood. He answered that call. Might we say, he bravely answered that call.

God desired to utilize Abraham in such a way that his response to God’s call would mean a blessing to every person in the world. Abraham was a vital instrument in the redemption of the world. What was the entirety of the promise?

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy

kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Gen. 12:1-3)

Genesis 12:1-3 plays an important role in the Biblical narrative that records this Abrahamic Covenant. These verses contain the first recorded speech of the Lord to Abraham (here called by his former name, Abram, until his name-change in Genesis 17:5). The Lord's words here are foundational to all that follow in His dealing with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Israel in the remainder of the Old Testament. Abraham heard what God spoke to him, and he left. He did not know the great lengths that would be taken for these promises to be fulfilled. The covenant was confirmed by subsequent reiteration and enlargement. It was ratified by an oath of God (Gen. 15:17-21) and solemnized by the recognized method of confirming an oath (cf. Gen. 15:18). It was confirmed by the birth of Isaac and by the reiterated promises given to Isaac (Gen. 17:9) and to Jacob (Gen. 28:12-13). We also have the benefit of seeing the covenant fulfilled. Sometimes God was not pleased with His people, but He was not going to break His promise. In this passage in Jeremiah, we not only see that there was a covenant in place, but a promise for a new covenant and hints of a great commission.

Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house

of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they break, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD. (Jer. 31:31-37)

Mankind today has the benefit of hindsight. We see the promise coming into fruition in steps. The part affecting mankind the most integrally is the coming of Jesus Christ, His death, burial, and resurrection and the establishment of His church.

Did Abraham hear the Gospel call? Absolutely he did. Without any type of knowledge of what was to play out before him, his action helped bring Jesus to the world.

Our Time

In society

God gave mankind free will. The beauty of this is that mankind can make their own decisions. God desires us to be obedient to Him, but we also can choose to be disobedient. Some bemoan that since bad things happen God is evil or cannot exist. This is a preposterous notion either made out of being hurt or out of sheer ignorance. If someone smokes for sixty years, he cannot shake his fist at God if he develops lung cancer. If someone consumes alcoholic beverages and operates a motor vehicle and crashes into an innocent car, that is not an act of God, but someone unwisely using his free will. For these very reasons (and a multitude like), one only needs to turn on the news today to see that our society is going into moral decay.

While some may look at their younger days with rose-tinted glasses to claim that their time was perfect and free from the sin of today, our society has always had people who did not desire to be obedient to God. Things have steadily gotten worse, but there have always been issues. The modern Christian faces a society that praises people for their immoral behavior and encourage the shedding of fear against moral society and finding acceptance in sinful activities. We need to look no further than the hub of the entertainment world.

The consumption of alcohol and drugs are lifestyles that are glorified. Sexual immorality is painted in such a light that to disagree makes you a villain. Our society has come to the point where homosexuality, promiscuity, and date rape are “the new normal.” Half of all marriages end in divorce and over 40 percent of our babies (the ones who escape abortion) are born to unwed mothers.

A two-parent family is the best and most productive environment in which to raise children who will one day grow into sound, well-rounded adults. It is ideal when the mother is able to care for her children, while the father provides an income for the family. This helps children to grow up in a happy and stable environment. Children with this foundation have sound male *and* female role models. Sadly, this has all but disappeared. There is such a wide array of “families,” the new “normal” family structure is nearly impossible to define. For instance, one out of every three children in the U.S. is born to an unwed mother. And this number is skyrocketing. Many believe that the odds of a marriage surviving are so low that they should forgo marriage altogether. This results in cohabitation becoming the precursor to marriage—not the other way around. It was very different even a few generations ago. Couples would date and get to know each other. Sexual

relations would not have been an option until marriage. The idea of living together would have been completely foreign. Today, we see a complete reversal of this. Often, couples live together for years, appearing as married without making the firm *commitment* of marriage. Often, marriage comes because of either a surprise pregnancy or a pressure inside the relationship. This creates the commitment for all the wrong reasons. Is it any wonder that the “divorced” status is the largest growing classification in North America? But cohabitation is the simplest of these new “families.” Single-parent families lack balanced gender role models. A boy raised by his mother may never learn how to be a proper father. The same principle applies to a girl brought up by a single father. What father would understand the problems an adolescent girl experiences? What about the concept of two parents of the same gender? How would a child learn to understand the differences between genders and know their roles in society? Or what about “swinging” parents? Imagine going back just 50 years and trying to explain such things. In our society, the nuclear family is the last bastion of morality, and its defenses are being breached. As stated above, over 80% of marriages will suffer some form of adultery and, ultimately,

many end in divorce. It should come as no surprise, since society places so much “value” on sex. Before marriage, the average person has had up to five sexual partners. Sex is no longer a mysterious and exciting aspect of marriage. What should be one of the most powerful expressions of love has been reduced to something as “special” as sharing a bank account or buying a car. Therefore, it is no surprise that something so under-valued is so easily marred. This framework and its examples have created what has been called the most sexually active generation of children the world has ever seen. (Shleifer 1)

With the desensitivity to morals that have been aided by anti-religious groups and the aforementioned “Hollywood,” the increase in gun violence should not be a surprise. We see a direct correlation between degradation of morals and violence. Domestic violence is rampant and on the news nightly, gun violence at schools and in communities, and violence in movies inundate the mind of those who watch television. Mind you, the flood of activities like this have nothing to do with actual guns. Guns have been available for years. We have even seen gun laws become more strict and still these numbers soar. Television has become a babysitter and an ultimate source of entertainment for families. Parents and/or guardians neglect their children. Children will replicate what they have seen. Children will take care of what is important to them. Technology allows people to carry computers in their pockets. Cellular phones and

tablets can be used to locate anything the heart desires from pornography to violence and any filth that lies in between. We see games like the “knock out game,” where a youth tries to knock an unsuspected victim unconscious with one punch, and instead of people coming to the victim’s aid, we find people using their technology to video the activity to upload it to social media.

In the Lord’s Church

I am reminded of a comic strip that I saw recently that was a discussion between Christ and, presumably, one of the apostles. Christ stated in Matthew 28:19-20, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

The other man responds, “But that last part tho...They’ll call us legalistic Bible-thumpers, y’know?”

Jesus responds, “Ugh you’re right. Ok instead just tell ‘em to invite me into their heart one time and then proclaim them born again Christians. And if anyone ever asks them why they don’t follow my teachings and commandments have them say something fuzzy about grace...Good enough, LOL” (Ford 1)

Unfortunately, we can even see some of the sinful things of the world creeping into the Lord’s church along with the idea that obeying the Word of God is not only inconvenient but hateful. Divorce has become such a problem that many elderships and gospel preachers who used to preach and teach sound doctrine on the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage have ceased to do so. These men have done hermeneutical gymnastics to create what they feel is a loophole for those who are in sin either openly allowing

unscriptural marriages to continue with no desire for repentance or the belief that if enough time elapses that the sin is swept under the rug, and apparently, out of the sight of God. The Hebrew writer proves this point moot in Hebrews 4:13, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Sin is sin and time does not change the consequences. Time and emotion do not change error or sin to being something that is okay in the sight of almighty God. Elderships, preachers, and church members that once held to the Truth of God’s Word encounter the crossroads of doing the will of the Father or studying out of the truth to appease family members or friends. Sadly, so many would rather have the applause of friends and family than approval from God’s Word. To be bold, a word that describes these changes is *cowardice*. While finding a loophole may offer a temporary reprieve to the conscience, continued study will show the loophole to close in on itself. We read in Hebrews 10:26-27, “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” Telling someone they are okay, even though the Bible says it is wrong, does not change that on the Day of Judgment the Word of God will judge us, not the word of friends. This does not just apply to the MDR conflict, but the consumption of alcoholic beverages, idolatry, mechanical instruments of music in worship, and the role of women in the church. Some are even involved in the fight for “gay rights” so that homosexuals can get married. This book will be read years from now and the fact that gay marriage did not always exist may raise someone’s eyebrows (because gay marriage is going to be legal very soon), I pray that the

Lord's church will still hold that the only place for sexual relations is between one man and one woman in the sanctity of marriage. While the people on the left will say we are on the "wrong side of history," we should all desire to be on the wrong side of history if being on the "right side" that means that we will be at odds with God. I would much rather be on the right side of God the Father, regardless of what society deems as correct.

Our Call

While wandering a deserted beach at dawn, stagnant in my work, I saw a man in the distance bending and throwing as he walked the endless stretch toward me. As he came near, I could see that he was throwing starfish, abandoned on the sand by the tide, back into the sea. When he was close enough I asked him why he was working so hard at this strange task. He said that the sun would dry the starfish and they would die. I said to him that I thought he was foolish. there were thousands of starfish on miles and miles of beach. One man alone could never make a difference. He smiled as he picked up the next starfish. Hurling it far into the sea he said, "It makes a difference for this one." I abandoned my writing and spent the morning throwing starfish."(Eiseley)

Regardless of our society going out of control with immorality, we have a responsibility to share the greatest

thing possible—the Gospel. We have two separate accounts of Christ calling for people to spread the Gospel. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Mat. 28:18-20). We also see in Mark 16:15-16, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” While the easiest thing to do would be to share “comforting lies,” we have to share “inconvenient truths” to those who would be lost eternally.

Why is the Gospel call to Abraham applicable to Christians today? How does the call to Abraham apply to Christians today? Galatians 3:26-29 makes this clear, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” The Bible teaches us that it takes belief and baptism for a person to be considered “In Christ”. If we are obedient, we are part of Abraham’s seed; we are part of the very promise that God made to Abraham.

Conclusion

Abraham left without knowing what we know. He did so without hesitation. How can we, knowing what we know, have hesitation? How can we sit back and not aid in sharing the soul-saving gospel with those who are around us? What excuses do we really have? We as Christians have a responsibility to study to show ourselves approved (2 Tim.

2:15), to love one another (John 13:33ff), to judge with righteous judgment (John 7:24), and to help those who are in sin (Gal 6:1-2) in hopes they will repent and return to the Truth (Jam. 5:19-20). We have a responsibility to share the gospel and work with our church family to give the best opportunity to have as many people go to heaven as possible, but like Abraham, it is going to be their choice to leave.

But still, how does the call to Abraham apply to us? God, in His infinite wisdom, gave mankind free moral agency. Men and women have to make the choice to do what they do every day. Abraham left merely because God told him to. We have the benefit of knowing the completeness and beauty of the message. We know our Savior, Jesus Christ. We have God's inspired Word that shares with us.

Works Cited

- Beek, M. A. *Atlas of Mesopotamia*. New York: Nelson, 1962. Print.
- Essex, Keith H. "The Abrahamic Covenant." *TMSJ* 10: 191-212. Print.
- Ford, Adam. "Matthew 28:20, American Popular Version." *Adam4dcom*. N.p., 1 Jan. 2014. Web. 4 May 2014.
- Hoerth, Alfred J.. "Abraham's Mesopotamia ." *Archaeology and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. Print.
- King James Version*. Print.
- Oppenheim, A. Leo. *Letters from Mesopotamia: Official Business, and Private Letters on Clay Tablets from Two Millennia*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967. Print.
- Schleifer, Bradford G.. "The Immorality Explosion! Part 1." *The Real Truth*. Web.

CHAPTER 24

Investigating Ishmael: The Other Son Of Abraham

Robert Jeffries

As each year passes, words seem to be so inadequate in describing my love and affection for the Southaven Church of Christ. I am so thankful for the honor and privilege that my family has been blessed with to work with such a godly congregation on a daily basis. I am so grateful for her Godly elders that have a great love for the truth. I am also thankful for each member and the love, care, and concern that they exhibit for one another.

In the midst of the Apostle Paul's inspired letter to the brethren of Galatia, he wrote the following words, "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman *was* by promise" (King James Version, Gal. 4:22-23). One of the first questions that should come to mind is why? Why did Paul write about Abraham's two sons? What significance did these two sons have for the churches of Galatia? What significance does this have for the church today?

Any good Bible student recalls the insightful writing of Paul to the Romans where he penned these words concerning the Old Testament Scriptures, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we

through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The passage from Galatians is significant because it helps us gain a better understanding of the assigned topic for this lecture: “Ishmael: Abraham’s Other Son.” In this study, we want to notice three specific points about this son. 1) The Son Who Was Born After The Flesh; 2) The Son Who Made Poor Choices; and 3) The Son Who God Uses As An Example To The Galatians.

THE SON WHO WAS BORN AFTER THE FLESH

“But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman *was* by promise” (Gal. 4:23). In order for us truly to understand what the Apostle Paul is writing about here, it is imperative for us to go back to the book of Genesis and study the account of Ishmael’s birth. Before Ishmael was born, his father, Abram, was told the following,

Now the LORD had said unto Abram,
Get thee out of thy country, and from
thy kindred, and from thy father’s house,
unto a land that I will shew thee. And I
will make of thee a great nation, and I will
bless thee, and make thy name great; and
thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless
them that bless thee, and curse him that
curseth thee: and in thee shall all families
of the earth be blessed. (Gen. 12:1-3)

This has often been called “The Abrahamic Promise.” Through this promise Abram’s seed would bless all nations. By the time we get to Genesis chapter sixteen, Abram and his wife, Sarai, are beyond the ages of child-bearing. Abram

was seventy-five and Sarai was sixty-five when they left Haran. “So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram *was* seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran” (Gen. 12:4). Genesis sixteen tells us that ten years had passed which would make them eighty-five and seventy-five years of age. “And Sarai Abram’s wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife” (Gen. 16:3).

After ten years had passed, Sarai believed that God was not going to bless her with children. Earlier in the Scriptures, we find that Sarai was barren. “But Sarai was barren; she *had* no child” (Gen. 11:30). For years, Abram and Sarai tried to have children but to no avail. Some today have struggled in this area as well. No doubt, it can be very frustrating and challenging. Couples who had trouble bearing children faced other challenges during this particular time period, especially from a social standpoint. “In ancient societies it was very shameful for a woman to be barren” (Cloer 34).

So, Sarai devised a plan in order to ensure that Abram would have a child. “Now Sarai Abram’s wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name *was* Hagar. 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” (Gen. 16:1-2). Sarai wanted Abram to conceive a child with Hagar. “During this time period polygamy was practiced mainly on the basis of two reasons, 1) The barrenness of a wife. Or, 2) The inability to produce a male heir. In such cases, the husband was free to take a second wife; but a more common practice

was for the husband to have a son through a slave or a servant girl such as Hagar” (Cloer 34). “The Code of Hammurabi, which governed Mesopotamia during this time period, had 282 laws” (Wikipedia). Of those 282 laws, one dealt with the situation that is at hand. “A wife from a prominent family who was unable to bear children had the option of getting a concubine for her husband to bear her husband children in her place. A child born to that union would be reckoned as her child and would have legal rights as a legitimate offspring of the marriage” (Cloer 34). However, this was never the plan for marriage and the family relationship. Notice the words of Jesus as He was questioned about the subject of marriage,

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?” (Mat. 19:3-5).

Nowhere in God’s law were there any provisions or encouragements to have an extra-marital affair, a concubine, or any other addition to the family for the sake of having children. Bottom line: just because something is acceptable in society does not mean that God accepts it. What are some present-day examples of things that society deems acceptable, yet God’s Word finds unacceptable?

Present Day Examples

Homosexuality

In our society today, a way of living that has often been termed as an “alternative lifestyle” is same-sex relationships, or homosexuality. God’s Word, Old or New Testament, has remained consistent on this subject. Consider the following:

Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it *is* abomination. (Lev. 18:22)

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood *shall be* upon them. (Lev. 20:13)

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence

of their error which was meet. (Rom. 1:24-27)

For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine. (1 Tim. 1:10)

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 7)

Abortion

Since 1973, when abortion became legalized in our country, over fifty million babies have been aborted (Ertelt). However, societal approval does not equate God's approval. God hates "hands that shed innocent blood" (Pro. 6:17). Another aspect that many fail to consider when it comes to abortion is that it violates what God has said in regard to the way we treat others.

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. (Mat. 7:12)

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath

fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law. (Rom. 13:8-10)

Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful. (Rom. 1:31)

Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good. (2 Tim. 3:3)

Alcohol

In our country, the age of twenty-one is the legal age for one to consume alcohol. So many look forward to that special birthday because it gives them the complete rite of passage into adulthood. Others have turned to the bottle to help them cope with their problems and believe it is the answer. However, when we open God's Word, we find that God has always forbidden the partaking of alcohol.

Wine *is* a mocker, strong drink *is* raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. (Pro. 20:1)

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, *that* they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, *till* wine inflame them! (Isa. 5:11)

Fornication

One of the accepted things to do in the twenty-first century is to have pre-marital or extra-marital relationships. Nearly every TV show and movie supports this kind of immorality. But society is not our standard; God is.

Marriage *is* honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. (Heb. 13:4)

Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. (1 Cor. 6:18)

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness. (Gal. 5:19)

Lying

Society calls it decency, because we are trying to spare the feelings of someone else. It does not matter if it is a little white lie or a bald-faced lie, it is still a lie. How does God feel about lying?

Lying lips *are* abomination to the LORD:
but they that deal truly *are* his delight.
(Pro. 12:22)

A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands
that shed innocent blood. (Pro. 6:17)

Another point we could make here is the appeal from a woman. More than likely, if anyone else would have devised this plan, it would have been easy for Abram to say no. However, it is oftentimes difficult to say no to a woman that you trust. A woman's influence can be very powerful. It can be used in a positive way or a negative way. One prime example of using it in a negative way (one with which we are all too familiar) is the example of Adam and Eve. A positive example that comes to mind is the one Peter uses. "Likewise, ye wives, *be* in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives" (1 Pet. 3:1). Abram gives in to the wishes of Sarai and goes to Hagar. "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" (Gen. 16:2). The word *hearken* means "to obey."

The woman Sarai selected to be the surrogate mother was her handmaid, Hagar. "Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name *was* Hagar...And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife" (Gen. 16:1; Gen. 16:3). A handmaid was a "female slave" (Strong). Hagar was considered to be the personal property of Sarai. So Abram took her as his wife and "went in" (had a sexual relationship) to her (Gen. 16:4).

"Sarai devised the plan; Abram agreed to it. This is similar to the fall of Adam and Eve. Several things were wrong with the plan:

1. It violated God's plan for monogamous marriage which he instituted in the beginning (Gen. 2).
2. It was a sinful use of Hagar who was not consulted about her wishes in the whole scheme.
3. It was presumptuous for them to think God needed help in providing the promised seed." (Winton 99)

Sarai made the plan and Abram executed the plan, making it a plan that was human in origin and fulfilled fleshly desires. God told Hagar through the angel of the Lord some things about the child she would bear.

And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. (Gen. 16:10-12)

She would bear a son and his name would be called *Ishmael*. "He would have a large number of descendants: there are nearly a billion still living today" (Winton 101). Muslims claim to be the descendants of Abraham through their relationship with Ishmael. He is described as a "wild

man,” a term that refers to loneliness and despair. “Ishmael and his descendants would be an isolated and lonely group dwelling in abandoned wilderness regions on the fringe of civilization (Job 39:5-8), where they would not only survive but thrive” (Whitworth 145). Ishmael’s descendants are of the Arabic ethnicity. His descendants have been engaged in warfare for centuries. The Middle East has always been a place of countless wars and strife. “And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren” (Gen. 16:12). Ishmael and his descendants have always struggled with getting along with others.

God’s plan to bless all nations through Abram’s seed was one that was Divine in origin. However, this would not deter God from executing his plan. God would bless Abram and Sarai with a son named Isaac who would be a part of the promised seed. “And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his seed after him” (Gen. 17:19).

THE SON WHO MADE POOR CHOICES

Just because Ishmael was born as a result of a sinful relationship between his mother and father did not mean that he had to make poor choices in life. However, when we analyze Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, it is like we have the good son (Isaac) and the bad son (Ishmael). One instance in particular comes to mind. For fourteen years, Ishmael had been Abraham’s only son and the center of attention. For those who have children, many times whenever there is a change in the family dynamics, the children do not always respond in a positive way. Ishmael responded in a way

that would change his life. In Genesis 21:10-14, the following words are recorded,

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *even* with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he *is* thy seed. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave *it* unto Hagar, putting *it* on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

Ishmael mocked Isaac. On the surface, this may not seem like that big of a deal. However, the Apostle Paul described it in a different way. He describes it as "persecution." "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is now*" (Gal. 4:29). This mocking was a form of hostility towards Isaac. It is important to understand the Hebrew and Greek tenses of the verbs that

are used in these contexts. John G. Butler suggests that the “mocking” and “persecuting” was not a one-time action, but that both of these words are in the imperfect tense, and that the action was continuous. “The continuous habit of the mocking makes the mocking something more than a harmless bit of ridicule at a celebration. It shows more than a passing emotion, but rather it shows a deep-seated heart attitude which says Ishmael’s belittling of Isaac had a lot of venom in it” (Butler 233). If something was not done about Ishmael’s mocking, there could be tragic results. Perhaps, Ishmael’s persecution could have turned into rage and destroyed the seed through which all nations would be blessed. So Sarah told Abraham to “cast out” Ishmael and Hagar. By the time Isaac was weaned, Ishmael would have been seventeen. What would cause a seventeen-year-old to persecute a three-year-old? Jealousy. How often has jealousy caused people to do things they would not normally do. One example from Scripture that comes to mind is the jealousy that turned into rage from Saul towards David.

Unfortunately, Ishmael’s descendants are still trying to accomplish things by means of persecution today. Much of the Muslim religion is grounded in persecution. The attack that took place in our country on September 11, 2001 really brought to light the persecution that is involved with this religious group. Today, suicide bombings seem to be some of the most prominent means of persecution that is used by this group of people.

Just because Ishmael’s parents made a poor choice in how they would conceive him did not mean that Ishmael had to make poor choices with his life. However, Ishmael started the ball rolling for numerous generations of poor choices. How many times have we seen that today in our world? Sometimes we use the sayings, “The apple doesn’t fall far

from the tree” or “Like father, like son.” If parents make poor financial decisions, many times so do the children. When parents are immoral, in a lot of cases, children will be, too. If parents make poor life choices, so do the children. All too often this is the case, but it does not have to be.

THE SON WHO GOD USES AS AN EXAMPLE TO THE GALATIANS

One of the reasons the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians was to enlighten them concerning justifying themselves by the Law of Moses instead of finding justification simply in the Gospel of Christ. In the fourth chapter of this book, Paul set forth a great example concerning the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. He did this through the means of an allegory. An allegory is “a description of one thing under the image of another. It is a prolonged metaphor, in which typically a series of actions are symbolic of other actions” (Webster). Albert Barnes describes an allegory this way: “Allegories are in words what hieroglyphics are in painting, the distinction between a parable and an allegory is said to be, that a parable is supposed history (or events that could happen—RJ) to illustrate some important truth and an allegory is based on real facts” (Barnes). As one notices the prolonged metaphor in Galatians 4, one can readily see the differences between the two covenants. Consider the inspired words of Paul of this historical event:

Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage

with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, *thou* barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. (Gal. 4:24-31)

Paul used a number of words as a reference to the Old Covenant in the allegory: Mt. Sinai (place it was given), Jerusalem (earthly Jerusalem was in charge), bondage (after all, Hagar was in bondage to Sarah. Those who follow the law were in bondage to it, because they were unable to obey it perfectly. The law convicted one of sin, but had no remedy to remove it), persecuted (Ishmael persecuted Isaac, his descendants are still persecuting God's followers today), born after the flesh (reference to Ishmael and the way that he was born), cast out (reference to Ishmael being cast out, in like manner, the law would be cast out, causing Judaism to cease to be God's approved religion) (Taylor 70).

Paul also used a number of words as a reference to the New Covenant in the allegory as he defends the Gospel of Christ. Jerusalem from above (spiritual Jerusalem, Heaven.

This is where our citizenship is—Phi. 3:20), free (in contrast the law placed us in bondage to the law of sin and death, Rom. 8:2), bondswoman (Sarai), born of Spirit (represents Christians are born of the Spirit—John 3:3-5).

As the Apostle Paul brought the allegory to a close, he wrote the following words, “So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondswoman, but of the free” (Gal. 4:31). In the very next chapter, the first verse expounded upon what we have by being born of the freewoman: liberty. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). As long as they stood firm, they could continue to have the freedom that Christ provided, but if they sought to justify themselves by the Law, they would fall from grace (Gal. 5:4). What a powerful way to encourage these Christians to abstain from the temptation to go back to the Law. In like manner, many are tempted today to go back to sin and leave the freedom that is found in Christ. May we resist that temptation with everything we have.

Works Cited

- Barnes, Albert. “Genesis.” e-sword. Digital file.
- Butler, John G. *Abraham: The Father of the Jews*. Clinton: LBC, 1993. Print.
- Cloer, Eddie. *Genesis*. Searcy: Resource, 2013. Print. Truth for Today Commentaries.
- Ertelt, Steven. “55,772,015 Abortions in America Since Roe v. Wade in 1973.” *LifeNews.com*. 18 Jan. 2013. Web.
- King James Version*. Print. S
- Strong, James. “Handmaid.” Strong’s Hebrews and Greek Dictionaries. e-Sword. Digital file.
- Taylor, Robert R., Jr. *Galatians and Philippians*. Pulaski: Sain, 1986. Print.

- Whitworth, Michael. *The Epic of God*. Bowie: Start2Finish Books, 2012. Print.
- Wikipedia. "Code of Hammurabi." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 10 Jun. 2014. Web.
- Winton, Bob. *Outlined Commentary on Genesis*. Gallipolis: Bob Winton, 1998. Print.

CHAPTER 25

Entertaining Angels Unawares

Mike Vestal

The Bible is a book both **from** God and **about** God and His will for men. It therefore makes a great deal of sense to start studying any Bible passage by asking, What does this passage teach about God? Amazingly, this essential gets lost all too often in all the other details of exegesis and homiletics. Then another fundamental question can be asked, What does this passage teach concerning mankind? In a very real sense, good Bible students need to ask the same questions of a text being studied that Saul of Tarsus asked of Jesus in the events leading to his conversion: 1) “Who are You, Lord?” (New King James Version, Acts 9:5) and 2) “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Acts 9:6). A proper understanding of each of these questions, as well as the order in which they are asked, is crucial not only to conversion, but also to a better handling of God’s Word (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). Although there is a difference in context, our attitude should be much like that of Moses who cried to God, “Please, show me Your glory” (Exo. 33:18).

Few passages in the Old Testament more powerfully speak concerning God’s greatness and man’s appropriate response than Genesis 18. Abraham and his family had been set apart to receive the blessing of God (cf. Gen. 12:1-

3; Gen. 17:1-9; Gen. 17:17-22). In fact, God's promise of blessing to Abraham was simply part of the fulfillment of a promise He had made back in Genesis 3:15. What was that promise? It was that through the "seed" of woman that God would eventually bring a deliverer who would crush Satan and undo the wreckage introduced into the world by sin and death (cf. John 10:10; Heb. 2:14-15). While Genesis 18 does contain some wonderful lessons about hospitality, ultimately the chapter is really about God Himself. Genesis 18 gives us a wonderful Old Testament "picture" of God, along with some very valuable lessons concerning our appropriate response to Him.

A Lord Who Shows Favor And Grace (Gen. 18:1-8)

The chapter begins, "Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day" (Gen. 18:1). "The Lord" translates the Hebrew *Yahweh*. That Abraham is not mentioned by name until verse 6 suggests that this narrative builds on chapter 17, where God "appeared" to Abraham, affirmed the covenant, and indicated that Sarah would bear Isaac at the "set time" within the next year (Gen. 17:21). "By the terebinths of Mamre" establishes the location of Abraham (cf. Gen. 13:18; Gen. 14:13). Abraham has not moved since he first came into the area and was dwelling in a tent in the land that God had promised him. It was "in the heat of the day," and the shade provided by the trees could mean a forty to fifty degree difference in temperature in that part of the world. People would have been relaxing at this time of day due to the extreme heat.

Abraham sees "three men" standing by him (Gen. 18:2). Although apparently Abraham did not at first recognize the identity of his three visitors (cf. Heb. 13:2), the clues will

intensify as the story unfolds and he realizes they are the Lord and two angels (cf. Gen. 18:13-14; Gen. 18:17; Gen. 19:1). Why would “the Lord” appear to Abraham in such a manner? The most fundamental answer to this question would be that God is a God of favor and of grace” (cf. 1 Pet. 5:10; Exo. 34:6-7). As noted by Allen Ross, “A good case can be made that the visitation to eat in Abraham’s tent was meant to convey intimate fellowship, and on the basis of such a close relationship, the Lord would guarantee the imminent birth of the child of promise” (342). After all, Abraham is known in Scripture as “the friend of God” (cf. Jam. 2:23; 2 Chr. 20:7; Isa. 41:8). the Lord would use this occasion to communicate effectively the close relationship in which the promises were based (cf. Gen. 26:28-30; Exo. 24). “As the true identity of the visitors dawned on the patriarch, he would have been moved by the nature of the visit” (Ross 343).

Not only does this gracious visit provide assurance of the covenant made with Abraham, it also will remind Abraham and Sarah that, even in their advanced years, nothing is “too hard for the Lord” (Gen. 18:14). The chapter further indicates that God in His great grace reveals to Abraham His intentions concerning Sodom (Gen. 18:16-21). The Bible also records that the gracious Father stays to allow Abraham the opportunity to intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah and to express his concern for God’s righteousness and mercy (Gen. 18:22-33).

It certainly is worth noting how Abraham responded to these guests. After all, the Lord typically stays only where He is wanted (cf. Rev. 3:20). The text states: “He ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground” (Gen. 18:2). Abraham was about a hundred years old at this time (cf. Gen. 17:1), yet he “ran” to serve! He may not have known exactly who his visitors were but sensed that they were worthy

of honorable treatment. Then notice Abraham's words in verse 3, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant" (Gen. 18:3). The Masoretic Text seems to have shown little doubt that Abraham promptly recognized one of the visitors as the Lord. Perhaps so, but whether the expression represents a polite and respectful greeting of others or is to be taken as a specific reference to Deity is not made clear by the immediate context. Abraham indeed will come to know the identity of his guests; whether he does at this particular point in the narrative is a matter of judgment (Davis 196, Leupold 536).

Genesis 18:3-5 contain a series of polite but urgent requests: 1) please stay and do not pass on by; 2) please allow water to be brought to wash your feet; 3) please rest yourselves under the shade of the tree; 4) please allow food to be prepared and brought to you; and (5) please refresh yourselves. As Warren W. Wiersbe pointed out, "Abraham was immediately both curious and courteous. Hospitality is the first law of the East, and Abraham faithfully obeyed it" (74). All service ought to be rendered with our relationship to the Lord ever at the forefront. At times, Christian service is far from what it should be due to the fact that this truth is no longer properly appreciated and applied (cf. Mat. 25:31-46). "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men...for you serve the Lord Jesus Christ" (Col. 3:23-24).

Consider some of the characteristics of Abraham's hospitality and service. It was **humble** in that he "bowed" (Gen. 18:2) and genuinely pleaded with his guests for the opportunity to serve (Gen. 18:3-5). Abraham's service was **personal**. Although he was older and quite rich (cf. Gen. 14:14), he deliberately chose to have a "personal touch." Abraham's service was undoubtedly **courteous**. He gave his guests the clear impression that it was his privilege to serve;

not even an ounce of pretense or any indication of selfishness was present. Further, it was **immediate**. He did not delay or procrastinate. He “ran” to meet the guests (Gen. 18:2), “hastened” to tell Sarah to prepare bread (Gen. 18:6), “ran” to the herd to get a “tender and good calf,” and “hastened” to have it dressed and prepared (Gen. 18:7).

One must also notice that Abraham’s service was **generous** and **sacrificial**. He is serving only the best he can offer to his guests. Bread is made from “fine meal” (Gen. 18:6) and the calf is “tender and good” (Gen. 18:7). The “three measures of fine meal” of verse 6 would have been far more than “a morsel of bread” (Gen. 18:5); it would have been approximately thirty-five quarts! Note also the **collective** nature of this service. Abraham not only was involved himself but got Sarah to prepare the bread and a young man to prepare the calf. Others were doubtless in some way involved. Finally, Abraham’s service was **attentive**. He “stood by them under the tree as they ate” (Gen. 18:8). He was ready to serve in any way necessary.

Much can be learned about hospitality and service from this passage (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:9). Romans 12:11-13 speak of being “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” and “given to hospitality.” Think about it. Abraham interrupted a comfortable afternoon nap during the heat of the day to extend hospitality to these three guests. But by the time the chapter concludes, hospitable and serving Abraham turns out to be the one immeasurably blessed! Such is the nature of the grace of God (cf. Rom. 5:15-21; 2 Cor. 12:7-9; Eph. 2:7).

A Lord Who Knows All And For Whom Nothing Is Too Hard (18:9-15)

There is at times a marvelous abruptness to God, His timing and His ways. “Then they said to him, ‘Where is Sarah

your wife?” (Gen. 18:9). The plural is correct: “They said.” H. C. Leupold noted: “Either all spoke or else they displayed such interest in the question that it was as though all had spoken” (540). The question almost certainly is rhetorical, for the One who knows Sarah’s name would also know her whereabouts. Further note that she is called by her new name, Sarah (cf. Gen. 17:15-19); this serves as a direct link concerning one of the purposes of the visit—her very name spoke of the promise God had made to Abraham. To ask a man about his wife would have been a very unusual thing in that culture, so the question not only serves to point the conversation in the way they wished to go, it also indicates something of the intimacy and closeness the Lord felt toward Abraham. Walton notes that in two previous passages where God asked where someone is (Gen. 3:9; Gen. 4:9), “it has not been with the intention of getting information but of drawing a conversation to the point” (452).

The promise is specifically and emphatically stated in Genesis 18:10: “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” The ESV renders “according to the time of life” as “about this time next year.” Although there are three guests, note the singular “I.” This word is from the Lord and signifies His divine provision and blessing. The **message** is sure in that it comes from God Himself, the **time** is definite—“about this time next year”—and the **promise** is definite and assured: “Sarah your wife shall have a son.”

Sarah was listening behind the tent door (Gen. 18:9-10). Gen. 18:11-12 reveal the initial response of Sarah to the news. Sarah is approximately ninety years old at this time (Gen. 17:17) and the sheer physical obstacle of conceiving at such an advanced age to her seemed insurmountable. Not only did the thought of Abraham and Sarah having a

son seem impossible, it seemed absurd, and so she “laughed within herself” (Gen. 18:12).

Sarah, although a woman of faith (cf. Heb. 11:11; Rom.4:18-21; 1 Pet. 3:1-7), did not initially respond to the message of the Lord as she should. The Lord earlier had given this word to Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:15-21); now, in this special “visit,” He says this in the hearing of both Abraham and Sarah. Her reaction is understandable but inappropriate and wrong. She believes the message simply is too good to be true. Sarah needs to see beyond her own inability and the inability of her “lord” Abraham to embrace in faith the ability of the Lord and what He has plainly said. Surely there is a powerful lesson in this for every Christian wife!

Sarah ultimately was guilty of questioning both the Lord’s veracity and His ability. God does not respond to Sarah’s faithlessness by taking away the promise, but by dealing with her unbelief. Genesis 18:13 says, “And the Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh?’” The speaker is identified as “the Lord” (*Yahweh*). “The rebuke is kind but forceful in its construction. What made the laughter amazing to the visitor was the ability of the one making the promise” (Ross 344). The Lord’s actions reflect His omniscience (Psa. 139:6; Heb. 4:13; 1 John 3:20). The underlying issue at stake is brought to bear in Genesis 18:13-14 by the two questions of the Lord. As noted by Ross, “The unquestionable, decisive fact both for the narrator and reader is a word of *Yahweh* was laughed at” (345). The Bible does not gloss over the sins of its greatest heroes. The text focuses on Sarah’s unbelief because she went on to lie about it due to being “afraid” (Gen. 18:15).

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14). The term properly rendered “too hard” or “difficult” in this verse can also mean “marvelous” or “wonderful” (cf. Psa. 139:6; Psa. 139:14). The Lord then repeats the promise to Abraham and

Sarah, indicating its certainty “at the appointed time.” God’s knowledge is matched by His power. This truth reverberates throughout Scripture (cf. Job 42:2; Jer. 32:17; Jer. 32:27; Luke 1:37). The question was not, Is this too hard for Abraham and Sarah? The answer to *that question* is obvious. The question is, Is anything too hard for the Lord? We must not doubt the Word of God, for His Word is a reflection of His very nature (cf. John 17:17). This is not faith in faith itself, but faith that rests in the glorious character of God. It is possible to get so consumed with how big our problems and difficulties are that we fail to emphasize properly how big our God is (Eph. 3:20-21)!

A Lord Who Reveals And Cares (18:16-21)

If you were to talk to people on the street about God, you would likely hear doubts not only about His existence but also about His fairness. One thing is sure—when we question the existence and character of the Lord and think we can do better, we have a defective view of God (cf. Rom. 11:33-36). Right living ought to be based on right thinking about God! The remaining verses of Genesis 18 grow out of what has just transpired in verses 9-15. This section inaugurates a break from friendship and fellowship (Gen. 18:1-15) to judgment and mercy (Gen. 18:22-33). God is all-knowing and all-powerful, but does He really care and is He fair? As noted by Ross, “This passage has most frequently (and legitimately) been treated for its emphasis on intercession; the predominant theme of the section, however is justice” (347).

The point of Genesis 18:16-21 is that the Lord does care and that He is fair. However, God makes sure that the lesson potential of what He is about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah is not lost on Abraham (or us). This God does by letting

Abraham know, before anything happens to Sodom and Gomorrah, what is going on in His mind. The Lord wants His friend Abraham to know that His decisions are righteous; therefore, God reveals His thoughts to Abraham concerning the matter. God chose to reveal His thoughts and intentions.

Once the discussion had ended regarding Abraham and Sarah having a child, the visitors “looked toward Sodom” (Gen.18:16). Notice that Abraham did not just wave good-bye to his guests, but went with them a while “to send them on the way.” If he had not taken the time to walk with them, he may never have had the opportunity to understand the Lord’s plans concerning Sodom. “This is a simple principle: If we do not make time to spend with the Lord, we will not understand His ways and will be confused in our thinking about Him (Isa. 55:8-9). We cannot build a relationship with God ‘on the fly’” (Krell). How we need to know God and to better understand His ways (John 17:3; Phi. 3:10)! Ultimately, we are only as close to God as we choose to be.

It seems God may have had a double motivation for revealing judgment on Sodom to Abraham. First, Abraham was His “friend” and was to be a channel of blessing to all the nations (Gen. 18:18). Second, Abraham could use this information about Sodom to teach his descendants so that they would “keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Gen. 18:19). Abraham being a blessing to the world depended first on his being God’s friend and then upon being a blessing in his own home. What a powerful lesson for making a positive impact upon future generations (cf. Deu. 6:4-12; Psa. 78:4-8)!

Our families are both a gift from God and a sacred trust (Psa. 127:3-5; 1 Cor. 4:1-2). They are ours for a while so they can be God’s forever. A deep relationship with God and a

sincere desire to do His will ought to be instilled in every Christian home. If we are not intentional about making a positive spiritual impact in our homes for generations to come, we are surely failing in one of the most important areas of life. One writer speaks of the acrostic “PIED” for positively impacting our homes: 1) **p**ray for them; 2) **i**nstruct them; 3) **e**xemplify Christ ourselves; and 4) **d**iscipline them properly (Krell).

God wanted Abraham to so influence his descendants that they would “keep the way of the Lord” and “do righteousness and justice” (Gen. 18:19). They were “to live in conformity with the will of God (righteousness) and to make the right decisions based on His will (justice)” (Ross 350). This surely has to do with both the inner and outer aspects of truly righteous behavior; it is a matter of both attitude and action. The words of Micah 6:8 come to mind: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” A sense of joyful fellowship comes when one properly respects and obeys God. In no better way has God ever revealed Himself and His care for man than in the sending of His Son (Heb. 1:1-3). How we need truly to hear what has been revealed through Him!

The “outcry” against Sodom’s “very grievous” sins is so great that the Lord Himself comes down to behold it (Gen. 18:20-21). The Lord’s judgment will be based on full and accurate information. This statement poses no difficulty for the Lord’s omniscience; it simply speaks of the Lord’s character and fairness. He personally observes sin. The cry out of Sodom is *evil*, and the response of the Lord will be *righteous*. The Hebrew text literally states, “I will go down personally and see if their sin is made complete or full” (cf. Gen. 11:1-9; Gen. 15:16). In Ezekiel 16:49-50 some of the

sins of Sodom are mentioned: pride and haughtiness (full of self), fulness of food (overfed), abundance of idleness (unconcerned and under-worked), did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy (indifference to the hurting), and they “committed abomination before Me” (sexual sin and perversion; cf. 2 Pet. 2:6-7; Jude 7). These verses basically say that Sodom’s sins “shouted” for God’s judgment (cf. Gen. 19:13)!

A Lord Who Is Righteous And Merciful (18:22-33)

Abraham most assuredly was the friend of God, but in this section we also see him as a true friend of men. Because Abraham was God’s friend, he knew more about Sodom’s future than the citizens themselves. Earlier, Abraham by God’s grace had “saved” Sodom (Gen. 14:13-24); now he intercedes on Sodom’s behalf. Please notice two important phrases as Abraham’s guests “turned away” and “went toward Sodom” (Gen. 18:22). The two phrases are: 1) “Abraham stood before the Lord” (Gen. 18:22) and 2) “Abraham came near and said, ‘Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?’” (Gen. 18:23). Evidently, the two angels went on to Sodom (cf. Gen. 19:1), but Abraham stands before “the Lord” (*Yahweh*).

Viewing these expressions in their context indicates that Abraham in both heart and mind was reaching out to God in reverence, service, and loving praise (cf. Exo. 30:20; Isa. 29:13). Hebrews 4:16 and James 4:8 express a similar idea in “drawing near.” Certainly compassion for Lot and his family motivated Abraham, but more is involved. He “came near” to God to plead on behalf of Sodom and on the basis of God’s own character. Warren Wiersbe made the following pertinent observation: “In the first half of the chapter, Abraham is running here and there; but in the last half, he is standing

before the Lord and interceding for Lot and the other people in Sodom” (77-78). There is an appropriate time both to run in diligent service and to draw near to and to stand before God in reverence and in prayer.

As Allen Ross says regarding this section, “Since the format is one of question and answer, it is different from all subsequent intercessions. Through the questions and the answers the righteousness of the Lord in His judgment is probed” (351). Abraham was concerned about the “righteous” (note the frequent repetition of the term in this section) who might perish with the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah if they were destroyed and he was concerned about how this related to the righteousness of God. Abraham had a burden for God’s righteousness and for souls. How we need to strike a similar balance today!

Then and now, the following words are true: “As I live,” says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live’” (Eze. 33:11). God would have “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). This section shows a marked contrast between the “righteous” and the “wicked” (cf. Psa. 1). This is well summarized in Genesis 18:25, “Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

We must not miss the point in studying this section. Genesis 18:22-33 is not just some audacious beat-down of God! The Lord deliberately gives Abraham the opportunity to express the burden he feels for the souls of Sodom and Gomorrah and for the very character of God Himself. God wants Abraham to realize fully that punishment of these cities

is not merely an act of divine judgment but that it is a just and righteous judgment. Abraham comes to this realization as he continues to *decrease* the number of righteous souls for which God might be willing to spare His judgment.

Great reverence, persistence, and concern for God's character and for souls all come together as Abraham goes from fifty to forty-five, from forty-five to five less, from forty to thirty, from thirty to twenty and from twenty to ten (Gen. 18:24-32). Each time God responds with an "I will spare all the place for their sakes" (Gen. 18:26), "I will not destroy it" (Gen. 18:28; Gen. 18:31-32) or "I will not do it" (Gen. 18:29-30). This is no auction and Abraham is no auctioneer! Abraham understands that the presence of the righteous benefits the wicked in ways the unrighteous never understand. The "wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness" (cf. Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6), but even then He is just and righteous. Abraham will come to see in God's destruction of the cities on the plain that not even ten righteous souls could be found. Only Lot was found as "righteous" (2 Pet. 2:7-9), and he and two of his daughters were spared by God's mercy and grace (cf. Gen. 19:12-26).

Sometimes it is asked why Abraham stopped with ten righteous souls. Was there something in the tone of the conversation or in the way God responded? Was it that Abraham felt that surely ten righteous souls could be found? A number of Bible students have commented that based on Genesis 19 there were at least ten souls in Lot's family. Perhaps a clue is given in Genesis 18:33, "So the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place." It appears that the conversation ended because the Lord decided that it should end. The truth was established that the God of righteousness

is also the God of justice and mercy. There was nothing else to be said.

We live in a country and in a world where evil is woven into the very fabric of culture. If Sodom and Gomorrah by their wickedness drew God's wrath and judgment, we surely cannot be very far behind (Pro. 14:34; Pro. 28:12). Intercessors like Abraham and a few righteous souls can and do make a difference!

We know that Judgment Day is coming. And we know from God's holy Word that men can be ready. In Abraham's dialogue with God, the number stopped at ten. Why? Because at the end of the day and in view of all that Scripture has to say about the subject of righteousness, he could have gone all the way down to one but the person with the necessary sort of righteousness that would avert God's wrath could not be found in those cities or even in the entire world (cf. Hab. 1:12-13; Rom. 3:10; Rom. 3:23). The One in whom real righteousness could be found had not yet come (cf. Gal. 4:4). But He *would* come, and He *did*. He *alone* can make men right with God. His name is Jesus (cf. Mat. 1:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18). And in the words of Jesus, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and He saw it" (through faith) and "was glad" (John 8:56). Oh, what a Savior! Oh, what a glorious God!

Works Cited

- Davis, John Jefferson. *Paradise to Prison, Studies in Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975. Print.
- New King James Version*. Print.
- Krell, Keith. "A Divine Encounter" (Genesis 18:1-15). *Bible.org*. Web.
- Krell, Keith. "If I Was God. . ." (Genesis 18:16-33). *Bible.org*. Web.

- Leupold, H.C. *Exposition of Genesis I*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992. Print.
- Ross, Allen P. *Creation & Blessing*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. Print.
- Sailhamer, John H. *Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990. Vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Print.
- Walton, John H. *Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. *The NIV Application Commentary*. Print.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Obedient*. Wheaton: Victor, 1991. Print.

CHAPTER 26

Three Tests Of Abraham's Faith

Allen Webster

Abraham gained his title as the father of the faithful the hard way. It was not an honorary degree or the product of an ad campaign. God gave him three tests that lasted an even one hundred years. He did not ace the exams, but he did come out with a passing grade.

The interesting aspect of this study is that God gives every Christian the same three tests. Paul says we are to “walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham” (Rom. 4:12). What faith tests does that entail?

Leave Home And Never Go Back (Heb. 11:8)

The Lord told Abraham “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Gen. 12:1). He immediately packed his belongings and made his way five hundred miles northward until he came to Haran. There he sojourned until his father died at the age of 205 (Gen. 11:32).

Then Abram again “took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came” (Gen. 12:5; cf. Gen. 11:31). He lived a

nomadic lifestyle for the next century (age 75 to 175). He lived in many places including Shechem, Bethel, the Negeb (south), Egypt, Gerar, and Mamre.

God commanded Abram to leave Ur of the Chaldees (Mesopotamia) because it was an idolatrous city. In the northwest segment of the city, archeologists have unearthed an imposing temple of the moon god, Nanna (also called Sin). Archaeology shows that both Ur in Lower Mesopotamia and Haran in Upper Mesopotamia were centers of moon worship. Even the names Terah, Laban, Sarah, and Milcah reveal allegiance to the moon-god. Sumerian culture in southern Mesopotamia had a number of gods in its pantheon: three chief astral deities—Nanna (the moon), Nanna's son Utu (the sun), and Nanna's daughter Inanna. Enlil was considered the chief god, with his cult center at the city of Nippur (Wilson 1).

Abraham's family members were idolaters. God later reminded Israel of their spiritual ancestry:

Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood [a reference to the Euphrates River] in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac. (Jos. 24:2–3)

Jacob's wife Rachel, who probably grew up with Terah's religion, stole her father's "household gods" (Gen. 31:32–35; Gen. 35:2–4).

Abraham likely found it difficult to leave for a couple of reasons:

First, People In Their Seventies Do Not Usually Enjoy Change.

Abraham had to leave the familiarity of his hometown and move to a strange place he had never seen before. When his family asked where he was going, he had to say, “I don’t know. God hasn’t told me yet.”

Second, Abraham’s Life Was Likely Comfortable And Settled.

He was a wealthy man (cf. Gen. 13:2; Gen. 14:14), and Ur was a place with a comfortable lifestyle. Wayne Jackson thinks Ur was possibly “the greatest city of the ancient world at that time. It is estimated that some 25,000 people lived within the city limits (walls), with as many as 200,000 in the outlying area. Two-story homes with ten to twenty rooms lined the narrow, twisting streets.” Abraham thus likely left a two-story mansion to live the rest of his life camping in a tent, sleeping on the ground.

Abraham could have gone back, but he never did. The Bible refers to that possibility: “If they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned” (Heb. 11:15). Abraham consciously made this choice because he was looking for a heavenly city (Heb. 11:16).

When we begin our journey to heaven, our faith is given the same test as Abraham’s. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Mat. 16:24–25). Jesus told the young ruler: “One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21).

Counselors tell drug addicts and alcoholics they must immediately replace their friends and stop frequenting bars

and places where drugs are sold or used. A recovering drug addict simply cannot have a friend who is using. An alcoholic simply cannot sit in a bar and sip soft drinks. Marriage counselors striving to save a marriage tell the one involved in an illicit relationship to break off all contact with his/her lover. If it requires quitting a job, moving to a new city, or breaking up longtime friendships, so be it. A clean and complete break must take place if the marriage is to be saved.

When we come to Christ, we must make an equally clean and clear break with the sins of our past. Godless, sin-loving friends will corrupt good morals (1 Cor. 15:33). Sinful practices have to be quit cold-turkey, leaving no place for the devil (Eph. 4:27). Sinful paraphernalia must be destroyed, even at a substantial personal loss (Acts 19:19).

Paul left his former life when he became a Christian. He said,

What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ...Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.
(Phi. 3:7-14)

He then applied his example as a general rule for all Christians: "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded" (Phi. 3:15). To the Corinthians he wrote, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing...let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,

perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 6:17–7:1; cf. Acts 2:40; Rev. 18:4).

Wait For Promises To Come True (Heb. 11:9)

Abraham “sojourned.” When God called Abraham, He made some promises to him (Gen. 12:1–7):

- a great name
- a great nation of descendants
- a blessing that would spread to the whole world
- a land

It took a good deal of faith for Abraham to respond to these promises, for he had no property, no prospects for greatness, no children, and no expectation of children since he and his wife were old (Gen. 11:30; Gen. 18:12).

The greater evidence of faith is that Abraham would have to wait twenty-five years before God began to fulfill His promises by the birth of Isaac when Abraham was one hundred. All the promises hinged on Sarah’s having a son, and that did not happen the first year, the second, the fifth, or even by the tenth. All this time, Abraham wondered and waited. He even complained to God: “Lord God...I go childless...to me thou hast given no seed” (Gen. 15:2–3). God reiterated His promise, “and he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:4–6).

God then gave Abraham a glimpse into the future of his family and nation. Abraham would be allowed to live to an old age. His descendants would be strangers and servants in another land but would come out rich after four hundred years (Gen. 15:13–14). God specified that it would happen in the days of Abraham’s great-great grandson—the “fourth generation.” Abraham did not know the names yet, but God

was referring to Moses—after the generations of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph (Gen. 15:16).

Abraham never lived to see the complete fulfillment. He lived till Isaac was seventy-five years old, and Jacob was fifteen. Abraham never saw descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore (Heb. 11:12). He died “not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off,” and was “persuaded of them, and embraced them” (Heb. 11:13).

Abraham’s faith was not misplaced. God has fulfilled each of His promises:

- Abraham’s name is respected by Jews, Moslems, Christians, and even unbelievers. The men of Babel wanted to make a name for themselves and failed (Gen. 11:4); Abraham trusted God and God gave him a great name.
- Israel became a great nation during the time of David and Solomon.
- The Jews have blessed all nations by giving mankind the Bible and Christ.
- Israel received the land in the time of Joshua.

Still, Abraham’s faith during his sojourn was not without its ups and downs. His patience was tested in different ways:

- He passed the test of worship in transit (Gen. 12:7–8; Gen. 13:4-18). Today, like Abraham, many Christians have their faith tested when they move to a distant community or even travel in a strange city on the Lord’s Day. God’s worship is designed to be calendar-based and not location-based. Whenever the calendar says “Sunday,” we should

find God's people and worship Him regardless of where we may be.

- He failed the test of fear and honoring his wife and marriage (Gen. 12:13). Abraham feared that the kings would murder him to have his beautiful wife Sarah, so he lied about their relationship, putting her in danger of being taken from him and sexually violated.
- He passed the test of riches and selflessness (Gen. 13:2-12).
- He passed the test of family responsibility (Gen. 14:12-16; cf. Gen. 11:28-31).
- He passed the test of humility and respect (Gen. 14:20).
- He passed the test of wisdom and protecting God's glory (Gen. 14:23).
- He failed the test of lust, leadership, and trust in God's plan (Gen. 16:3-4). Eleven years after he left Haran, Abraham got caught up in a scheme Sarah concocted to help God by using a surrogate mother since she could not get pregnant (Gen. 16:2-3). Sarah chose Hagar, her Egyptian handmaid, to carry the child. Sarah quickly regretted the decision (Gen. 16:5), and the world has been regretting it ever since—the son, Ishmael, fathered the Arab nations that have long persecuted the Jews and opposed Christianity (cf. Gen. 16:11-12). This plan was a mistake on several levels, but primarily because God was not consulted and would not use the son (Ishmael) to produce the chosen nation or the promised Seed. This decision later grieved Abraham's heart (Gen. 21:11).
- He passed the test of morality and love (Gen. 18:20-33).

- He failed the test of besetting sin (Gen. 20:2–13) and setting a good example before unbelievers (Gen. 20:9). (Note the sarcasm in Abimelech's response in Genesis 20:16.)
- He passed the ultimate test of trust in God (Gen. 22:2–10).
- He passed the test of grief (Gen. 23:1–2).

God gave Abraham a passing grade on his life:

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice. (Gen. 22:17–18)

To complete our journey, we too are in “need of patience” (Heb. 10:36). Christians are those “who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” (Rom. 2:7). “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord” (Psa. 27:14). “We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal. 5:5). We “wait for his Son from heaven” (1 The. 1:10). Like Abraham, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

Obey Even When It Is Hard (Heb. 11:17-19)

Can you imagine what Abraham felt when he finally held the promised baby? How he must have treasured every

pitch of the ball, every walk along the path, every question, smile, and conversation. Perhaps few fathers have ever doted on sons as Abraham doted on Isaac.

Fast forward through the toddler stage, the inquisitive childhood years, and the companion teen years. Abraham and Isaac have now shared the better part of a quarter century together. [Josephus suggested that Isaac was twenty-five years old at the time (1.13.2).]

With this close relationship in mind, think of how hard God's next command to Abraham would have been to obey. God said, in effect, "Kill him" (Gen. 22:2). The Lord instructed Abraham to take Isaac to Mount Moriah, and there offer the lad as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:1–13). God had never before asked for a human sacrifice; He would not again (except when He offered His own Son as a sacrifice for our sins).

Why now? God was testing Abraham. He did not want the boy's life; He wanted Abraham's heart. Abraham loved Isaac, but he could not make a living idol of him. God had to be first. God had promised Abraham many descendants, and this promise could not be fulfilled unless Isaac lived to have children or God raised him from the dead.

Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but God tests us to help bring out the best. Solomon wrote, "The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts" (Pro. 17:3). James wrote of this:

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth

he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (Jam. 1:12–15)

We should expect testing; we should invite it. David said, “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psa. 26:2).

True faith is always tested. Christians face both the initial challenge of leaving the world behind and the persistent challenge of persevering until the end (Rev. 2:10), but Christians will at times face a sharp, emotional, extremely difficult challenge to their faith. When Jesus was asked the question, “Lord, are there few that be saved?” (Luke 13:23), He did not respond by saying, “No, it is easy enough to be saved. Don’t sweat the small stuff.” Instead He said unto them, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24). *Strive* here is a strong word (*agonizomai*) which means “to struggle, to compete for a prize, fight.”

Our tests may be like Abraham’s in some respect.

- It may not make sense, as Abraham must have thought about this new command. Some, for instance, have difficulty making sense of God’s command to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). They may wonder what water covering the body has to do with erasing sin from the soul. No matter; true faith obeys God even when it does not make complete sense.

- It may go against our natural emotions, as Abraham's did. When the church is forced to withdraw fellowship from a personal friend, it can be hard to follow through and participate in this effort to win back his soul (1 Cor. 5:1–11).
- It may involve our family relationships, as Abraham's did. Putting God ahead of our spouses, children, and parents can be hard, but total allegiance is the only thing God will accept. A wife's natural inclination may be to lead, or a husband's to follow, but following God's roles for the family always brings the best results (Eph. 5:23–33).
- It may be that others will dissuade us from it, as surely others would have Abraham if they had known what he was about to do. No one is a true friend who encourages us to disobey God, to endanger our souls.

Some of God's commands are hard sayings (John 6:60).

- At some time in our Christian life, we may have to decide between defending our children's actions and God's Scripture.
- We will likely sin in a public way and have to decide whether we will be humble enough to walk down the aisle and ask our brethren to forgive and forget (Acts 8:22; Jam. 5:16).
- We may find ourselves strongly tempted to forsake our wedding vows for the exciting touch of another (2 Sam. 11). The heat of the moment can be cooled by remembering David's hard lesson (2 Sam. 11–12) and his son's inspired dictum: "But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul" (Pro. 6:32).

- We may have a really bad experience at the hand of a church member or get crossways with an entire congregation about direction and doctrine (3 John 9–11).

Like Abraham, the Christian's faith will be tested. God is educating us; He is improving us; He is molding us. Some "mountain heights" of spirituality can only be reached by going through the "valley of suffering" (Psa. 119:71). Hard times can build good character (Jam. 1:2–4; 1 Pet. 1:7). Ralph Waldo Emerson was once approached by a concerned and inquiring person who said, "Mr. Emerson, they tell me that the world is coming to an end."

Emerson calmly replied, "Never mind, we can get along without it." We all need to learn that we can "get along without" the world.

Suffering is an effective teacher in the school of life, and some lessons are only learned at her feet. This is why dedicated Christians often have to go through suffering. God uses the furnace of affliction—physical injury, disease, prolonged sickness, difficulty in rearing children or respecting parents, financial problems, or other overwhelming cares—to develop spirituality (2 Cor. 12:7–8). A young woman was suffering greatly and confided her frustration to an older Christian friend: "If God loves me as you say He does, why did He make me so?"

The older woman replied, "He is making you now." God's purpose is to prepare us for heaven.

Testing tells whether we are "gold, silver, precious stones" or "wood, hay, stubble" (1 Cor. 3:12–15). The worthiness of the ship is not determined while it lies in the harbor but when it rides the waves of a storm. Our faith also must be tested during life's storms.

During the Great Depression, a good man lost his job, exhausted his savings, and forfeited his home. His grief was multiplied by the sudden death of his young wife. The only thing he had left was his faith. One day as he combed the neighborhood looking for work, he stopped to watch as men did stonework on a church building. One was skillfully chiseling a triangular piece of rock. Not seeing a spot it would fit, he asked, "Where are you going to put that?"

The man pointed toward the top of the building and said, "See that little opening up there near the spire? That's where it goes. I'm shaping it down here so it will fit up there." Tears filled the hurting man's eyes as he walked away thinking of the words: "shaping it down here so it will fit up there." He found new meaning in his difficult situation. William Cowper, included this meaningful line in his song *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*: "Behind a frowning providence God hides a smiling face."

Testing makes heaven more attractive to us (2 Cor. 4:16–5:1; Heb. 11:10; Col. 3:1–2). One observed: "It is through our tears that we see the farthest into heaven." Perhaps Paul suffered more than any other New Testament Christian; he also seems to have been the most attracted to heaven. He said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phi. 1:21–23).

Jesus warned His disciples that following Him would not be easy:

Think not that I am come to send peace
on earth: I came not to send peace, but
a sword. For I am come to set a man

at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Mat. 10:34–39)

With God's help, we can pass the tests, as Paul wrote, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Works Cited

- Joshephus, Flavius. *The Works of Flavius Josephus*. Trans. William Whiston. Auburn and Buffalo, 1895. *Antiquities* 1.13.2. Print.
- Jackson, Wayne. "In the Steps of Abraham." *Christian Courier*, n.d. Web.
- King James Version*. Meyer, Rick. e-Sword Software. Franklin: Meyers, 2000-2009. Digital file.
- Wilson, Dr. Ralph F. "Abraham: An Introduction to His Life and Times." *JesusWalk*. Wilson, n.d. Web.

CHAPTER 27

Not A Thread Or A Shoelace: Avoiding The Appearance Of Evil

Howard Odom

I recall being young(er) and playing the Trust Fall game. The object of the game was to create an environment of trust. The game required at least one faller and one catcher. In the game, the faller stood in front of the catcher in an upright position with hands crossed and said, “I am ready to fall. Are you ready to catch me?”

The catcher stood behind the faller with one leg out in front of the other and hands extended and said, “I am ready to catch you. Fall away.” The faller then had to rely on the strength and care of the catcher to catch him as he fell backwards. In playing this game as a child, I just knew I would not fall backward for certain people because I did not trust them. As the text of Genesis fourteen unfolds, we will see Abram totally relying upon God to “catch” him. Abram put total trust in God to take care of his needs.

Background

To properly understand the events of Genesis 14, we need to go back to Genesis 11.

Chapter Eleven: Confusion—Nations Are Born

After the flood came to an end, God commanded Noah and his offspring to scatter and replenish the earth (Gen. 9:1). As a direct result of the command, a rebellion occurred and confusion resulted:

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. (King James Version, Gen. 11:1-4)

In essence, the offspring of Noah said, “God, we don’t like your way of doing things and we will follow after our own heart in the matter.” And the building of the tower began. Friends, to this, let me just pause and say, God always wins! You can be on the side of obedience and you will be blessed as a result, or you can be on the side of disobedience and be punished as a result. Either way, God’s purpose will be fulfilled and God will win as He did with the disobedient offspring of Noah. They were made to speak different languages from each other to keep them from being successful and they were scattered as commanded by God. This scattering brought about division and the birth of many different nations.

Chapter Twelve: The Contrast between Abram's Promised Nation and the Nations

Genesis 12 shifts focus. In Genesis 1-11, the focus had been upon the human race as a whole, whereas in chapter 12 the focus was now upon a specific people with whom God deals. Beginning in chapter 12, God deals with Abram. Abram was a man from the land of Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:31; Acts 7:2). Born some three hundred years after the events which took place in chapter 11, Abram lived in a world that had been subdued by those whom God had scattered. In chapter 12 God called Abram to leave his father's country, to move away from his father's people to a unknown place of God's choosing (Gen. 12:1; Heb. 11:8). This is the same call Joshua later made to the children of Israel (Jos. 24:15)—exalt and serve God the Father above the gods of Mesopotamia. God told Abram that if he obeyed, then God would bless him with land and a seed (i.e., a nation) and would make his name great. In Genesis 11:4-9, Abram begins to carry out the meaning of his name (exalted father) by exalting the Father in obedience (Heb. 11:8). He went. Once there, God confirmed unto him His promise concerning the land (Gen. 12:7).

Chapter Thirteen: Lot's Choice

Both Abram and Lot (Abram's nephew, who had been with him the entire journey) had accumulated great wealth (Gen. 11:28; Gen. 11:32; Gen. 12:16). Great tension developed between the herdsmen of the two men (Gen. 13:7). As a resolution, Abram offered for Lot to choose where he would dwell (Gen. 13:8-9). His offer spoke volumes about the character he possessed. He could have reasoned very well that the land on which they stood had been promised to him by God and was his by right. Yet, Abram was selfless and humble. Consider Paul's words to the Philippians, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness

of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phi. 2:3). For the sake of peace, Abram was willing to esteem Lot above himself even though things were to Lot’s favor. Listen to Paul again in Romans 12:18: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Abram took it upon himself to make peace where there was strife (Gen. 13:8). It could very well be said that Abram walked by faith (Gen. 12:2) in light of God’s promise to bless him, while Lot on the other hand walked by sight (Gen. 13:10). If we could learn from Abram in this matter, then the Church would be better off. Abram, being more concerned with peace and unity, while trusting in God, displayed selflessness in allowing Lot to choose. However, Lot did not choose the same; Lot chose selfishness (Gen. 13:10). Abram, having seniority, should have been offered the first choice, but instead Lot chose selfishness and chose what appeared to be the better land. This decision would later bring much heartache and trouble to both Abram and Lot (Gen. 14:14; Gen. 14:19).

Chapter Fourteen: The Rescue of Lot

The land which Lot chose was soon caught up in conflict. An alliance of eastern kings made war upon the kings who ruled in the region around the Dead Sea (Gen. 14:1-3). The latter group, consisting of the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar, had been oppressed for many years. Eventually, they rebelled against the kings of the east. Their rebellion was unsuccessful and, as a result, both they and their belongings were taken captive (Gen. 14:11). Among those captured were Lot and his family (Gen. 14:12).

At this point, it is noteworthy to point out that the Scriptures often refer to Lot as the brother of Abram (Gen. 14:14). Basically what is being drawn out is it the kinship between the two men. In their day, family meant closeness, a responsibility one to another. Lot’s capture was not only

a blow against himself but also against Abram. This was an opportunity for the promise of God—“I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee” (Gen. 12:3)—to come into effect. In Genesis 14:13-16, after hearing of Lot’s capture by the kings of the east, Abram responded by gathering together 318 of his trained men (Gen. 14:13) to pursue and defeat the kings of the east. In Genesis 14:15-16, Abram succeeded in his pursuit and rescue of those who had been captured. Melchizedek told Abram that this victory came from “the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand” (Gen. 14:20).

Genesis 14:17-21 records a contrast between two of the kings:

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him [Abram] after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and of the kings that were with him, at the vale of Shaveh (the same is the King’s Vale). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be God Most High, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all. And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. (Gen. 14:17-21, ASV)

So both the king of Sodom and king Melchizedek were gathered together with Abram in the king’s dale.

King Melchizedek come forth with refreshments and blessings for Abram. “Blessed be,” Melchizedek proclaimed. In saying this, he emphasized the place of God among the kings gathered together with him. The king of Sodom, on the other hand, was focused neither on Abram nor on God but on himself. “Give me,” proclaimed the king of Sodom. He was only concerned about reclaiming the people who had been taken captive. After all, what is a king without anyone to rule over? He should have displayed an attitude of gratitude, yet he demonstrated an unthankful and selfish spirit.

After this display of selfishness, the king told Abram to keep the possessions for himself. At this point, Abram could have reasoned very well to himself that God was blessing him and that he should keep both the people and the possessions for himself. After all, he earned them, right? He could have chosen to be like King Saul (1 Sam. 15:8-9) who, after being told to destroy the Amalekites utterly (1 Sam. 15:3), kept for himself a remnant, thinking his disobedience was going to be to the glory of God (1 Sam. 15:15). But Abram chose not to compromise. Rather, he and God had already discussed the matter. Abram promised God that he would take nothing from the king. Abram said, “I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich” (Gen. 14:23). Abram would not take even the smallest thing such as a string (thread), much less a shoe strap (shoelatchet) which was of much greater value. Abram trusted solely in the Lord to provide for his every need and he wanted no ties with the king of Sodom. Abram did not want it to even appear that his blessings came from some source other than God. He wanted to avoid even the appearance of evil.

The Appearance of Evil

The principle of abstaining from the appearance of evil is found in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians: "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 The. 5:22). We have usually taken this verse to mean that we must keep from doing whatever appears to be wrong. Although this has an element of truth, it misses what the verse is actually saying.

Yes, we are to abstain from the appearance of evil! Jesus said it like this:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Mat. 5:13-16)

We are to let our lights shine (i.e., to abstain from all appearance of evil). Why? So the world may see our good works. Our light is meant to shine. The one who shines his light lives in such a way that others can see his good works and give praise to the Father! As Christians, we have an obligation to seek and to save that which is lost (Mat. 28:18-20; Luke 19:10) and we cannot be successful in doing so if we do not let our lights shine and if we harm our influence by not abstaining from even the appearance of evil.

Consider an example. To the issue of eating meats offered to idols, Paul said, “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (1 Cor. 8:13). Paul had no problem in eating the meat (1 Cor. 8:8), but it became an issue when it caused his brother to sin. So his practice was not only not to eat it in the presence of one who might be offended, but also to abstain from eating at all. It might not be wrong to partake, but it might well not be expedient to do so (1 Cor. 6:12). This was Paul’s attitude and this should be our attitude when it comes to our influence and to avoiding things that might harm it.

For another example of abstaining from the appearance of evil, notice 2 Corinthians 8. In the context, Paul has taken a collection from the brethren in Corinth to send to the needy brethren in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:19). Accompanying him was a brother chosen by two or more congregations of the area. (Also with him were Luke and a few others. See Acts 20:4-5.) But why? Why bring these men along on the journey to give the funds to Jerusalem? The answer lies in verse 20. Paul was cautious and did not want anyone to have anything negative to say concerning him bringing the funds to Jerusalem. He did not want to suggest even the appearance of evil. Rather, he wanted to present things honest in the sight of man as well as God (2 Cor. 8:21). This example is no different than that of Abram in Genesis 14 and serves as an example for us to follow in abstaining from the appearance of evil.

Now, take it a step further. Notice that in 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul was warning against false teachers and doctrines. Some were teaching things contrary to Christ, so Paul warns the Thessalonians to try the spirits and if they turn out to be true; if they were, Paul instructed to then hold on to the true things (1 The. 5:21). But if they were false, then stay far away

from them (1 The. 5:22; 1 John 4:1)! This passage speaks not of what *appeared* to be wrong but what was indisputably wrong. The American Standard Version words it like this, “Abstain from every form of evil.” As Christians walking in the light (1 John 1:7) and letting our light shine, we should do more than just abstain from the appearance of evil; we should stay far away from evil itself. To do this, we have to know what evil is and how to discern it. This comes by a renewed mind (Col. 3:10). When we put off the old man and put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27), we come to act, think, and speak differently. We come to act, think, and speak like Christ. We no longer desire to practice sin but rather put to death its practices and put on the righteousness of God (Eph. 4:24). We come to know evil and how to discern it. All of this is true of a renewed mind. If you continue reading in Colossians 3, you will see that a renewed mind comes by knowledge. If we are going to have a renewed mind then we are going to have to study and grow (2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:2).

How to Abstain From the Appearance of Evil?

Returning to Genesis 14, notice that Abram had already made up his mind as to what he would do. He already had taken an oath before God that he would not take anything from the king. He put his trust solely in God. If we are going to be successful today in abstaining from the appearance of evil and from evil itself, then we have to make up our minds prior to being faced with the opportunity. We have to resolve to be like Job who made a covenant with his eyes (Job 31:1) that he would not look upon a woman to lust after her. This he made before it even happened or had a chance to happen. We have to purpose to be like Daniel (Dan.1:8) who purposed not to defile his body with the kings’ meat prior to the occasion. We have to trust in God as Abram did.

Abram trusted in the wisdom, providence, power, and justice of God (Gen. 14). How can we accomplish that today? We do it by leaning on Him through His Word and through prayer. Abram both trusted fully in Him and communicated with Him. How is your trust in God? And how is your prayer life?

Conclusion

I would like to share a story of trust told by men:

A man strung a tight rope across Niagara Falls and printed in the local paper that he would walk across the falls with a wheelbarrow full of rocks. The day came and the crowd was big and excited about the event. The man came out with his new wheelbarrow and asked, "How many of you believe that I can make it across the tight rope and back?" The crowd cheered loudly and said, "We believe you can do it." The man went on his way with patience of steel, made it to the other side and back with the wheelbarrow full of rocks. The crowd thundered with cheers. The man said, "How many of you believe I can push a man or woman in my wheelbarrow across and back?" The crowd got even more excited and cheered to see him take a person across Niagara Falls and back. The man was excited about doing his last event. The man said, "If you believe, raise your hands." The cheering crowd lifted their hands high and cheered. He started

asking for volunteers among those who believed to sit in his wheelbarrow, thereby leaving the safety and security of dry ground. Not surprisingly, no one volunteered. Although many believed he could do it, no one volunteered to sit in his wheelbarrow. All the ones who believed and who had raised their hands said, "You are crazy. I am not getting in that wheelbarrow."

Many say they believe in Christ today and cheer Him on like the crowd of people in the story, but when it comes to producing fruit then all are barren. Do you trust in God and His Word to govern your life? Are you abstaining from the appearances and the forms of evil?

Works Cited

American Standard Version. Print.

King James Version. Print.

CHAPTER 28

For I Know Him That He Will Command His Children After Him

Richard Stevens, III

I am very appreciative of the privilege of speaking on this very excellent Bible lectureship with good brethren who are respected for their spiritual work and Christian character. May God continue to bless you all. May God also continue to bless this fine congregation and its good work in the Lord. And may God continue to bless our good brother Wade Webster and his family in the noble endeavor of preaching the gospel of Christ without compromise in Biblical love.

I Know Him...Abraham

Surely, the omniscient Lord knows everything. He is a God of knowledge (1 Sam. 2:3), with perfect knowledge (Job 37:16), and with unlimited understanding (Psa. 147:5). “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (King James Version, Rom. 11:33). Surely, the all-knowing Lord was accurate when He said, “I know him/Abraham,” for all people are the creative works of His hands (Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 2:7; Psa. 100:3; Acts 17:26);

“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). The Lord knew Jeremiah, John the baptizer, and the apostle Paul in the womb and ordained them to preach to nations (Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:13-17; Gal. 1:15-16). The Lord knew Moses by name (Exo. 33:4; 33:12; Exo. 33:17), and called Cyrus by name before he was born (Isa. 44:28; Isa. 45:1).

The Lord Knows All About Us, Too.

- The Lord knows our struggles, weaknesses, trials, and temptations (Exo. 3:7; 1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 2:17-18; Heb. 4:15).
- The Lord knows our abilities and limitations (Gen. 11:6-9; Exo. 4:10-12; Psa. 21:11; Luke 12:25-26).
- The Lord knows our works - good and bad (Job 34:25; Pro. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 6:10; Rev. 2:2).
- The Lord knows what we will do (Exo. 3:18; Exo. 7:1-5; 1 Sam. 23:9-12; Luke 1:13-17).
- The Lord knows our secrets (Ecc. 12:14; Mat. 6:4; Mat. 6:6; Mat. 6:18; Heb. 4:13).
- The Lord knows our thoughts (Job 42:2; Eze. 11:5; Mat. 9:4; Mark 2:8; Luke 24:38).
- The Lord knows our hearts (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kin. 8:39; Jer. 17:9-10; Acts 1:24).
- The Lord knows the time of our deaths (1 Sam. 28:18-19; 1 Kin. 2:1; Isa. 38:1; Isa. 38:5).
- The Lord even knows how many hairs are on each of our heads (Mat. 10:30).

“But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because **he knew all men**, and needed not that any should testify of man: for **he knew what was in man**” (John 2:24-25). The Lord most assuredly knows us all, inside and out.

O lord, thou hast searched me,
and **known me**. Thou knowest my
downsitting and mine uprising, thou
understandest my thought afar off.
Thou compassest my path and my lying
down, and art acquainted with all my
ways. For there is not a word in my
tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it
altogether. (Psa. 139:1-4)

Our great God thoroughly knows us as He knew Abraham. The Lord knew the type of father Abraham would become because of his obedient faith. Reaffirming the theme of the lectureship, “Abraham: The Man that God Called Friend,” because as Jesus stated, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:4; Exo. 33:11). Abraham is a good example in fatherhood and gives us direction in the ways of the Lord. “So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Gal. 3:9).

I Know Him... That Before Abraham Had Children That He Would First Have A Wife

Abraham was married before he began to have children. The Lord called Abraham to go to a place that he knew not (Gen. 12:1-4; Acts 7:2-5; Heb. 11:8), and Abram/Abraham took Sarai/Sarah **his wife** (Gen. 17:5; Gen. 17:15; Gen. 12:5). The Lord promised Abraham an heir from his own bowels (Gen. 15:4). But the heir was not Abraham’s son Ishmael born of Hagar, his wife’s handmaid. Abraham was told, “And God said, **Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed**; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (Gen. 17:19). This is the arrangement of God’s will. First have a wife, and then have children with her. But it is

never right to have children with a woman before marriage. Our society has gotten away from the Lord's divine order of having children. No one should ever have sex without first being married, since sexual relations are only authorized by God in a scriptural marriage. **"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled:** but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: **neither fornicators**, nor idolaters, **nor adulterers**, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind" (1 Cor. 6:9). "Nevertheless, **to avoid fornication**, let every man **have his own wife**, and let every woman **have her own husband**" (1 Cor. 7:2). And if sex is not allowed before marriage, then neither are children! Notice these alarming statistics of recent times:

Unmarried Childbearing (Data are for the U.S.)

- Number of live births to unmarried women: 1,609,619
- Birth rate for unmarried women: 45.3 births per 1,000 unmarried women aged 15-44 years
- Percent of all births to unmarried women: 40.7% (US CDC)

It seems that many no longer understand that children should come after marriage, not before.

I Know Him...That Abraham Understood That The Lord Gave Him Children

Children, which are God's perfect gift, should be had according to His will (Psa. 127:3; Jam. 1:17). Abraham was blessed with several children (Gen. 16:16; Gen. 21:1-3; Gen. 25:2-3) and completely understood where his children came from. The Lord first told Abraham that he would give him a

son in old age and did what He promised (Gen. 17:19; Gen. 18:10-11; Gen. 21:1-7). Abraham knew it was impossible for him and his wife to have children due to their age but was fully convinced that the Lord could provide them with the son He promised (Gen. 15:2-6; Heb. 11:11).

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.** (Rom. 4:19-21)

Childless Hannah understood like Abraham and Sarah:

And she was in bitterness of soul, and **prayed unto the Lord**, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but **wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child**, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. (1 Sam. 1:10-11)

She understood where children come from and as a result wanted to give him back to the Lord in the sense that he

would serve the Lord all the days of his life. The Lord indeed heard her prayer and answered her request. She named her child accordingly: “Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and **called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord**” (1 Sam. 1:20). Listen to the words of Leah concerning some of her children:

And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and **she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction;** now therefore my husband will love me. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the Lord hath heard I was hated, **he hath therefore given me this son also:** and she called his name Simeon. (Gen. 29:31-33)

Rachel said, “**God** hath judged me, and hath also **heard my voice, and hath given me a son:** therefore called she his name Dan” (Gen. 30:6). God gave the righteous pair of Zacharias and Elizabeth a great son in their old age (Luke 1:5-15; Luke 1:57). Many would do well to learn from these examples. “Lo, children are an **heritage (gift) of the Lord:** and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psa. 127:3). If people understood that children were a blessing/gift from God, then perhaps they would be inclined as Hannah was and give their children back to the Lord. “But Jesus said, **Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me:** for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 19:14). Bringing children up

in the good ways of the Lord is the way to give them back to the Lord (Pro. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:5).

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. (Deu. 6:6-9; cf. Deu. 11:18-20)

Abraham and these others understood where children came from and taught them the ways of the Lord. Perhaps through imitating them, we might generate a more Bible-minded next generation. More may be inclined to stay within the confines of the Lord's church and His doctrine if they had first been given back to the Lord as children. We cannot expect our grown children to appreciate that of which they have very little knowledge. Abraham commanded his children to keep the way of the One who had given them to him (Gen. 18:19).

I Know Him... That Abraham Wanted Children To Accomplish The Lord's Will

I believe the reason Abraham desperately wanted to have children was because he understood that the Lord wanted him to have children to accomplish His will. The Lord told Abraham numerous times that His will was for him to have a son (Gen. 12:2; Gen. 12:7; Gen. 13:15-16; Gen. 15:13; Gen.

15:18). He also told him that all nations would be blessed through his seed which was spiritually speaking of Jesus (Gen. 12:3; Gen. 18:18; Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16). However, Jesus was also a descendant of Abraham (Mat. 1:1). Therefore, the spiritual blessing was accomplished through the physical offspring/children of Abraham. Abraham believed God concerning this (Gen. 15:4-6). Abraham was rich and had many women servants (Gen. 13:2; Gen. 12:16; Gen. 14:16), yet having an heir did not seem too great a concern until after the Lord had shown him His will through his coming seed. First, Abraham had no child by his wife and had a conversation with the Lord concerning it:

And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, **lo, one born in my house is mine heir.** And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness. (Gen. 15:2-6)

At the time, Abraham was fine with having a child that did not come from his own bowels if it had allowed him to

do the Lord's will. But such was not the Lord's will. Next, because his wife still bore no children, the two had an idea in providing children for the Lord's will. The child of this arrangement would come from him but not his wife Sarah:

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. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. (Gen. 16:2-4)

Nonetheless, the child promised by the Lord would come from both Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:16-19). People today want children for various reasons. Some want children to help their turbulent relationship. Some want to them to carry on the family's name or business. Some want them to have something to love. Some want them as heirs to share their possessions with. Some want them to live through their achievements. But Abraham wanted children to fulfill the Lord's will. Children can and should make us better people. Our responsibility as parents should motivate us to walk in the will of the Lord more diligently by understanding that our kids will most likely follow in our footsteps. Remember, that it is the Lord's will that children are taught and motivated to do His will which is demonstrated primarily by way of

example (Deu. 4:9; Deu. 6:6-9; Deu. 31:11-13; Jos. 8:34-35; Neh. 8:1-3; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15).

I Know Him... That Abraham Will Love His Lord More Than His Children

The Lord blessed Abraham with the promised child, and Abraham called him Issac (Gen. 21:1-7). The Lord tested Abraham as He does all of His people—for their spiritual benefit (Jam. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). God told Abraham: “And he said, **Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac**, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and **offer him there for a burnt offering** upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Gen. 22:2). Without hesitation, Abraham arose early the next day, journeyed for three days until he arrived at the place, and there began the sacrifice procedure (Gen. 22:3-9). As Abraham was about to slay his son upon the altar, the angel of the Lord stayed his hand and said, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now **I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me**” (Gen. 22:12). Pleased, the angel of the Lord spoke a second time:

And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and **hast not withheld thy son, thine only son**: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice. (Gen. 22:16-18)

The Lord gave Abraham a son knowing he would not love his son more than Him. It is the Lord's will that everyone love God as Abraham did, even much more than their children. Jesus commanded, "And thou shalt **love the Lord thy God with all thy heart**, and with **all thy soul**, and with **all thy mind**, and with **all thy strength**: this is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30). Sadly, many would fail if they were tested as Abraham. It is obvious that most love the gift of children more than they love the Giver of children. It is all too common, even among church folk, that when it comes to a child's desire and the Lord's will, the Lord loses out. This is why children are allowed to miss mid-week Bible classes for school rehearsals and athletic practices. Some even miss Sunday worship services altogether for an evening with the kids at the ballpark or at the movies. Yet, you would be hard pressed to find someone without knowledge of Matthew 6:33, although violations of it are extremely prevalent. It seems "first" does not mean first when it comes to the Lord and doing things for our kids. Jesus offered this rebuke of such behavior, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and **he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me**" (Mat. 10:37). Putting children's activities before the Lord's will is one way of loving children more than the Lord. Other ways exist and are summed up by putting anything before Lord in any regard to our children. Abraham understood this and kept God's will first, even if it meant sacrificing his beloved child.

I Know Him...hat Abraham Will Be An Example Of Obedient Faith To His Children

Abraham was what all parents should be—a good example to their children. Abraham was a good example of obedient faith to God long before Issac and Ishmael were

born. No doubt they heard the stories, though. Yes, their dad was not perfect by any means, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecc. 7:20; cf. Rom. 3:9-10; Rom. 3:23). However, one does not have to be absolutely perfect to be spiritually faithful. Abraham obeyed God from the very outset (Gen. 12:1-4). Commenting on this event, the Hebrew writer said, “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, **obeyed**; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8). When the servant’s child in Abraham’s house and later Ishmael were born, and Abraham wanted to make them the fulfillment of God’s promise, the Lord said no, and Abraham obediently complied to the Lord’s wishes. When God made a covenant with Abraham and told him to circumcise all the males in his household (Gen. 17:9-14), Abraham obediently did so:

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.** (Gen. 17:23, cf. Gen. 17:24-27)

He obediently circumcised Issac also after his birth (Gen. 21:4). Abraham was also an example of obedient faith even in the conception of his son Issac. Although, “Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and **it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women**” (Gen. 18:11), they faithfully tried to have a son because God had promised, and they had Issac. Paul records:

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. (Rom. 4:19-21; cf. Heb. 11:11)

When Abraham tried to offer Issac upon the altar, Issac saw firsthand the unwavering faith of his father. Doubtless, Issac did not come to know what the Lord said to his father, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because **thou hast obeyed my voice**" (Gen. 22:18). For sure, he and his siblings later understood that their father was the way God desired all to be. The Lord spoke to Issac as an adult after the death of his father Abraham and said, "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; **Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws**" (Gen. 26:4-5).

Abraham Was A Good Example In Many Other Areas For His Children

- Abraham was an example that one should worship God (Gen. 12:7-8; Gen. 13:4; John 4:23-24).
- Abraham was an example of not trusting in riches, but in God (Gen. 12:16; Gen. 13:2, Gen. 13:5-6; Mat. 6:24; 1 Tim. 6:17).

Abraham was an example of maintaining unity through selflessness (Gen. 13:8-11; Phi. 2:3-5).

- Abraham was an example of rightly giving to God (Gen. 14:18-20; Pro. 3:9-10; 2 Cor. 9:6-8).
- Abraham was an example of fighting off threats against his family (Gen. 14:12-16; Eph. 6:11-17; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).
- Abraham was an example of petitioning God on behalf of others (Gen. 18:23-32; Gen. 20:17; 1 Tim. 2:1-4).
- Abraham was an example of obeying God even when it was difficult (Gen. 21:10-14; Gen. 22:1-18; Acts 5:28-29; Acts 5:40-42).
- Abraham was an example of showing hospitality (Gen. 18:1-8; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2).
- Abraham was an example of making provisions for his family, even for his dead loved ones (Gen. 23:1-20; 1 Tim. 5:8).
- Abraham was an example of wholly trusting in God (Gen. 22:10; Heb. 11:18-19).
- Abraham was an example of commanding/demanding that his household follow the ways of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; Jos. 24:15; Eph. 6:4; Heb. 12:8).

Conclusion

The children of Abraham had a father who faithfully “walked the walk” of God’s will as a great example. Therefore, the Lord confidently said, “I know Him that he will command his children...after him” (Gen. 18:19). May every father strive to do likewise.

Works Cited

King James Version. Biblegateway.com. Web.

United States Center for Disease Control. "Births: Final Data for 2012, table C." *National Vital Statistics Report*. 30 December 2013. PDF.

CHAPTER 29

The Covenant Of Circumcision

Billy Bland

And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. (King James Version; Acts 7:7-8)

The above words were spoken by a man named Stephen, who just moments later would be stoned to death by the very people whose forefather was Abraham. Unfortunately, Abraham's descendants did not have the faith, nor the works, of Abraham (cf. Rom. 4:16; John 8:39). Although Stephen was a man full of faith and power who did great wonders and miracles among the people (Acts 6:8), certain of the Jews rejected his message, stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes and brought him before the council. They even set up "false witnesses" against him. Because he preached Christ, the enemies of the truth were determined to find him guilty of blasphemy even before they heard his defense! However,

in his defense, Stephen set forth one of the best sermons ever on the history of the Old Testament. In a brief sermon, he encapsulated God's dealing with His people from Abraham to the Christ. In this defense, Stephen mentioned "the covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8). This covenant is so significant that the Jews will later be known as the "Circumcision" and the Gentiles as the "Uncircumcised." Paul wrote, "Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands" (Eph. 2:11).

In this chapter, we will take a look at the covenant of Circumcision. The discussion will focus on the Biblical history and purpose of circumcision, the New Testament controversy concerning Christians and circumcision, and the question, Does water baptism today take the place of circumcision?

The Biblical History And Purpose of Circumcision

The word *circumcise* literally means "to cut around" (Strong). It was an "operation performed on the male organ of propagation for the removal of the foreskin" (Wycliffe 127). Although there is some controversy as to when the practice of circumcision actually began (some sources say the Egyptians practiced circumcision before Abraham while others would say the nations probably "borrowed" the practice from the influence of Abraham's people), the Biblical history of circumcision began with God's covenant with Abraham. God commanded Abraham to leave his homeland of Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to a land that He would show him. God planned to bless Abraham with a land, a great nation, and ultimately the seed promise—Jesus Christ (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:16). After some time passed, God again appeared to Abraham and reassured him of His promise.

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. (Gen. 15:1–6)

God promised Abraham that one who proceeded from his own bowels would be his heir. Although he had no seed as of yet, the number of his seed was to be as the number of the stars in heaven! God again appeared to Abraham when Abraham was ninety-nine years of age and gave him the covenant of circumcision as a sign of His promise to him. Moses records:

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I *am* the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou

perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant *is* with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is

born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which *is* not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant. (Gen. 17:1-14)

This covenant was with Abraham and his seed. Circumcision of the foreskin served as a token (sign) of God's covenant to Abraham and his seed. Every male child was to be circumcised at eight days old. This applied to every male child that was born in the house or bought with money of any stranger who was not of their seed. Every male child that was not circumcised was to be cut off from his people. He had broken God's covenant.

Abraham promptly complied with this covenant.

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. And Abraham *was* ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son *was* thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh

of his foreskin. In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him. (Gen. 17:23–27)

When Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him on the eighth day—“And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him” (Gen. 21:4).

Circumcision also was commanded through the Law by Moses, not because the covenant of circumcision began with Moses, but rather the practice continued as commanded by God (Lev. 12:3; John 7:22-23). Again, it applied not only to one’s own children, but to all who would sojourn among God’s people. “And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof” (Exo.12:48).

For some reason, Moses failed to circumcise his own son. God meant what he had said and due to Moses’ failure to follow God’s word on this matter, God sought to slay him. God would have slain him if Zipporah had not intervened and circumcised the boy. The Bible says, “And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast *it* at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband *art* thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband *thou art*, because of the circumcision” (Exo. 4:24–26).

The Jews continued to keep the covenant of circumcision until the New Testament period **except during the**

wilderness wandering. Due to the faithlessness of the adult Jews who came out of Egypt, God caused them to wander in the wilderness until that generation died. The twelve spies had searched the land for forty days and ten of the spies came back with a negative report saying they could not take the land. As a consequence of their lack of faith in God and His word, they would not be allowed to enter the promise land. They would have to wander in the wilderness for forty years until that generation passed away. The children, which they said would be a prey to the inhabitants of the land, would enter the promise land. During this wilderness wandering, the children who were born during this time were not circumcised. Consequently, when God brought them into the land, God commanded Joshua to circumcise the children of Israel. “At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time. And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins” (Jos. 5:2-3).

For some reason, the Israelites had not practiced circumcision while in the wilderness. During these forty years, they were being punished for their unwillingness to enter into Canaan at the first opportunity (Num. 13-14). Since circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham’s descendants, and the nation of Israel was being punished by God for their unbelief, perhaps circumcision was inappropriate for them at the time. However, the rebels from the wilderness days had by this time

died, and a new generation had arisen. As they entered into the land of promise, it was necessary and timely that those born in the wilderness be circumcised. At the Lord's word, Joshua made sharp knives and circumcised Israel while they were at Gilgal...The name *Gilgal* means "rolling." (Winton 25-26)

"And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day" (Jos. 5:9).

From this day forward, there was a clear line of demarcation between the Israelites and the "uncircumcised." At times, the *uncircumcised* was a synonym for the enemies of God's people. "And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who *is* this **uncircumcised Philistine**, that he should defy the armies of the living God" (1 Sam. 17:26). "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this **uncircumcised Philistine** shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God" (1 Sam. 17:36). "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee **the uncircumcised and the unclean**" (Isa. 52:1).

The meaning and purpose of circumcision is seen in the way God figuratively uses the word *circumcise*. Israel was to be a separated people who belonged to God. Physical circumcision **only** did not keep them in a covenant relationship with God. Their **hearts** were to be circumcised as well. God warned that if Israel departed from Him in

disobedience to Him they would suffer and be scattered among the heathen, but

If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And *that* I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their **uncircumcised hearts be humbled**, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. (Lev. 26:40–42)

Likewise, God said, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked...And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deu.10:16; Deu. 30:6).

It is obvious that circumcision also signified the putting away of sin from their lives. Although under the New Testament the Jews were no long under the law of circumcision, Paul showed that physical circumcision to the Jews would have benefited them under the Old Testament if they kept the law. He wrote, “For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall

not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision” (Rom. 2:25–26) (La Vista Church of Christ).

New Testament Controversy Concerning Circumcision

The Christian is not under the covenant of Circumcision. The promise God made to Abraham has been fulfilled. As previously noted, the promise to Abraham consisted of a land promise, a great nation promise, and the seed promise. The full extent of the land promise was fulfilled to Israel. Joshua stated,

And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass. (Jos. 21:43–45)

Likewise, Abraham became a father of many nations. Israel itself was great, but then there were also the nations that descended from Ishmael, Esau, etc.

The “seed” promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Paul stated,

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to

thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. (Gal. 3:16–19)

The above passage proves that both the promise and the law of Moses was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus was the “seed” promise.

Unfortunately, the Jews had a “blind spot” when it came to seeing the fulfillment of the law of Moses and circumcision. Even some of the Jews who believed in Jesus did not want to give up circumcision. In fact, they taught that the believing Gentiles also had to be circumcised in order to be saved. If that had been the case, then, in effect, the Gentiles would have to become Jewish to be a Christian! The threat was so great that the apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to help put a stop to this erroneous teaching.

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had

no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. (Acts 15:1–2)

Luke continues, “But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter” (Acts 15:5–6). After much disputing, a letter was sent out from the church in Jerusalem affirming that God does not command the Gentiles to be circumcised and the church in Jerusalem had never stated He did!

And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment. (Acts 15:23–24)

Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, often wrote to combat the false teaching that Gentiles (or Jews) needed to be circumcised under the new covenant. The books of Romans and Galatians especially deal with this problem. To the churches in Galatia, he stated,

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. (Gal. 5:2–6)

The old covenant was taken away that the new covenant might be established—“Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*” (Heb. 10:9–10). One cannot bring over any of the old law since Christ took it away. To do so is to fall from grace! Consequently, under the new covenant, there is no distinction between the Jew or the Greek. Again, Paul affirmed, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye *be* Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:28–29).

Using a figure of speech called metonymy (where one name or concept is placed to mean another associated with it), Paul shows that physical Israel is no longer God’s Jews. Rather, Christians are God’s “Jews” today. He wrote, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew,

which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God” (Rom. 2:28–29).

A question might arise: If Christians are not to be circumcised to be saved today, why then did Paul have Timothy circumcised? The answer is, Paul had Timothy circumcised, not because it was commanded of God, but because of the Jews who knew that Timothy’s father was a Greek and his mother was a Jew. Timothy could not have an honest hearing by the Jews if he remained uncircumcised. The Bible says, “Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:3). This was not done in order to keep a commandment of God, but so Timothy could have a fair hearing by those to whom he preached. On another occasion, some tried to have Paul circumcise Titus. Paul explained,

But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. (Gal. 2:3–5)

Titus was a test case for the false teachers. If they could get Paul to circumcise Titus, they could say Paul’s actions show that Gentiles need to be circumcised! Paul gave place to them by way of subjection, no, not for an hour.

Does Baptism Take the Place of Circumcision?

Some in the past have taken the position that circumcision was a type of baptism and consequently, water baptism now takes the place of circumcision. They then “reason” since baptism takes the place of circumcision and infants were circumcised, the infants today should be baptized. The passage of Scripture that is used in an attempt to teach this doctrine is in the book of Colossians. Paul wrote, “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:11–12). Upon close examination of this passage, one will read that Paul speaks of a “circumcision made without hands...” and it is called “the circumcision of Christ.” But is Paul describing baptism as the circumcision made without hands and the circumcision of Christ? No, he is not. The circumcision without hands is the “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” It is when Christ cuts away or rolls away our sins. We are baptized into Christ for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27), but it is Christ who performs the taking away of our sins.

M. C. Franklin showed the fallacy of thinking baptism took the place of circumcision by stating “if they adopt circumcision as a type of baptism, they are wrecked of the rock of inconsistency, because circumcision was absolutely necessary for one to be in covenant relation with God. ‘And the uncircumcised male’ was to be ‘*cut off from his people.*’ Infant baptizers must admit the necessity of baptism or else abandon their cherished theory, which is their main prop for infant baptism.” He likewise showed for them to be consistent, those who use this argument must baptize the

infant on the eighth day as that is the day the male children were circumcised. Franklin continued to show the fallacy by noting that every Bible student knows circumcision was a problem in the first-century church. Many tried to impose circumcision on the Lord's church. Paul adamantly opposed such a doctrine and said circumcision profited nothing (133-134).

T. W. Brents listed many reasons against the false doctrine that baptism took the place of circumcision. In order to help one see the differences between baptism and circumcision, he listed at least sixteen differences.

1. Circumcision was confined to the Jews, and those purchased with money by them; baptism is for all nations.
2. Circumcision was to be performed on native Jews at eight days old; baptism is for any age capable of believing the gospel.
3. Circumcision was confined to males only; baptism is for men and women. If baptism came in the room of circumcision, why baptize females?
4. Circumcision applied to those bought with money; baptism has no such application. No Christian man thinks of baptizing a servant, simply because of purchase; but why not, if baptism came in the room of circumcision?
5. No faith was required as a qualification for circumcision; but believers only are baptized. When the eunuch demanded baptism of Philip, the answer was: "If

thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest,” clearly implying that if he did not believe he should not be baptized.

6. Circumcision was not an initiatory ordinance, but was for such as were already members of the Jewish family; and if not circumcised he was to be cut off from his people. Gen. xvii:14. Baptism, properly administered, admits or introduces the subject into the kingdom of God (John iii:5); therefore, baptism did not come in the room of circumcision.

7. Circumcision showed a man to be a Jew; baptism shows a man to be neither a Jew nor a Gentile, but a Christian only.

8. Baptism is administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Circumcision was not thus administered.

9. Baptism is administered to show the burial and resurrection of Christ. Circumcision was not administered for this purpose, because these events had not transpired when it was instituted, nor for many hundred years afterward.

10. Circumcision placed a man under obligations to do the whole law; baptism frees us from bondage, and puts no one under the law of Moses; hence it came not in the room of circumcision.

11. Baptism is administered for the remission of sins (Acts ii:38); circumcision had no such object.

12. Baptism is for the answer of a good conscience (1 Peter iii:21); circumcision had nothing to do with the conscience, but pertained wholly to the flesh.

13. Those baptized went on their way *rejoicing* (Acts viii:39; xvi:34); we imagine that those who were circumcised were usually taken away crying. Therefore they were not much alike.

14. Circumcision was obedience to the law of Moses (John vii:23); baptism is obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

15. No one can be a scriptural subject of baptism who is not first taught the gospel; but many were circumcised before they were old enough to be taught any thing.

16. The gift of the Holy Spirit was promised to those baptized on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii:38); this gift was never promised to any for being circumcised, or, as following it (428-430).

It is obvious that water baptism did not take the place of circumcision and neither was circumcision a type of baptism.

CONCLUSION

The covenant of circumcision was given to Abraham as a token of the covenant God made with him. This three-fold promise to Abraham has been fulfilled. We are blessed as a result of this promise in that “the seed” through Whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 22:18) is Jesus Christ. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of

one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). Likewise, Paul stated, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye *be* Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:26–29).

Works Cited

- Brents, T. W. *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, Gospel Advocate, Nashville: 1973. Print.
- King James Version. Accordance 10.4.1*. Altamonte Springs: Oaktree Software, 2014. CD-ROM.
- Franklin, M. C. “The Fallacy About Circumcision.” *Gospel Advocate*, Vol. 78, Gospel Advocate, Nashville: 1936. Print.
- Harrison, Everett F., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Carl F. Henry. *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology*, Hendrickson: 2000. Print.
- La Vista Church of Christ, *Why Did God Command Abraham To Cut off The Foreskin?* La Vista Church of Christ: Omaha, 2003. Web.
- Strong, Augustus H. *Strong’s Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*. Accordance electronic ed., version 2.5. Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 1999. CD-ROM.
- Winton, Bob. *Commentary on Joshua*. Winton: Manchester, 2003. CD-ROM.

CHAPTER 30

Living In A Tent/ Looking For A City

Lennie Reagan

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (King James Version, Heb. 11:9-10)

Have you ever thought about what kind of faith would impress God? We read of a Roman centurion in Matthew's gospel account who amazed Jesus: "When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Mat. 8:10). The impressive faith of this centurion is capable of being replicated in every child of God. Perhaps the emphasis should be a bit more straightforward: this astounding faith must be displayed in every child of God. We are taught by the inspired writer of Hebrews: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). The inspired author highlights the kind of effort that is required to please God—"diligently seek

Him.” The faith that impresses God is exhibited as we exert considerable effort and make a careful search of God’s Word. It is a journey that Abraham began in the Ur of Chaldees and ended when his eyes closed in death.

Pattern theology has taken a hard hit for a long time, yet the divine patterns have weathered the storms and still stand strong today. Abraham stands as an example for all believers. The pattern of his life is worthy of imitation. The apostle Paul reminds us: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Additionally, we learn, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11). The Bible teaches us why Abraham was so highly regarded by God: “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Gal. 3:6), and again: “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (Jam. 2:23). These inspired reports about Abraham are so impressive that we might find it difficult to relate to him. We might be excused if we said: “Well, it was easy for Abraham. He was different from me. I could never believe like that!” Most preachers are asked of their favorite Bible passage. This writer responds with: “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours” (Jam. 5: 17, NKJV). Elijah was a human being just like us. He was not physically superior to us. The same thing is true of Noah, Moses, David, Paul, or Abraham. They were people just like you and me. What made them stand out is the same thing available for us. We need to see that it was faith in God that made them stand out. Can we have the same faith in God as did Abraham? Is it possible for us to make the same journey as did Abraham?

Living In A Tent

Have you ever been in a situation when you knew, really knew you were in the right, and then find out you were in the wrong? Of course, most of us have been there. Depending on the circumstances, that newly acquired knowledge may be funny or very serious. Many times in Bible studies those who thought they were saved painstakingly came to the revelation through their study of the Bible they were lost. Deafening silence fills the room as they come face to face with the reality of their eternity. The Bible text does not describe for us the struggle Abraham faced as he heard the Word of God:

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Gen. 12:1-3)

We are not privy to his reaction other than obedient faithfulness. The faithful evangelist Stephen gives us this inspired commentary of Abraham's initial departure from his homeland:

Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country,

and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. (Acts 7:2-5)

When we look at the account of Abraham leaving his home and leaving his father's house after Terah's death, we find

So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. (Gen. 12:4-5)

We should notice that wherever Abraham goes, God is there with him. Did Abraham have trust and confidence that where he went God was with him? Moses recorded an interesting statement of Abraham:

And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. (Gen. 12:7-8)

We understand what Saul did when he heeded the commanded of Ananias to call upon the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). Saul obeyed. Saul made a commitment to God. When Abraham called on the name of the Lord, did he make a commitment to follow God? Was he acknowledging his dedication to God? Had Abraham been convinced of God's faithfulness, at least to some degree? His decision made at Bethel seems to suggest his desire to follow God on this journey as the sojourner looked for a city.

It was not just Abraham who followed God without seeing the fulfillment of the promise. His son Isaac and his grandson Jacob also followed. When God reiterated the covenant with Jacob that He had made with Abraham, God concluded by saying: "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. 28:15). It is the presence of God that kept Abraham waiting for the moment when God's promises would be fulfilled. He did not always know where he was going. Yet, he knew one thing: wherever it was and however he went, God would be with

him. At times, it seems that Abraham took matters into his own hands with costly consequences (Gen. 12; Gen. 20). It is within those times of doubt and self-reliance the humanity of Abraham is seen and it is those same instances where the love of God with His creation is most manifest.

Abraham's journey crossed country borders and cultural boundaries.

And Joshua said unto all the people,
Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your
fathers dwelt on the other side of the
flood in old time, even Terah, the father
of Abraham, and the father of Nachor:
and they served other gods. And I took
your father Abraham from the other side
of the flood, and led him throughout all
the land of Canaan, and multiplied his
seed, and gave him Isaac. (Jos. 24:2-3)

Abraham and his family had to make changes as they began to pursue the eternal God. God stressed the difficulties Abraham would face as he left his home, his father's house, and his family's idolatrous past. The land that would be given to the seed of Abraham was a strange land for this beginning nomad. It was a long journey of about four hundred miles from Haran to the southwest to reach the land of Canaan. Necessity became the motivation as he moved his herds and his family wherever he could find water and pasture. Yes, God had promised the father of the faithful a land, yet he was still looking for a city as he lived in a tent.

Are the experiences of Abraham unique to him and his family? We, as the obedient of the house of God, recognize the difficulties of living in a tent and looking for a city. When

men seek to follow the will of the living God, the promises of blessing and protection seem so distant at times. Even then the believer continues to follow, trusting God and accepting His perfect will as it is always right on time. It takes great obedient faith to travel beyond the barriers of society. It takes special effort to learn to understand, interact, and love those who are different from us. It is just too far outside our comfort zone. We have all seen otherwise mature believers in Christ absolutely refuse to get involved with people they thought were spiritually or socially inferior to themselves. How does our obedience measure up to the amazing obedience of this tent-dweller? Abraham was a man bucking prejudice, misunderstanding, and racial differences to follow God in the midst of a people who were very different from him.

Does our obedience reach to those heights? The gospel has the power to deliver us from the barriers that we have established. In the book of Philemon, how did Paul teach Philemon to receive his run-away slave Onesimus? Paul was not telling Philemon to release Onesimus, but he was teaching Philemon to treat him like a beloved brother. “For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?” (Phil. 1:15-16). The power of the gospel was able to dissolve the master/slave relationship and produce a brotherly relationship. And the gospel still has the same power today.

What about other borders and boundaries? Jesus was a friend of sinners. He reached out to tax gatherers and prostitutes. Are there some sinners that, in our minds, are just too sinful for the gospel? Would we be willing to reach out and teach them? Would we show them the same love and concern that we do to those who are more like us?

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Mat. 5:46-48)

We are fond of quoting that part about being “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” but do we realize a part of that perfection includes loving those who are different from us? Abraham’s faith was clearly an obedient faith.

We have daily opportunities for service and interaction with our fellow nomads. Those opportunities will arrive in packages that vary in difficulty, circumstances, and troubles. At times, we will be tempted to go down to Egypt (Gen. 12) and compromise the divine standard of holiness (1 Pet. 1:14-16). Yet, the promises of God stand fast: “For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:5-6).

Looking For A City

The son of the idolatrous Terah left the Ur of Chaldees and Haran looking

for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:10-16)

It is only fitting that the journey of the faithful begins with and is identified with faith in the face of uncertainty. The paradox of the faithful is clearly seen: the only way to gain God's promises of that heavenly city which has foundations is to live in tents which have no foundations. Jesus put it this way: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:34-35). Moses saw and obeyed in the same manner:

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with
the people of God, than to enjoy the

pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. (Heb. 11:25-28)

The long list of faithful men and woman resound with selfless sacrifices they have made in view of obedience and that city. What was the reason? Did they know something we do not know? Were they given a secret of obedience that God has hidden from us? Here is the difference. When the Hebrews writer instructed us that Abraham was looking for a city, he used a word that indicates that Abraham “expected” that which God had promised. No, not in the sense that Abraham was looking for something he believed he earned, but he understood the city for which he longed was solely possible because of the God whom Abraham obeyed.

What an amazing way to live one’s life! Abraham evaluated the evidence of God’s appearance while the father of the faithful was still in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2) and again while in Haran (Gen. 12:1-4), and based on the evidence, Abraham obeyed. He trusted God. Abraham believed the promises of God. Even though the man’s faith buckled at times (Gen. 16), and even though he sinned at times (Gen. 12; Gen. 20), he righted his life and locked in on his goal of the city whose Builder and Maker is God.

When the life of Abraham is evaluated, is it possible for us to think of a man who loved God any more than Abraham? Jesus reminds us: “If ye love me, keep my commandments”

(John 14:15). The inspired record of Abraham's life leaves no doubt of the eternal value of his obedience: "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). Also, the words of James tie together the faith and obedience of Abraham:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. (Jam. 2:21-24)

The lawyer who asked Christ, "Which is the great commandment in the Law?" (Mat. 22:36) was attempting to entrap Christ. Our Master easily answered this question: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Mat. 22:37-40). The one thing this lawyer was attempting to accomplish exposed the fallacy of our concept of priorities.

Have you ever looked back at church history and thought, "Why did they do that?" or "I would never take part in something like that." Whatever it is it looks so weird to us. Think back to the second and third centuries when among the elderships of local congregations, the elders would

appoint one of the elders as their bishop. Then, all bishops in one city would elect one as the bishop of that city over all the congregations. Now, we think about that and shake our heads and say, "I cannot believe they would do that," especially after Paul warned them that error would rise up out of elderships (Acts 20:28-31).

However, would you consider this? Every church started doing it. Something that was weird became the norm. At one time, the thing to do was to have a pet rock, right? Go ahead and admit it. You had one, right? Everyone was buying a pet rock. Yet, now that seems really weird to us.

Twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred years from now, what will people think when they look back at the church of this generation? What are the things we are doing which will cause them to think, Why did they do that? What are the things and the attitudes that are normal to us, but so weird when we look at the Word of God?

Some will remember back in the 1950's and 60's when the Lord's church exploded with growth. The difference maker was that the Word of God was being taught. It was the power of the Word that changed the lives of people. The difference was their preparation to love God and love people. Jesus reminds us that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). Here is an interesting thought: the Bible never teaches us to follow our hearts; it tells us to examine them: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:23-24). What we need to do with our heart is to love God with all of it. We have messed up this world and our lives enough already by doing what seems right in our own eyes (Jud. 21:25). May it be said of us, we followed the Lord; with our heart, we loved and obeyed our Lord faithfully.

Jesus, while He was preparing His disciples for the time He would no longer be with them on the earth, made a very simple statement in response to the inquiry of the lawyer: “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mat. 22:36-40).

The command of Jesus is very simple, is it not? He is telling us not to allow anything to become more primary than our love for God and for each other. Honestly, it is a challenge to make sure that our relationship with God goes beyond a belief system. Is it more than our belief in God? Is it what Jesus said it must be? Is it a completely sold out, love relationship with Him, each other, our communities, and the people around the world? Sometimes maybe it is a love relationship with God and a “like” relationship with other people who are different from us. But that is not what Jesus said, is it?

What would happen if everyone in your family said, “We are not going to go to church anymore; I will never pray again or read the Bible again; I am through with God”? How would you respond? Would you quietly go with them or would you say, “Oh, no, not me. I love Jesus so much. I love Him with everything I am, with everything I own; I am going to keep following Him. I hate to see you go, but I love Him more than I love you.” We have to make sure that we have our own relationship with God and that we love Him and each other more than we love our families or ourselves. Because there is coming a day when we will stand before God alone and He is going to examine every facet of our lives and what He finds is going to determine our eternity. At that time, we will hear

one of two things. “Well done, faithful slave” or “Depart from me, I never knew you. I know your wife, she really loves me, and I know your children and they love me so much. But I do not know you. You never loved me.”

Two things worthy of remembering as we live in our tents are understanding and practice. Without doubt, absolutely imperative, essential to our loving God is to understand why we must love our neighbor as ourselves. It is crystal clear that if we do not love our neighbor in the right way, we cannot love God like we should. “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). We can verbally express our love for God, but if we do not love our neighbor by the same standard, we are lying.

Perfect practice makes perfect. We cannot possibly love our neighbor without perfect practice: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:11-12). John is not simply making a statement that God loves us. John is giving us the standard by which we gauge our love for each other. If God so loved us: the word *so* is an adverb of manner and it mandates the love that God has for us is the same kind of love we have for each other. The end result of that kind of love is that God will love people through us: we love God, we love people. The issue of living in a tent while looking for a city will be settled if we love God the way Jesus commanded us.

Abraham did not live his life in an attempt to see how he could squeeze God into his tent. His life is the blueprint we can emulate because we want God to have priority over our lives, our tents, and His city. Like Abraham, we all have time to serve God. Every one of us has enough money to

honor God in our worship and service in helping others. Do we have enough time and enough money to live the kind of life we want to live and serve God and give to God the way we should? We probably do not. So we have a decision to make. Usually, not always, God ends up getting sacrificed so we can please ourselves.

Abraham brings to reality the possibility that we become more concerned about what God wants than what we want. That is the very core of what it means to be a slave of Christ. That is what Jesus meant when He said we should take up our cross and follow Him, submitting to His will for our lives instead of crowding Him out of our lives and giving Him a token of our lives. Let us judge ourselves before we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. His priority in that day will be justice.

When he was 88, the Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes found himself on a train. The conductor called for tickets, but Justice Holmes couldn't find his ticket and seemed terribly upset. He searched his pockets and fumbled through his wallet without success. The conductor was sympathetic. "Don't worry, Mr. Holmes," he said. "The Pennsylvania Railroad will be happy to trust you. When you reach your destination you'll probably find the tickets and you can mail it to us." The conductor's kindness did not put Holmes at ease. He said, "My dear man, my problem is not 'Where is my ticket?' but rather 'Where am I going?' (Sheane)

Where are we going? We all know where we live—in a tent. Abraham has answered the eternal question we need to ask. Where are we going? For what are we looking? “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels” (Heb. 12:22).

Works Cited

King James Version. Print

Sheane, Stephen. “The Risk-Taking Church.” *SermonCentral*. Outreach, Inc. Dec. 2009. Web.

CHAPTER 31

Blessed In All Things

Obed Rodriguez

I work at a public library where we provide our patrons with access to computers where they can surf the Internet. A couple of weeks ago, a big storm hit our town and we lost service for a few hours. One of our patrons came to my desk and asked me if all our computers were down, because he needed to get a phone number from a company and the only place to find it was the web site of that company. I said that I was sorry but the rain had probably caused the Internet to go down and there was not much I could do to fix it. One of our employees overheard our conversation and yelled from the other side of the room, “Blame it on God!”

To which I said, “No, we don’t blame it on God. We thank God for the rain instead.”

Our patron looked at me, smiled, and said: “You are right. We should thank God for the rain. This phone number can wait for later, but the rain is something we truly need.” Thank God for the rain. Sometimes we do not realize how blessed we are. We live in such different conditions that we have stopped paying attention to the truly important things in life and we fail to recognize the blessings that our Heavenly Father gives us every day.

God Blessed Abraham

In Genesis chapter twenty four the Bible tells us,

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. (New King James Version, Gen. 24:1)

Abraham was close to the end of his life and at this point, he could look back and appreciate all the blessings that God had given him. He was aware that the things he had come from above and they were not his but it was all given to him so he could use them to do good. His blessings could be summed up in four major categories. First, he was blessed with freedom to seek God. Second, he was blessed with prosperity. Third, he was blessed with the love of his family and finally he was blessed with a hope of a life with God after death.

The Blessing of Freedom

In Genesis chapter 11, we find the confusion of mankind trying to do things its own way instead of following God's command. Things get better, as far as the fulfillment of the scheme of redemption, when we see the descendants of Shem and especially the family of Terah that included Abram, his wife Sarai, and nephew Lot. For some reason, unknown to us as far as the details concern, Terah decides to leave Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan, but he stopped in Haran and died there. Although we do not know exactly why he left Ur and went to Haran and stopped there, we know that God wanted Abraham to leave Haran and push forward to the land of Canaan. The land of Canaan would be the place God would give his people, the Israelites, as an inheritance in order for them to be free to have a relationship with God not having to deal with the oppression or influence of the idolatrous nations around them. For example, Ur of the Chaldeans, eventually known

as Babylon, was an idolatrous nation. If Terah and Abraham had remained there, they would not have been free to worship and obey God's commandments. In the same manner, when they get to Haran (Assyria) the culture of that nation would have made them worship Baal and Ashur among many other deities.

It was also not God's plan that Abraham remain in Egypt, when he was Pharaoh's guest (Gen. 12). Pharaoh himself gave order to Abraham to leave the country with everything he had.

God had purposed for Abraham to dwell in a place where he could have freedom of religion, freedom to seek the true living God honestly and objectively. What a great blessing this was to Abraham and not only to him but to all the following generations that did not appreciate it. Those who did were very thankful for it.

The Blessing of Prosperity

The Bible does not record if Terah and Abram took anything with them when they left Ur of the Chaldees, their home country (Gen. 11). The Bible says:

And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. (Gen. 11:31)

It is not until Genesis 12:5 that we are told that they had gathered possessions and people in Haran, obviously with hard work and most of all with the blessing from God.

Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. (Gen. 12:5)

When they got to Egypt, they acquired more goods and possessions by finding favor in the eyes of Pharaoh (Genesis 12:16). No doubt Abraham became one of the wealthiest men in the whole world. He was so wealthy and rich that the land where Lot and he lived was not large enough for their cattle so they decide to separate one from the other. Sometimes possessions can create conflict among families. We can see that, nowadays, when fights among family members are created because of an inheritance or even pieces of jewelry when a loved one passes away. One great quality of Abraham, however, is seen in his lack of interest for the material things compared with his interest in doing God's will. He knew that the things that he had were given to him by God and that God could take everything away in the blink of an eye, as happened in the case of Job.

When Abraham had the opportunity to become even richer in Genesis 14 after defeating Chedorlaomer king of Elam, he declared that the victory belonged to God and he would not take anything for himself.

I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that *is* yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' (Gen. 14:23)

What an outstanding man of God! In the midst of all the things that he had gone through, he was still aware of his absolute dependency on God. He knew that those things that he possessed were all a blessing from God.

The Blessing of His Family

All the blessings that he had received were truly appreciated by Abraham, but they all were meaningless if he had no one to whom to leave them. His freedom would just end with him and no one in his family would enjoy it. The same thing would happen with all his possessions; to whom would he give those without an heir?

That is without a doubt the greatest blessing that Abraham could have received from God in this life. When God told Abraham to leave his father's home and go to the land of Canaan and he would receive blessings, the list included his family, his descendants and the nation that would be born out of a man that was almost 100 years old.

I will make you a great nation; I will bless
you And make your name great; And
you shall be a blessing. (Gen. 12:2)

Abraham's family started when he married Sarai. Sarai was a beautiful woman (Gen. 12:11) and also a woman of faith that shared not only Abraham's perspective on life and obedience to God but also was respectful of her husband (1 Pet. 3:6) and of God's plan for them even when they were old.

Abraham's family was completed when Isaac, the son of the promise arrived. It was not complete when Isaac the son of promise arrived. Even though the birth of Ismael was a blessing, as is the birth of any child, the son that God promised was Isaac. He was the one who would bring fulfillment of the promise to make a nation out of Abraham and Sarah

whose descendants would be like the stars of the sky. The birth of Isaac was the most important blessing in the life of Abraham.

The Blessing of Hope of life with God.

Abraham's life was truly a blessed one. He received from God all the things this life could offer. That did not mean that he did not experience pain and fear during that life. God blessed him with freedom, but he also had to fight for the freedom of others. God blessed him with a fortune, but that fortune also brought dangers and envy with it, even a separation between him and Lot his nephew. God provided him with a family, but he also suffered the loss of his wife and was tested by God when He asked him to offer his son of promise in sacrifice.

However, the Bible tells us that Abraham had a different perspective on life. The author of Hebrews tells us that Abraham was a man of faith and that his faith meant that he believed on a life beyond this life. He understood that he was just passing through and that he was a pilgrim on this planet. He lived in tents because he knew that there was not a need for a permanent house, since he was not going to stay here in this earthly life forever.

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God. (Heb. 11:9-10)

Because of his faith he knew that even when God had requested that he offer Isaac as a sacrifice, God was able to bring him back from death and he was not afraid.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (Heb. 11:17-19)

We are also told that these men—even when they did not receive the fulfillment of their promise—were confident of what God would give them in the other life. They were glad to live a life of sacrifice and wait for that better place that God had prepared for them in heaven.

But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:16)

It is very interesting that out of all the men in the Bible, Jesus explains to us the state of Abraham at the present time. In Luke chapter 16, our Lord explains that Abraham is in a far better place. As a matter fact, he is in a place called Paradise where he is also providing comfort to those who were not as blessed in their life, like Lazarus, but are now enjoying of all the blessings that will truly last-the spiritual ones.

But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. (Luke 16:25)

We Are Also Blessed

Our God has blessed us with those same blessings that He blessed Abraham with and more. God has blessed us with freedom, prosperity, a family, and most of all with a hope of life eternal with Him.

The Blessing of Freedom

Freedom is one of the most important things for humanity today. Not everyone in the world enjoys the same freedom that we enjoy here in the United States of America. We must be thankful to our God because we live in a country where we can still come together as Christians to worship our God.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior. (1 Tim. 2:1-3)

According to the International Religious Freedom Report made by the U.S. Department of State, in China, the country with the largest population of the world, freedom of religion is non-existent. The government harasses and arrests and in many cases, sentences to prison many people on charges related to their practices and religious beliefs. The religious practices are scrutinized and regulated by the police. China restricts freedom of expression, association, and assembly.

Without doubt, the religious freedom we enjoy today is part of God's blessings for this nation. This freedom was

very appreciated by the founding fathers and it is expressed in the Constitution of the United States. The immigrants that came to this country in the Colonial Era were looking in part for that freedom of religion and I must admit that even when I came from Mexico, a country where we are supposed to have freedom of expression and religion, even I had the chance of experiencing certain discrimination for not being Catholic. Back then, all the people that were not Catholic were considered Protestant. They did not care to hear about what the Church of Christ was. I can honestly say that I appreciate living in a country where I do not feel ostracized for my religious beliefs. Thank God for the blessing of freedom.

The Blessing of Prosperity

I was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and was raised in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, a central state of the country. Through the years, I have had the chance to travel back to my home country and preach in numerous gospel meetings. Every time I go back to my country, I am reminded of the difference in services and commodities that we have in the United States that other countries do not have. However, Mexico is also a very blessed country in comparison to other countries in the world on continents such as Africa and Asia. The way that we eat, the way that we live, the houses, the vehicles, and the services we have are far better than what most people on the planet have. For instance, let us consider our church buildings. Did you know that most churches of Christ in the world do not even have pews, air conditioning, or running water? The wealth and financial power that God has given us is something that we need to consider as a great blessing but at the same time, we must use it to help others. We need to find a way to share our blessings with those that are in need. The bank accounts of the congregations need to be used to

help those that are homeless and hungry, not only in this country, but afar off, too.

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (Jam. 1:27)

We must understand that we are stewards of the blessings that we have received and that one day we will have to present ourselves before God to give an account of what we did with these blessings in favor of the kingdom of Christ. A church emergency is not the failure of an A/C unit; a church emergency is the failure to preach the Gospel and help those in need.

The Blessing of a Family

The blessing of having the love of a family in our lives is one that sometimes we take for granted. Sometimes we do not take the time to express our gratitude to our spouses for everything they do. We do not realize how blessed we are to have their companionship and support through all the tough times and the good times. The Bible tells us that having a spouse is a blessing from God.

And the Lord God said, “*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.*” (Gen. 2:18)

We also need to learn that our sons and daughters are a great blessing from God, and they need to be appreciated, educated, and loved.

Behold, children *are* a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb *is* a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So *are* the children of one's youth. (Psa. 127:3-4)

Having children is also a great responsibility and a challenge in times when life seems so far away from what our Lord wanted it to be. Our children are growing up in times when morality and Christian principles are challenged every day in television and every possible media. The blessing of having children needs to be appreciated and at the same time needs to be taken with great responsibility.

The Blessing of Having Hope in God.

Finally we see that our God wants to bless us with the most important blessing of all, the blessing of eternal life with Him in heaven. Abraham knew that there was a life beyond this life and that in order to obtain that life, he needed to be faithful to God's commandments, even when maybe to the "human eye," it did not make much sense. God has wanted to give us all these blessings to make our life better, but we must understand that some of these blessings are blessings that can change from blessings to curses. A person that becomes wealthy can all of a sudden feel blessed for the things he can get now, but those possessions can take him away from God, as we have seen in many cases. It is fact that many of the people that win the lottery spend all the money they get and actually end up in debt. The only true blessing that does not change its value is the spiritual blessing. Spiritual blessings—for example, the blessing of prayer—are the benefits we have for having a good relationship with God. God hears our prayers if we have a good relationship with Him (Jam. 5:16). Other spiritual blessings include fellowship with the body of

Christ (Heb 10:24-25) and of course having our sins forgiven by the blood of Christ through the obedience of the Gospel in baptism (Acts 2:38-47). The blessing of the eternal hope with God will only come to those who obey the Gospel of Christ through being baptized into Christ. Naaman the leper could not enjoy his new life unless he was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River just as the Israelites would not have been able to enjoy the Promise Land unless they were to cross the Red Sea with Moses. Then and only then, they would truly have the spiritual blessings from God. Those blessings do not change in value—they remain true blessings; the other ones are just material things that will stay behind when we leave this life. We must focus on acquiring the true blessings from above and not the things that perish.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
(Mat. 6:19-21)

We have now the opportunity to look into all the things that God had prepared to bless us with since before the foundation of the world. Everything that we have today is part of the preparation that we need in order to make it to heaven one day.

We must understand that the only true unchangeable blessings are the spiritual blessings. The physical blessings that we receive not always remain a blessing. Thanks be to

God that He has blessed us with the blessings in this life and also in the life that is coming.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. (Eph. 1:3)

May God help us appreciate all the blessings we receive from Him and use them in favor of the growth of the kingdom of Christ.

Works Cited

New King James Version. *Biblegateway.com*. Web. 7 May 2014.
United States. Dept. of State. "International Religious Freedom Report for 2012." *U. S. Department of State*. Office of Website Management. Web. 9 May 2014.

CHAPTER 32

A Faith Strong Enough To Pull Back The Knife

Eric Owens

The Power Lectureship continues to be a wonderful work that edifies the church, encourages the brotherhood, and glorifies God; I am honored to be a part of this good work.

The study of Abraham is both timely and necessary, but not simply because Abraham is an exceedingly significant person in Scripture. Sure, he was called out of Ur and given promises that serve as the foundation of the Bible (Gen. 12:1-3). God promised that He would bless all of the nations of the earth through Abraham's seed. It is hardly necessary to come up with something more significant than this especially when we consider that Christ is the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:8; Gal. 3:16; Gal. 3:26-29). Scripture unfolds to demonstrate how God fulfilled His promises to Abraham. And Paul argues that the promises to Abraham supersede the Law of Moses and serve as the foundation of the gospel of Christ (Gal. 3:17-19).

Still, among the things that stand out about Abraham is his faith. And there may be no greater demonstration of Abraham's faith than the account recorded in Genesis 22. Abraham's faith was strong enough to kill his only son and offer him to God. He had a faith strong enough to pull back the knife and so can we. Let us study Genesis 22 together and learn from Abraham's great faith.

The Setting

When we read Genesis 22, we are quickly impressed with the fact that we are reading something like nothing else in Scripture. God told a man to take his son and kill him in sacrifice to heaven. What is more, we also read that Abraham did it. He took his son, laid him on an altar, drew his knife back, and killed him. All references to this event in the New Testament state that Abraham offered Isaac (Heb. 11:17-19; Jam. 2:21).

How did Abraham do it? The simple answer is he did it by faith. But this simple yet Biblical answer only engenders more questions: 1) What is faith and 2) How was his faith strong enough to kill his own son? We want to examine these questions and more in our study.

Part of the answer is what we learn about God and Abraham's relationship. Faith is relational. We will say more about that later; for now, we will note that relationships take sacrifice. Neither Abraham's relationship nor our relationship with God is a one-way street. We cannot simply receive from God; we must also offer up to God.

Until the offering of Isaac, Abraham had given little to God; instead, God had been the overwhelming giver in the relationship. The sacrifice of Isaac shows us God asking Abraham for something. That request gives Abraham an opportunity to demonstrate his faith and solidify his friendship with God. "Faith fulfilled ends in friendship" (Jenkins 6). Note what God had given.

God's Provisions

God Called Abram Out Of Ur And Gave Him Promises.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram,
Get thee out of thy country, and from

thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (King James Version, Gen. 12:1-3)

God Reassured Abram After Lot's Departure.

And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. (Gen. 13:14-17)

God Blessed Abram When He Rescued Lot.

And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued

them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. (Gen. 14:14)

God Blessed And Protected Abram.

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born

in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. (Gen. 15:1-5)

God Made His Covenant With Abram.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. (Gen. 17:1-5)

God Shared His Mind With Abraham.

And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great

and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. (Gen. 18:17-19)

God Provided Abraham With A Child.

And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. (Gen. 21:1-5)

Having given all that he had to Abraham, God asked for something in return. Abraham's faith had developed because of God's faithfulness throughout his life. In answering how Abraham's faith could be strong enough to pull back the knife, one answer would be the fact that having Isaac to sacrifice is proof positive that he can trust the God who asked for him. How did he get Isaac? God is faithful!

Demands Of Sacrifice

Sacrifice Requires A Sacrificer (Gen. 22:1).

God did tempt Abraham. This is not a solicitation to sin; God cannot be tempted to sin, neither does he tempt man to sin (Jam. 1:13-15). The word *tempt* (KJV) means “to test, try, prove or put to the proof or test” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs).

In order for the test to be successful, someone must answer the call to be tested. Abraham’s faith is demonstrated from the beginning; his answer is “Here am I.”

Sacrifice Requires An Object And Recipient (Gen. 22:2).

God commanded Abraham, “Take now thy son...and offer him to me for a burnt offering.” The recipient of this and all acceptable worship is God. But there must be something to offer to God. God is clear in what he requires from Abraham; He always is when it comes to humanity offering Him something. Isaac is the object of God’s desire and Abraham is the one who must choose to give him to God.

Sacrifice Requires Willingness (Gen. 22:3-5).

All acceptable sacrifices to God have one thing in common; they must come from a willing heart. Abraham is willing to offer Isaac to God and this can be seen in the following four things: his purpose, his plan, his persistence, and his perfect outlook.

He purposed to sacrifice Isaac. The Bible tells us that when it came to carrying out God’s request, Abraham rose early in the morning. He went to bed knowing exactly what he was going to do and he rose up early to get to it.

He planned for an offering. Abraham took all of the necessary things for a sacrifice. This is because he intended to offer Isaac. He took Isaac, wood, and a knife. Equally apparent is what he did not take; he did not take a lamb.

He persisted to make the offering. Scripture informs us that it took three days to reach the place God would show

him. This means Abraham had time to think about what he was doing. He did not turn back neither did he change his mind. Because the journey took three days, he went to bed and woke up only to continue his journey to offer his son. .

Abraham had a perfect outlook of the events. He told his young men to wait with the animals because he and the lad would go yonder and worship and would come again to them. Abraham included Isaac in the return trip, even though he was going to kill him.

Sacrifice Requires Performance (Gen. 22:6-8).

An old saying says Talk is cheap. Such is absolutely appropriate concerning our relationship with God. We must not be talkers; we must be doers. Abraham did offer his son, because sacrifice is not accidental (Gen. 22:6), Abraham took the wood and put it on Isaac. He took the knife and they left the men and went both of them together.

Abraham trusted God. Isaac's question recorded in Gen. 22:7 followed by Abraham's answer are both astounding. Can you imagine it? They were both walking and Isaac began to inspect the gear. Father, I see the fire and the wood but where is the lamb. If we could freeze the account here, what father in the same position could not feel the weight of the question?

Abraham's answer is equally astounding and is the key to the entire chapter. "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." We are talking about Abraham's faith, but Abraham's faith in his heavenly Father is rivaled by Isaac's faith in his earthly father. The end of the verse simply says, "So they went both of them together." If his father said it, Isaac believed and followed, implicitly trusting his father; they both went together.

Sacrifice Requires Submission (Gen. 22:9-10).

The moment had come at last; God finally said stop. Maybe it was more relief than anxiousness for now Abraham

could move from thought to action. We can only imagine the event, thoughts, heat, breathing, and heartbeat of everyone involved. Isaac watched as his father built an altar and the wood was placed in order.

Next the text says, Abraham bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. Two things in this verse stand out. First, Abraham tied Isaac up before he put him on the altar. He bound him; what was that like for Isaac? Were words exchanged? Abraham did not tell Isaac to get on the altar. He bound him and that brings us to the second thing. After binding him, he took Isaac and put him on the altar. Was this news to Isaac; if so what was that like?

He did not simply bind him and put him on the altar. After binding him and after putting him on the altar, Abraham stretched his hand back. Freeze the scene again; what must Isaac be thinking? He was looking at the knife about to be thrust into his body. If that was not enough, the one doing it was no less than his father. Maybe he was horrified. Maybe he was shocked into silence. Maybe his belief in his father was unwavering and he trusted him implicitly. Or maybe he was wondering how his father who had loved him every day could forsake him and kill him. Abraham and Isaac were submissive.

Sacrifice Requires Acceptance (Gen. 22:11-12).

Three times in the chapter, Abraham was called by name. God called, Isaac called, and the angel from heaven called. Every time Abraham answered, "Here am I." This last call must have been sweet to his ears for he was told not to lay his hand upon the lad, neither do anything unto him.

Heaven now knew of Abraham's faith because he had not withheld his son from God. God accepted Abraham's sincerity and his faithful action. The test was now over and God's stopping of Abraham says to Abraham, I accept your

offering; you passed the test! James picks up the account here when he wrote,

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. (Jam. 2:21-23)

Abraham became the friend of God this day. The Scripture of belief recorded in Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled when Abraham offered Isaac. Now God knows because Abraham has demonstrated his belief.

God then provided just as Abraham had told Isaac (Gen. 22:13-14).

- First, God's provisions are always near—Abraham looked behind him.
- Second, God's provisions always server man's highest need—Abraham offered the ram instead of his son.
- Third, God's provisions glorify God and humble men—Abraham had to rely on God.

Summation And Explanation

The twenty-second chapter of Genesis is an amazing chapter. The content and events of the chapter mirror God's eternal plan to redeem humanity. Consider that in this chapter are a father and a son. The father sacrificed his son, his only son whom he loved. Wood on which the son would be laid and an instrument of death to take his son's life were

in his hand. The journey took three days. According to James 2:21, Abraham offered Isaac, and Hebrews 11:17 records that Isaac was Abraham's only begotten son. Also, Hebrews 11:17 says Abraham offered Isaac while Hebrews 17:19 says that Isaac was resurrected. Putting the thoughts together we see that Genesis 22 contains the account of both a death and resurrection. The father took his only begotten son and sacrificed him.

Genesis 22 also informs us that though Abraham went through with the offering in his mind, God actually stopped him and provided him a ram. Isaac did not taste death on this occasion. The lamb was substituted for him.

Anyone familiar with Scripture can see the similarity and differences between Abraham offering Isaac and God offering Christ. Humanity sinned and God redeemed us through His son. Our heavenly Father took his only begotten Son and laid him on the cross and sacrificed him (Isa. 53; Acts 2:22-24). Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. Apply what Abraham said to Isaac to our redemption, "My son God will provide himself a lamb" (Gen. 22:8). Jesus is God's lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). These are the similarities; now notice some differences.

The offering of Isaac tested Abraham's faith. Christ's death redeemed humanity. Abraham was offering to his friend. God offered His son for his enemies (Rom. 5:6-8). Isaac was taken off the altar. Christ remained and died; he is the lamb. Christ died for sins though he had no sins of His own. Isaac did not know he was the sacrifice; Christ did know and came to earth to accomplish the will of His Father (Mat. 20:28; Mat. 26:39). Our Lord is not only the Lamb of God, He is also the Good Shepherd who loves the sheep and laid down His life for them (John 10:10-18).

How Abraham Pulled Back The Knife

Abraham Had Faith.

What Is faith? “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). This Bible passage offers us an explanation of faith. Paraphrasing the verse, we could say, our conviction or trust is the foundation of what we expect based on proof of what we have not yet seen. Given this explanation, it is easy to see how Abraham pulled back the knife and why we should be able to pull back our knives as well. He trusted the evidence he had seen, given by the one he could not see.

Faith Is Relational.

Abraham had heard God’s word often in his life. Faith comes by hearing God’s Word (Rom. 10:17). The relationship began with God calling Abraham and making him promises (Acts 7:2-3). The journey from Genesis 12 to Genesis 22 was God demonstrating his faithfulness to Abraham.

The demonstrations of God’s faithfulness mentioned above and all of the provisions God gave serve as the basis of the relationship. Is God trustworthy? Will God keep His word? Can God do what He has promised? These questions are answered for Abraham by God from his call to leave Ur to the request to offer Isaac.

Abraham believed God, because God had given him reason to believe (Gen. 15:6). Abraham saw demonstrations of God’s power. He knew what Sarah was thinking. He was able to give Sarah back to him after Abimelech took her (Gen. 20:1-18). He saw the smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah. But maybe no act was as crucial to the development of Abraham’s trust in God as was the birth of Isaac. “And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to

him” (Gen. 21:1-2). The God Who promised and gave a one-hundred-year-old man and a ninety-year-old woman a child from her body is worthy of being trusted no matter what He asks of you.

Abraham also saw and heard God’s character. It was his God who told him about His plans to destroy Sodom. And when Abraham approached God for the righteous, God heard him. He did not simply hear him, but He moved from 50 to 10 in an effort to spare them.

Abraham asked, Would God “do right” (Gen. 18:25)? By the end of their discussion, Abraham could have said, Now I know you are a righteous God and you will always do right. The relationship is based on God’s ability and God’s character (Heb. 11:6). The faithfulness of God evokes our faith in God.

Abraham’s Faith Is Our Faith For Faith Is Always the Same

We are studying Abraham so our focus is on his faith. But the reason the writer of Hebrews can include all of the people he does in chapter 11 of his book is because they all had the same faith. Pulling back the knife in Genesis 22 should not be thought any stronger, better, or greater than any of the other people in the chapter.

Enoch walked with God; are we strong enough to walk with God in the midst of a world that has walked away from Him? Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain; are we strong enough to offer only what God authorizes despite pressures from within and without to change, alter, and leave Scripture. Noah moved with fear and built an ark to the saving of his house. Are we strong enough to fear God and continue to preach righteousness and God’s plan of salvation to save man by water as Noah did?

Time would fail to speak of all of the other people in the chapter. Walking around walls like Joshua, are we strong enough to trust God's Word despite how it looks and sounds to human wisdom? Moses chose God, his people, and suffering rather than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season. Are we strong enough to refuse the world's invitation to abandon holiness for fleshly passions that war against our souls?

One of the mistakes one may make is to look at Abraham and others and conclude that he could not have done that. If there is any act of faith mentioned in Scripture that causes one to conclude that could not have done that, then he misunderstands faith. For faith trusts in God and whatever God says to do, faith believes He will keep His word and so one moves to carry out His word. The request does not matter; faith trusts God.

Build a boat when you have not seen rain; march around a city though you have never taken one that way. Dip in a river to be cleansed of your leprosy. You will have a child though your body is dead and your wife is past bearing. When the city is surrounded, go out to the captors and do not fight. Instead, go to their land and build houses and rear families and pray for the good of the land. The one who trusts God's Word will live for the just will live by faith. Or take now your son, your only son whom you love and offer him to me for a burnt offering. It would not matter what the request is; when you trust God, you trust His ability to keep His Word. That trust moves you to do what He said.

If we wonder if our faith is strong enough to pull back the knife, we should also wonder if our faith strong enough to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Is it strong enough to pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you? Is it strong enough to let your light shine in

a dark, sinful, sometimes hostile world? Is my faith strong enough to love my neighbor as myself? Is my faith strong enough to love, honor, and cherish my wife or reverence, submit to, and obey my husband?

Faith is the basis of our entire relationship with God. We can do nothing to Him, for Him, or with Him without it. The just live by faith and without faith, it is impossible to please God. A faith strong enough to do whatever God says is a faith strong enough to pull back the knife.

Abraham Acted Like God.

God blessed man by making us in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). The image of God provides us the ability to behave like God. We are constantly exhorted in Scripture to be as our Father who is in heaven (Mat. 5:43-48). The reason for the exhortation is simply because we can. Our spirit can behave like the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9).

Abraham and God had a relationship; Scripture called it a friendship. Friends have faith in each other. God proved that He could be trusted. For twenty-five years, Abraham waited for God to keep His word. Many things happened in his life over those twenty-five years and God was with him through them all.

God appeared to Abram to reassure him and God protected and provided for Abraham throughout his life. That time together convinced Abraham of God's character. God blessed Abraham with the child He had promised. Years elapsed from Isaac's birth till the sacrifice, but by then, the relationship was solidified.

So when God asked for Isaac, Abraham acted just like he had experienced God acting with him. He got up early, prepared, purposed, and with singleness of heart and focus, he went. He got to the place and he laid his son down and drew his knife back. He did this because God asked this of

him. If God needed his son, then God could have him. This is behaving like God because when we needed His son, He did not withhold Him from us (Rom. 8:32).

Humans are not depraved, we are not animals, and we do not have a fallen nature. We are created in the image of God, crowned with glory and honor and capable of behaving like our heavenly Father. A faith strong enough to pull back the knife is a faith capable of behaving like our Father who in heaven.

Conclusion

Abraham's demonstration of faith is an example of the kind of faith that pleases God. He is the father of faith for all of those who believe (Rom. 4:11-13). He did not stagger at God's promises; he believed in the Lord. All saints are capable of living this same kind of faith. Like him, we must learn God through His Word and believe God is both capable and willing to keep His Word. Allow that trust to move us to do anything God commands us to do. Then we will have a faith strong enough to pull back the knife.

Works Cited

- Brown, Francis, Samuel Driver, and Charles Brown. "Nasah." *Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions*. Meyer, Rick. e-Sword Software. Franklin: Meyers, 2000-2014. Digital file.
- Jonathan Jenkins. *Becoming God's Friend*. Houston: Digital Bible Study Books, 2011. Digital file.
- King James Version*. Cambridge: Cambridge University P, n. d. Print.

CHAPTER 33

Was Not Abraham Our Father Justified By Works?

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

It has been a joy supreme to have appeared on all past Power Lectureships beginning with the initial one on the providence of God in 1989. Genuine gratitude is expressed to Wade, Robert, and the elders, and all treasured saints composing the Southaven congregation for the invitation to appear on the 2014 one. From the initial one in 1989 to the current one in 2014, each lectureship has been relevant, timely, and greatly needed. This annual lectureship has been hosted by a great congregation, great eldership, great directors, and sound speakers. Looking back, it can be said truly that truth has been safe in the hands of all participants.

Abrahamic Prominence

Either as Abram, his initial name, or Abraham, the new name given him by Jehovah God, his good, great, and grand names appear in sixteen Old Testament books and in ten New Testament books.

He had a good name—Abram—at birth. Its rich meaning is “father of height” or “exalted father.” The new name given

him—Abraham—meant “father of a multitude.” He added much luster to both of these names. Truly, we can say that he was not an ordinary man but a very extraordinary man. He was father to eight children—Ishmael, Isaac, and the six sons born to him by Keturah. These six are listed in Genesis 25:2. His descendants looked back to him as founding father. An attractive appellation of Deity in both Testaments is “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” This speaks volumes of these three noble patriarchs in the early morning of time. Heaven’s Almighty God would not have allied Himself with three ungodly, unrighteous, Immoral, and worldly men. They were men of good character, excellent breeding, and sterling reputations. It was a great complement to them that Almighty God chose to be known as the God of this tremendous trio. Thousands of men are portrayed in the Bible but God chose these three, not three other Biblical men, for this signal honor. In the New Testament, Jesus let us know that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will grace heavenly habitations (Mat. 8:11; Luke 13:28). All three of these are mentioned in the two genealogies of Matthew and Luke (Mat. 1 and Luke 3). Hence, they were in the family line from which sprang the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Inspired Assessment Of Abraham By James

This is not James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John. It is not James, the son of Alphaeus. This James is the Lord’s brother. Earlier he and his three brothers’ rejected the Deity of their older brother—the Christ (John 7:4). Subsequent to His resurrection, Jesus made an appearance to James as we learn from Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:7. It strongly appears from this appearance by Jesus that he was not only the half-brother to Jesus but His full brother in the faith made holy.

Paul referred to him in Galatians 1:19. He presided at the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15 and was a great leader in the Jerusalem congregation (Gal. 2:9). He and Jude, another half-brother of Jesus, wrote the two New Testament books bearing their names respectively.

In his book, James mentions God, Jesus, Abraham, Rahab, and himself by name. Abraham and Rahab are portrayed as people of faith coupled with obedience in James 2:21-25. In his “Gospel of Common Sense,” as some have called it, James wrote sagely and saliently, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.”

From James 2:14 through James 2:26, the inspired scribe is refuting an error—faith only—in his day which if anything is even more popular and widely accepted in our own day. Martin Luther taught it in the 1500s. The Methodist Confessional of Faith teaches that faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and one filled with comfort. It is neither. It is not wholesome and it is not filled with comfort for it overflows with damnable error. Yet, it is widely accepted by myriads of men in denominationalism. They do not believe James, else they would reject this *ism*.

James had already stated that faith only is incompetent to save. He shows its lack of any value in these valiant verses. Demons even believe and tremble; yet they are not saved. Vain or empty is the man who claims faith only is powerfully operative in the realm of redemption. In James 2:20, he asks tersely if they did not know “that faith without works is dead” (King James Version).

James is now ready to back it up with Old Testament examples of the very well-known Abraham and the lesser-known Rahab in Joshua's era.

From the time God called him, both in Ur and later in Haran, this noble man linked his faith with a spirit of remarkable obedience. When called to leave Ur, and later Haran, he obeyed promptly and joyfully.

In Inspiration's Hall of Faith, Hebrews 11, the Scripture affirms his submissive spirit by noting,

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whether he went. (Heb. 11:8)

He obeyed and vacated Ur, going on to Haran, traveling in a northwestern direction. From Haran, after his father Terah died, he and his household journeyed into Canaan. Every mile that he traveled the Fertile Crescent road was a mile of working faith. "Faith only" would not have moved him an inch from Ur or later from Haran. His fundamental faith remained on alert during all this journey. It remained with him with the rest of his life. That is why he died in the faith (Heb. 11:10ff).

The admirable apex of his towering faith is delineated in Genesis 22 and Hebrews 11:17-19. Abraham was 100 years of age at Isaac's birth. Isaac was the son of promise and greatly loved by his aged parents. The seed line is not to be worked out through Abraham's servant, Ishmael, or one of the sons of Keturah. Isaac was the chosen one. It has been surmised that Abraham might have been 125 at this time. If right, Isaac would have been 25. He would have been in the very prime

of his manly strength. Youthful Isaac might have resisted, but he was the dutiful son.

The faithful patriarch was commanded in Genesis 22 to take Isaac, the son he loved so deeply, and go to the land of Moriah “and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Gen 22:2). Tested and tried, Abraham obeyed implicitly and promptly. He did not delay. He took Isaac, two of his servants, and the wood for the offering. He had sufficient time to weigh in his mind what he was commanded to do. It was not until the third day that “Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off” (Gen. 22:4). Leaving the two young men at one spot, the father and son went to the designated area for the altar’s erection on Moriah. Perhaps this was one of the four hills on which Jerusalem was built. The other three were Zion, Bezetha, and Acra. He told the two servants that he and his son “will go yonder and worship, and come again to you” (Gen. 22:5). The Hebrews penman, very likely Paul, offers a needed insight relative to this (Heb. 11:17-19). Abraham believed fully and firmly that God would raise him from the dead if the fatal knife were plunged into innocent Isaac. Abraham had the knife ready for the painful plunging when his hand was stayed (Gen. 22:12). A ram was caught in the thicket nearby and became the sacrificial object and not the son of promise.

James knew all this when by the Spirit’s direction, he affirmed Abrahamic justification of works of obedience (Jam. 2:21). Monumental faith was wedded to Abrahamic works of obedience thus making faith perfect or entire. “Abraham believed God and his obedient faith and regal righteousness were imputed or credited to his account. As a result he was called “the Friend of God” (Jam. 2:23). Jesus taught, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you (John 15:14).

With such a towering act of supremely obedient faith on Abraham's part, James is ready to spring forth the single greatest refutation in the Bible of faith only (Jam. 2:24). With force and finality James wrote, "Ye see then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Luther hated this passage and its holy author when he came to it. He called James "a right strawy epistle" and denied it belonged in the Sacred Canon of Scripture. It is reported that he changed his attitude toward this worthy and wonderful book. He should have repented of the blasphemy and slander against this general epistle.

"Faith only" would have been damnable to Abraham had he endorsed and practiced it. It is equally damnable to all its deceived practitioners today.

The second assigned text is Roman 4:1-25. Our exposition of it will be divided into seven sections. A title will be assigned for each of these.

Abraham Was Justified By Faithful Obedience— Not By Meritorious Works (Rom. 4:1-5)

The background of Romans 4 is the problem of Judaism. At first Jews thought salvation was for them only. Gentiles were excluded. Cornelius' conversion in Acts 10-11 shattered that. This occurred in A. D. 41. A further shattering of their selfish sentiment was the Jerusalem Conference in A. D. 50. Luke records it in Acts 15. Paul adds a supplement of his own in Galatians 2. Judaizers turned to another equally damnable error. They then contrived to force Gentile Christians to be circumcised and keep Mosaic mandates if they expected to be saved. Acts 15 and Galatians 2, 4, and 5 refuted that falsehood. In fact, Paul labeled this as having fallen away from grace in Galatians 5:2-4. In Romans 4 the Spirit of truth prompted Paul to

reference Abraham their founding father and one they respected greatly.

Furthermore, it needs to be pointed out that man may be justified in only two ways. 1) One of these is a life of absolute perfection with not a sin in his past. Then he could merit salvation; it would be owed him as a matter of debt. No one could qualify for Jesus only lived a perfect life. Paul had stated already, in profound Romans that all have sinned and come short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). 2) The second, and right one, is justification by faithful obedience to God's law—the New Testament. This Judaizers did not like at all and fought Paul all his life over this.

Was Abraham justified by perfection of heart and life with no sin at all in his life? Had that been the case, he would have had proper cause to boast. Salvation would then be a matter of debt God owed the patriarch. Abraham was not perfect as we see in Genesis 12 and 20 with lies told about his real relationship with Sarah to Pharaoh and Abimelech, respectively.

The Scripture is plain that "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). The Spirit and Paul have their minds focused on Genesis 15:6. Because of his obedient faith, and faith demands submission to truth, this was credited to his account. Be it recalled that Abraham had practiced righteousness long before Genesis 15:6 occurred. This is readily seen by what Moses wrote of Abraham in Genesis 12-14. Marvelous indeed was his past filled with a righteous faith, availing faith that acted submissively. He will reach the apex of his faith in the willing offering of Isaac in Genesis 22 and to which James alluded in James 2:21-23. If one were perfect in heart and life, then grace would be nullified. Salvation would be owed him; it would be a matter of debt. However, the person who does

not attempt meritorious works but builds and maintains a working, obedient faith, then this is counted to him for righteousness (Rom. 4:5). It should have been obvious to the mindset of Judaizers that Abraham's justification was neither by circumcision nor by keeping Mosaic mandates. He was 99 years old when circumcised and had been a justified believer for some 30 years. He preceeded the Mosaic law by some 430 years—1921 B. C. to 1491 B. C. (cf. Gal. 3:17). Abraham was justified by submitting to Jehovah's requirements. Gentile Christians were justified by submitting to the gospel of Jesus Christ which they had done. They did not need to be circumcised or keep Moses' mandates or Sinaitic statutes.

David's Testimony (Rom. 4:6-8)

To the Jewish mindset in the first century, Abraham, Moses, and David were at the very top of all Old Testament personalities. Paul had already alluded to Abraham. Now he turns attention to the renowned David and what this mighty monarch wrote in Psalm 32. To one who deems his works as meritorious, God does not credit that one as righteous. If a person is ungodly and unrighteous, God does not credit godliness and righteousness to him for he possesses neither of these. The Almighty does not pretend we are godly and righteous when we are neither. Satanic sons and devilish daughters are not treated like sons and daughters of God are.

Widely accepted errors today are that Adam's sins are imputed to us, that humanity's sins are imputed to Christ making Him the greatest sinner who ever lived, that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, that another's sins are imputed to us, or that the righteousness of others is imputed to us. Roman Catholics do this in what they call supererogation or a Bank of Good Works. They contend that some have done

far more than is needed and the surplus works are placed in a Bank. Deficient ones may cash

in on this surplus for their own lack. Banks do not operate this way and neither does God's religion. Righteousness is right doing, right thoughts, right words, and right deeds. It cannot be transferred to others. The five foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1ff tried to circumvent this by seeking to borrow preparation and righteousness from the wise five. The clear point of the wise is stated in two decisive words—"not so" (Mat. 25:9).

David stresses two points: 1) Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered (Rom. 4:7). 2) Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin or charge him with possession of such. Such is not the case with this man because his sins are covered properly; his sins have been forgiven.

Abrahamic Justification By Faith— Not By Meritorious Works (Rom. 4:9-14)

This section covers verses 9-14 in Romans 4. Does this blessedness come only on the circumcised (the Judaizer's contention) or upon the uncircumcised (Gentiles) also? Not the former but the latter has to be the right response. Circumcision was not what justified Abraham. He was 99 when circumcised, yet had been a faithful follower of Jehovah God for about 30 years at the time of his circumcision, at which time he vacated Ur and journeyed to Haran. We know he was 75 when he left Haran and journeyed into Canaan (Gen. 12:4). Probably, he was near 70 when he went to Haran from Ur of the Chaldees.

Abraham was counted righteous long before he was circumcised. Could not the dense Judaizers see such razor-sharp reasoning on Paul's part? Abraham surely was justified

minus circumcision. So were Gentile Christians. Circumcision played no part in their reception of redemption. Paul sums it up marvelously in Galatians 6:15 wherein we read, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.”

He received the sign of circumcision and a seal of his righteous faith. Thus he was in perfect position to be father of all believers—Jews who were descendants of Abraham and had obeyed the gospel and Gentiles who had obeyed that same glorious gospel.

Paul mentions “the steps of that faith of our father Abraham” (Rom. 4:12). The steps of salvation—hearing, faith, repentance, confession and baptism—are matters of mockery to a new breed of preachers, elders, and church members who no longer walk the old paths (Jer. 6:16-17). I had much rather be a “five-stepper” as no stepper at all!

The Abrahamic promise came not through Mosaic mandates but “through the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:13). If keeping Mosaic law makes one an heir, then “faith is made void and the promise of none effect” (Rom. 4:14). Paul’s strongly worded which case left no leg upon which any Judaizer could stand—none at all! He refuted their whole Judaistic argumentation thoroughly.

No Law—No Transgression

This is the gist of Romans 4:15. The law worked wrath to its violators. It said do or die. No Old Testament Israelite kept that law perfectly for all of them sinned at one time or another. Paul proved that in Romans 2-3. In Romans 1, Paul proved Gentiles as sinners before God. Romans 3:9 and Romans 3: 23 wrap up his arguments in forceful conclusion.

Never have men been void of law. All were under patriarchal law in the early morning of time. Israelites

were under the Mosaic system from Sinai till Calvary and Pentecost. Gentiles had been under God's moral law or patriarchal precepts prior to Calvary and the coming of Christianity.

Minus law, there is no transgression. No law, then no transgressors. This proves Gentiles were under law prior to Calvary. Had there been no law for them, then all non-Jews in the Old Testament era were free of any transgression. What about men today who say there is no law, rule, or regulation for man. Then there would be no transgressor of law—not as much as one!

Abrahamic Faith (Rom. 4:16-22)

Redemption had to be of faith (Christ and the gospel) to be by grace. Faith and obedience should never be arrayed against each other as misguided preachers do toward the masses of men to whom they preach. The riches of redemption belong to both Jew and Gentile through faith—not through Sinaitic statutes or Mosaic mandates. Abraham is not father to infidelic Jews or rebellious Gentiles. He is father to Christians—to Jews and Gentiles alike.

Abram, his former name, meant “exalted father.” Abraham, his new name, meant “father of a multitude.” God “quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17). He took a couple, Abraham and Sarah, who thought they had no procreating powers and made them parents in their old age of Isaac. He was 100 and she was 90 at the time of Isaac's birth. Strong had been Abrahamic faith that God would make this formerly barren couple parents of the son of promise. Years before he had been promised that through his seed nations would be blessed. Paul, in Galatians 3:16, makes clear that his seed (no s at the end of this word) would be Christ—

not Abrahamic descendants as some have mishandled this precious passage.

Abraham did not stagger in unbelief in the promise of this son but was fully persuaded that what the Almighty promised, He could fulfill. Such righteous faith on Abraham's part caused God to credit such marvelous, obedient faith to Abraham's account.

Price Of Our Justification (Rom. 4:23-25)

These precious principles were not written just for the sake of one man, namely Abraham, but for all heirs of redemption in Christ. Righteousness will not be put down to our account in the absence of a righteous disposition. Faith only did not accomplish such for Abraham and his family and neither will it be of any value to us. It is false on the very face of such. In Rom. 4:24, Paul makes crystal clear that faithfulness is essential if this bright, beautiful blessing is to be put down on our account. There is an essential *if* appended here and it reads, "If we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." Ardency of accepting His resurrection is part and parcel of Him as the only begotten Son of God, formerly dead but now alive and forever more.

Calvary and His resurrection are linked loyally and lovingly. He paid the precious price for our offenses on Calvary. Then He "was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Had He remained sealed in that sepulchre, there would have been no justification for a single son of Adam's race.

Lessons Learned From These Two Passages

1. At no time has God saved any man until fervent faith moved him into obedient action.

2. Faith only and saving or availing faith are poles apart.
3. Faith is perfected when it is wedded to the beauty of obedience.
4. Faith only bats out here—way out!
5. In the context of James 2:21-23, we note that James declares faith only to be dead, barren and void of any value (Taylor 31-32).
6. “No amount of works that a person may do will make his forgiveness any less a matter of grace” (Whiteside 111).
7. Judaism and its contenders that circumcision is an absolute must for salvation bat out here—way out (Taylor 86)!
8. Faith that rebels against Deity’s directions is not Biblical faith at all—not even a forty-second cousin!

Works Cited

King James Version. Print.

Taylor, Robert R. Jr., *Studies In James And Jude*. Ripley: Taylor, 1987. Print.

---. *Studies In Romans*. Abilene: Quality, 1996. Print.

Whiteside, Robertson L., *A New Commentary On Paul’s Letter To The Saints At Rome*. N.p. Clifton, 1945. Print.

CHAPTER 34

Sarah: A Woman Who Was Blessed To Keep House

Donna Faughn

I can close my eyes and easily focus upon the day that I married my very best friend in this world. I can see the decorations in the church building, the beautiful dresses my bridesmaids were wearing, the groomsmen in their suits, and just how handsome my soon-to-be husband looked as our eyes met for the first time that day as my father escorted me down that aisle and placed my hand in my groom's. We had dated for six years, and finally our wedding day was a reality. After our honeymoon, we moved into a roach-infested apartment and could not have been happier.

I can also still recall with great clarity the day that my doctor told me that I was going to have a child. The joy that washed over me was indescribable. And then I got the pleasure that evening of telling my husband the news and got to relive that joy as I saw the look of pure happiness that came upon his face—along with a few tears. We rushed out of our home to go and share the good news—news that brought joy to both families—with both sets of parents. We had been married for three-and-one-half years and had been trying to have a child for about a year. Our plan had always been for me to be able to quit my teaching job and stay at home with our children when they came along, and now our plan was

going to become a reality. We had prayed for children. We had planned for children. We were prepared for the arrival of our first child—a daughter.

The account of Abram and Sarai in Genesis does not give us any details about their wedding or home, but it would probably be safe to assume that they did not have the beautiful wedding that my husband and I did, nor a sturdy, permanent structure in which to live. The Scriptures tell us for certain that their home was not blessed with children in the early years of their marriage because we repeatedly read that Sarai was barren, as she was for much of her life.

Upon leaving Ur of the Chaldeans with Terah, Abram's father, to journey toward Canaan, Sarai was called upon to leave her home and live in a tent. Travel was a major part of her life, and yet we read about a woman who loved her husband, trusted in God, and apparently left her home willingly to be by her husband's side. The Psalmist, in exalting the God of the universe, said, "He grants the barren woman a home, Like a joyful mother of children" (Psa. 113:9). He may have had Sarai in mind when he wrote this. Much can be learned from this woman Sarah.

Sadly, today, many women fail to see the joy of caring for a home and family. They strive for something bigger and better materially. Having a roof over their heads to give protection from the elements is often not good enough for women today. When blessed with the conception of a child, many fail to enjoy carrying the child and then caring for that child when he/she is born. The Psalmist describes children by saying "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward" (Psa. 127:3) Many fail to see children as a reward from God.

Let us take a look at this woman named Sarah, and let us see what we can learn from her about how we as

Christian women should view our role as wife, homemaker, and mother.

What Do We Know About This Woman Named Sarah?

We learn much of what we know about Sarah from the passages in Genesis in which she is mentioned. The first time she is mentioned in the Scriptures is in Genesis 11:29-31. She is named Sarai and is married to a man named Abram, the son of Terah. As we continue to read about Sarai, we find so many qualities about her as a woman of God—qualities like love for husband, obedience, loyalty, submissiveness, beauty, ingenuity, hospitality, and faithfulness. Along with all of these qualities, Sarah was a woman who was blessed by God. While all of these qualities may not be described in the words mentioned here, they exist so clearly in the passages which tell us of this woman named Sarai (Sarah). Let us consider some of these qualities.

Love, Obedience and Loyalty

In Genesis 12, we read that Abram at age 75 received a call from God to leave his country and family and journey to a land that God would show him. God promised to make a great nation from Abraham, bless him and make his name great, bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him. God promised Abram that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). Sarai surely must have known about this covenant God had with Abram, and she loved him enough to be willing to go with him on this journey. The love Sarai had for her husband was more than a feeling; it put feet on that feeling and led her to go with her husband as they went to an unknown place. This action brings to mind words like obedience and loyalty when I think of a woman who loves her husband and is willing to follow her husband's lead as he follows God's commands.

Beauty and Submission

In the same chapter, Genesis 12, we learn much about Sarai's submissiveness, along with the fact that she must have been a beautiful woman. As she and Abram were about to enter Egypt because of a severe famine in the land, Abram made a request of Sarai that seems very strange to us as we read this passage. The Scriptures do not tell us Sarai's exact age, but we know that she was some years older than sixty-five. They had traveled from Haran to the land of Canaan and then down to Egypt, so there is the possibility that several years had passed. In our time a woman of Sarai's age would probably not be described as so beautiful outwardly that she would be the object of some man's desire. Abram feared for his life, so he asked Sarai to say that she was his sister, in order that he might live. This, of course, was partially true. This same action is repeated in Genesis 20 and at this time Sarah is even older. She did not, however, refuse to submit to Abraham's request but went along with his plan and became part of the harem of Abimelech, the king of Gerar. In both instances God intervened and not only protected Sarah, but also allowed Abraham and Sarah to leave with great possessions.

Ingenuity

"In Sarah's time woman assumed little importance until she had given her husband a son, for it was through his son that a man lived on. The tragedy of Sarah's early life was that she was barren" (Deen 8). We read of other women in the Bible who longed for children. In 1 Samuel we read about Hannah who gave us one of the most beautiful definitions of prayer found in the Bible. As she explained to Eli the priest what she was doing she said, "I have poured out my soul before the Lord" (1 Sam. 1:15). Many years earlier, Sarah may have had this very same depth of longing.

We learn a lesson about the female gender in chapter 16 of Genesis. Women tend to be “fixers.” No doubt Abram had told Sarai about the dream he had and what God had revealed to him about future generations, and yet she remained barren. She found a “solution” for their problem in the form of her female servant, an Egyptian named Hagar, whom she offered to Abram as a surrogate. When Hagar conceived, Sarai was upset and sent her away. God once again intervened and told Hagar to go back to her home and submit to Sarai. Sarai was seventy-six years old when Hagar had a son and Abram called him Ishmael. For the next fourteen long years, Sarai watched Ishmael grow up before her very eyes while she remained barren. She could not “fix” God’s plan because God’s plan did not need fixing.

Hospitality and Blessing

In Genesis 17 we read about the renewal of God’s covenant with Abram. At this time God renamed him Abraham which means “father of a multitude.” Sarai received two things on that same day. Her name became Sarah, which means “princess,” as did her original name. She also received these promises from God: she would be blessed by God, bear a son whose name would be Isaac, be the mother of nations, and kings of people would come from her. She was 89 years old when Abraham received these promises from God.

Genesis 18 continues with more news of God’s plan through the mouths of three messengers, one of whom is the Lord, Who appeared before Abraham. He offers them hospitality which came from the hands of Sarah, while the Lord gives Abraham the news about the next year of their marriage. “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son” (Gen. 18:10). As Sarah was listening to this conversation, she thought about their ages and laughed to herself. One of the

most beautiful passages for any Christian is found in Genesis 18:14 when the Lord who was speaking with Abraham made this statement: “Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” God had a plan and Sarah was very much a part of that plan.

Faithfulness

Abraham and Sarah were blessed with a son, Isaac, the son of promise, just as God had said they would be. I doubt that their life was ever the same, nor their relationship with the God of the universe. As the account of the life of Abraham and Sarah continues in the book of Genesis, we read a great deal about faith. The Scriptures do not tell us whether or not Sarah knew about the test of Abraham’s faith which God gave him. She may have wondered where the sacrifice was if they were going to offer a sacrifice to God. Abraham may have also been wondering how God was going to work this out, but the trust and faith Abraham had in the God he served is clear when we read “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son...concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (Heb. 11:17-19). While Sarah also might not have understood how this would work out, she apparently trusted Abraham and God to take care of her child.

The book of Hebrews begins by defining faith: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1) Hebrews 11:11 records the great faith of this woman named Sarah. “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised” (Heb. 11:11). Along with so many men of faith who did wonderful and mighty acts for God, Sarah is

mentioned in this great “hall of faith.” She is among that great cloud of witnesses to whom we can look to help our faith grow and become stronger as women of God.

The Value Of A Godly Wife And Mother...Today

With all of these wonderful attributes of Sarah in mind, let us fast forward in time to our day and age and make some applications. Culture is often used as an excuse for the differences in Bible days and our world now. Our culture is different today, but I believe that the value of a godly wife and mother is the same today as it was in the days of Sarah. Those same attributes which Sarah had should be had by godly women today. Without exception they are matters of the heart. Let us take a look at some practical applications concerning the God-given roles of women.

Not A Possession But A Treasure

Weddings are important events in our lives. They mark the beginning of a new family, just as God intended for it to be. Often on that wedding day the bride and groom feel very treasured. They look upon one another in an adoring fashion as she comes down that aisle to stand beside her fiancé. Vows are taken at most wedding ceremonies. Vows in Bible times were of extreme importance, as they should be today. They bound a person to do what he or she had vowed to do. Hannah, whom we mentioned earlier, made a vow to give her son to the Lord if God would bless her with a son (1 Sam. 1:11). She faithfully kept that vow and Samuel, her son, became a great man of God.

I do not know what kind of vows Abraham and Sarah might have taken as they became husband and wife, but I do know that Abraham treasured Sarah. She was by his side through all of their trials and triumphs. When Sarah died at the age of 127, Abraham and Isaac both mourned for her

and Abraham made special arrangements for her burial. He would not accept the gift of a burial place in which to bury her, but paid full price for the cave of Machpelah. Abraham did not consider Sarah to be his possession, but a very great treasure.

When Jim and I married many years ago, we made some vows to one another on that day. These vows are not found in God's Word in these exact words, but the principles are found on many pages of the Bible. We took those vows very seriously. I clearly recall the minister saying that we were taking these vows "before God and these witnesses." I vowed to "love, honor, and obey" Jim as my husband until death parted us. Jim vowed to "love and cherish" me until death parted us. We have both tried to live up to those vows over the last 44 years. We have had many good and bad times in life, but since we made vows before God, we determined to enjoy the good times and work through the difficult times. I am not a possession for Jim to use as he wills, nor is he a possession for me to use. We treasure one another, and the value of that treasure increases with each passing year.

Many young people today refuse to use traditional vows, calling them antiquated. They balk at using words like honor and obey. They write their own vows which are often beautiful to listen to, but do not contain the principles Sarah taught us, nor the guidelines found in the New Testament.

In his letter to the Ephesians the apostle Paul wrote some words that would help all couples be a treasure to one another. Paul told wives to submit to your own husband, **as to the Lord** (Eph. 5:22, emphasis added). Paul goes on to say that the husband is the head of the wife and she should be subject to him (Eph. 5:24). This forever establishes the position that a husband should have in the home. Let me hasten on to say that Paul then instructed husbands to love

their wives as **Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her** (Eph. 5:25, emphasis added). When a man loves his wife so much that he would give his life for her, she is a treasure, not a possession. A wife who is loved in this way will have no problem loving, honoring, and obeying her husband. She will treasure him.

We live in a possession-oriented society. Many people think their worth is measured by what they own or by what they can show off materially. It is not difficult then to understand why so many women today feel like possessions rather than treasures. When a wife does not try to emulate the qualities Sarah had or follow God's plan for the home, she is not a treasure. Chaos, unhappiness, low self-esteem, anger, bitterness, and often divorce are the results.

Not A Pedestal Position But A Partner For Life

The first problem that Adam encountered after he was created by God was the fact that there was no suitable companion found for him. God took care of that problem by taking one of Adam's ribs and making a woman—His crowning creation. God did not put Eve upon a pedestal to be above Adam, nor under his feet to be his slave. God created Eve to be a helper for Adam and serve alongside of him. She was made to be a partner in the work they were to do. She was capable of bearing children, but not without Adam. Adam was capable to producing children, but not without Eve. They were perfectly suited for one another just the way God intended for it to be. This first marriage is a wonderful example of how marriage partners are to be partners for life. They are an example of what God intended when He said for a man to “cleave to his wife.” That word suggests permanence—a cementing together for life.

Adam and Eve are just one example in a long list of couples we read about in our Bibles. We do not think about

Abraham without thinking also of Sarah. Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Boaz and Ruth, David and Bathsheba, Joseph and Mary, Ananias and Sapphira are all examples of couples who are named in the Bible and made a commitment to be partners for life. Their names flow off our tongue almost as one word.

Do you know any couples like that today, couples who have made a commitment to one another and it is difficult to think about one without the other? Abraham and Sarah had just such a relationship. We do not read about her having her girlfriends over to discuss how difficult her life was since she had to live in a tent and travel all of the time. We do not read passages about her complaining about Abraham's lack of ability to give her a child. When Abraham asked her to prepare food for their guests, I doubt she complained about that task. What the Scriptures teach me about Abraham and Sarah is that they blended their lives and based their partnership on a solid foundation—faith in God.

Many today begin their journey together without the commitment of marriage. They want the physical benefits of partnership without a commitment to the relationship. How many of us would want a business partner like that—one who benefitted financially from the partnership, but was not committed to making the business work, placing all of the responsibility on our shoulders? Others enter marriage with the idea that they should not have to put forth any effort to make the partnership work, but should be placed upon a pedestal and the other partner do all of the work, constantly catering to their every want and need. Marriages like this are seldom happy and never all that they could be. When both members of the marriage place faith in God's plan for the home, then a partnership is formed that will not dissolve when those inevitable problems come along in life.

Remember Jesus' admonition in Matthew 19:6, "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." Learn to be partners for life.

Not A Burden But A Blessing

God chose Abraham and Sarah to be the parents of Isaac, the son of promise. We learn in Genesis 18:19 why God chose Abraham: "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." God made a promise to Abraham and miraculously carried it out with Sarah who was well past the age of having children. Sarah's pregnancy and delivery of Isaac were not a burden, but very much a blessing.

The Psalmist says it so beautifully when he says, "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward" (Psa. 127:3). He begins this Psalm by saying: "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psa. 127:1). Do we recognize the foundational principle contained here? God is to be the foundation upon which we build our homes. Abraham and Sarah obeyed God, even though they struggled at times to understand His will for their lives. Sarah's attempt to get a child by Hagar was merely her way of trying to help God with His plan. Can you imagine the joy Sarah felt when she realized she was pregnant? I doubt seriously that she complained about the weight gain, swollen ankles, or pain of childbirth. She considered Isaac a blessing and spent the remainder of her life caring for him. Even upon her death bed, she made a request for his future.

Today, many view children as anything but a blessing from God. Many women view pregnancy with disdain because of what it may do to their bodies. They may see it as a financial burden, or as an inconvenience. Babies are referred

to as accidents, problems, nuisances, tax deductions, and, in a very crude manner, trophies. Sadly, millions are murdered before they even get to draw their first breath on earth.

The Psalmist painted a beautiful picture for parents when he continued Psalm 127. “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Psa. 127:4-5a). Warriors did not shoot arrows aimlessly into the air. They took careful aim before letting the arrow leave their hands. I have no doubt that Abraham and Sarah were aiming Isaac in a particular direction even though he was not a child of their youth. As faithful Christian mothers, God has given us a task to do in rearing children. We pray for them to come into our lives. We prepare for their wellbeing. We discipline lovingly. We teach them to function in society. But most importantly, we aim them toward God by daily living our lives for Him and teaching His ways to our children. We work alongside our husbands to instill within those children a faith that will carry them into eternity.

We Are Blessed To Keep House...Just like Sarah

God’s crowning creation is blessed to serve—in our marriages, in our homes, in our God-given roles as women. Sarah was a servant who had faith in God and trust in her husband. The Holy Spirit through the apostle Peter used Sarah as a great example for all of us today. He used her as an example from former times of “the holy women who trusted in God” (1 Pet. 3:5). Holy women behaved properly, dressed properly, and understood the beauty and power of submission (1 Pet. 3:1-5).

Many years ago, I married a school teacher. We had plans to teach school nine months out of the year and then travel in the summers. We did plan to volunteer our time to help with

the youth program at our congregation, but we wanted some time to do what we wanted to do. (It sounds so selfish now!) After several years of teaching, my husband began preaching on a part-time basis for a very small congregation in our area. He loved it and began spending more and more time working on sermons and church-related activities. We had purchased a home and God blessed us with those children for whom we had prayed. Life was good for me as a stay-at-home mom. Then the letter came. A congregation of the Lord's church wanted to know if Jim would be interested in preaching for them "full time." I never dreamed he would give up the stability of his teaching job, sell our home, and move us to another community away from our families, but I agreed to go with him to talk with the elders. He came out of that meeting with a glow in his eyes and a spirit on fire to do the Lord's work. We cried that night. We prayed that night. We discussed many things that night. About dawn he typed his letter of resignation to the school board and our life changed forever. We sold our home. We gave up living close to family. We took a job that paid us less money and had no insurance. We stepped out on faith in God and began a journey that has blessed us beyond measure.

I have been blessed—just like Sarah—to keep house.

Works Cited

- Deen, Edith. *All the Women of the Bible*. New York: Harper & Row, 1955. Print.
- New King James Version*. Nashville: Nelson, 2004. Print.

CHAPTER 35

Sarah: Whose Daughter You Are, As Long As...

Cindy Colley

Sarah's legacy as recorded in First Peter 3:1-5 is not one that most women aspire to build today. The qualities that we are specifically instructed to exemplify in order to be her daughters—in order to “do well”—are all traits that we are to exhibit in the marriage relationship. They are subjection, a chaste manner of life, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, and obedience.

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old

time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. (King James Version, 1 Peter 3:1-5)

Our willingness to observe and emulate the spirit described in the above verses will set us sharply apart from many women of today's American society. While women around us make fun of their husbands, we will honor ours. While they attempt to usurp the roles of leadership and family provision, we will be happy to follow and flourish in the roles for which God created woman. While female role models in America today are those who flaunt sexuality and focus primarily on physical beauty, we will be modest and chaste, placing our emphases on the beauty of the heart. Ironically, our quietness will make us stand out in a world of assertive and boisterous women and our femininity will be a gentle affront to feminism in our culture. While we may associate worldliness with immoral actions (i.e., drinking, fornication, adultery, gambling, etc.), the big temptation to be like the world, for God's women today, may be in Satan's lure for us to lead our husbands, to assert our authority in society, and to be loud and self-promoting in our very personalities.

It is interesting to notice that this text about the meek and quiet spirit of subjection is sandwiched between two powerful passages about Christian suffering. Just prior to our instructions about how to be Sarah's daughters, we read about how we are called to suffer for the sake of the One who suffered the ultimate trial for our salvation:

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. (1 Pet. 2:20-25)

Just a few short verses after the “Sarah’s daughters” passage we read, once again, about blessings for those who suffer for well doing, even as Christ suffered for our sins:

But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as

of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. (1 Pet. 3:14-18)

The admonition of Peter for women to be submissive, chaste, meek, and quiet in marriage, although applicable to all women, was specifically written to those first century women who were married to heathen men. (I do not believe this passage gives permission for Christian women today to enter into the marriage covenant with heathen men. We must remember that the gospel was new at the time of this writing. Many married women may have accepted the gospel, upon first hearing it, even as their husbands rejected it.) The wives to whom these verses were penned would likely, in many cases, be called upon to suffer as they applied these principles of Christianity to their homes and marriages. In truth, the Holy Spirit was addressing women who were likely suffering at home because they were Christians. Many of them may have been verbally or even physically abused because of their commitment to Jesus. As we think about the command to these women to be obedient to their husbands, how serious we should be in our own applications. Most, although not all, of us can surely keep the injunctions of First Peter 3 far more easily than could the suffering women of Peter's day.

May we commit today to be daughters of Sarah and may this commitment bring unbelieving husbands to the Lord

(1 Pet. 3:1) and give us incorruptible beauty—beauty that is of great value in the sight of God (1 Pet. 3:4).

We Have A Prior Commitment

The two simple words *I do* changed almost everything about your world. They limited your possibilities in some ways and wildly enhanced them in others. In those two little words, you likely exchanged dating for mating, shopping around for shopping for groceries, and being a child to hoping for one. It was a radical change and, assuming you had lived your life in purity, it was probably the fastest radical change you'll experience in this lifetime.

Your married love is sustained by your commitment. That is right. Marriage is not sustained by love. It is the other way around. Agape love is the force that makes Christian marriages happy and makes them last a lifetime. Throwing in the towel is not an option for those of us who view marriage as a triangle between ourselves, our husbands, and our God. In fact, the commitment we made by candlelight before those witnesses was only solidified by the fact that we already had a prior commitment. Our marriages are infinitely richer because of the prior commitment we made to Jesus Christ. Before I married my husband, I was spiritually married to Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:32). I made vows of faithfulness to the Lord long before I made them to my husband. The prior commitment rules the present commitment and that is what gives us security in matrimony. Let us examine the influence of the prior commitment.

Obedience

Because my first commitment (my prior commitment) is to Christ, I am primarily responsible for obeying him. Thus, I immediately have the guidelines for marital submission: I must obey my husband in any event, except in the event

that he asks me to disobey my Lord. Words like “submit unto your own husbands as unto the Lord” in Ephesians 5:22, “even as Sarah obeyed Abraham” in First Peter 3:6, “obedient to their own husbands” in Titus 2:5, “submit...as it is fit” in Colossians 3:18, and “see that she reverence” in Ephesians 5:33 are strong vernacular in our culture of feminism. But, if we are first submissive to the Lord, our submission to our husbands “in every thing” (Eph. 5:24) is not contingent on culture or convenience. We do it because we are married to Jesus first. True, it enhances the experience of marriage. God’s way is always the best way. But we submit to our spouses because our marriages are triangular relationships with our Savior at the top.

The words *in everything* in Ephesians 5:24 are powerful. They are all-inclusive. Some have argued that submission in marriage is only required in spiritual matters—that my husband has no authority about what kind of cookies I bake or whether or not I accompany him to the office party. That premise, though, is inconsistent with the teaching in the first few verses of 1 Peter 3. Those verses about the exhibition of meekness and about obedience as Sarah obeyed Abraham are directed to women who are married to men who are yet heathen men. It is clear that submission in First Peter 3 is not about spiritual matters at all. (What kind of spiritual leadership would be provided by one who “obeyed not the Word”?) This passage just makes it crystal clear that husbands are the leaders of wives “in all things.” While it is true that godly men, in the spirit of loving their wives as Christ loved the church, delegate authority to capable wives in many areas (my husband has never been specifically authoritative about my kitchen, laundry room, or sewing room), the wife’s obligation is still to obey “in everything.”

Attitude

It is interesting that Peter commands actions (subjection and obedience, chaste manner of life) and attitudes (meek and quiet spirit) in the details of how we attain to be daughters of Sarah.

Christianity obviously rules not only our outward actions, but it requires our hearts. The greatest command is still, today, loving the Lord with my all...all my heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10:27). Thus, core principles of Christianity, the “ethics,” if you will, of Christ, determine my daily decisions and regulate my relationships...all of my relationships. I am often amazed as I see women who are kind and gentle people, mannerly and decorous, unselfish and soft-spoken until they get behind the closed doors of their own homes.

May I suggest to you that home should be the place where you exhibit the best that Christianity has to offer? After all, your relationship with your husband is the most permanent of all earthly relationships. If you have children growing up in that home, you are daily and indelibly etching on their souls. You are putting attitudes in them that will prove very difficult to remove...ever. And your own happiness in your marriage is largely dependent on your attitude at home. Are you getting in your own way of happiness?

Remember the premise. Your prior commitment—the one you made to Jesus in the waters of baptism—rules your marriage. Perhaps the most succinct passage that you apply daily in your relationships is known as “The Golden Rule”: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them” (Mat. 7:12).

It is a great challenge to apply this passage at home. It means we refrain from nagging. Women are nurturers. We want to fix our husbands, even the insignificant shortcomings

of good husbands. But nagging is ineffective (it is like flipping a light switch over and over when the lights are still not coming on) and is not consistent with our prior commitment.

Applying the golden rule means we are not pouters. As pouting wives, we give our husbands the silent treatment. If we do not get our way, we withhold conversation, smiles, and warmth from the men we love. We treat them in ways in which we would not like to be treated. We should never let the sun go down on marital wrath (Eph. 4:26). Further, we should not end phone conversations in words of malice or let cars back out of our garages when relationships have rifts. Life is too fragile and regret is too bitter.

The golden rule also prohibits manipulation. Women have the power to get much of what we want. It takes strong women to keep this power under control. Whining, crying, lying, withholding sex, or using sex to achieve selfish purposes is inconsistent with the prior commitment. Weak women like Delilah (Judges 16) and Jezebel (1 Kings 21) use the power of manipulation. Strong women for God use the power of self-control. We do not submit to our husbands because we have to. We submit because we choose to honor the prior commitment.

The golden rule makes us polite, genteel people. Are we polite to our husbands? Do we speak respectfully to and about them? Do we especially work to do this in front of our children, our most crucial audiences? Do we refrain from interrupting and correcting them? Do we use the words like *please* and *thank you* and *you are so welcome* and *excuse me* to the people we love most? We are most certainly reaching into the future marriages of our children as they watch the marital interactions of their parents. Surely it makes sense that our homes will be warmer and happier if we are polite within their walls. But, regardless of whether we see the positive

outcomes, we must honor our prior commitment. We must honor the original vows we made to the Lord. Remember, Sarah called him “Lord.”

Financial matters are tempered by my relationship with Jesus, as well. My husband’s masculinity—his wholeness as a man—is incomplete if he knows he fails as a family provider. Do you want to give your husband the gift of emotional wholeness? Stay in the budget! Work hard to be frugal and help him in every way possible to make ends meet. Be sure you contact him about all large decisions prior to making them. “What is a large decision?” you may ask. If you are wondering about this with regard to some pending choice, you should go ahead and ask before purchasing. It is much more pleasant to hear, “Oh, sure...go ahead,” than “I cannot believe you did that without consulting me.” Never compare your husband’s money-making ability in an unfavorable light with that of another man. That comparison is a great way to strip away your husband’s confidence and masculinity.

The golden rule simply has endless and positive ramifications in our marriages. Think about how many problems with in-laws would automatically find solutions if both spouses applied the golden rule toward their partners in dealing with parents. In fact, if you combine Jesus’ golden rule with His eternal rule about leaving and cleaving (Gen. 2:24), your marriage would be insulated from interferences that cause pain in marriage.

Rewards

Of course, the big reward is heaven. If we can just make it to the throne...if we can sit around the throne of God with our spouses and our children in the New Jerusalem, singing praises to the Lamb...our marriages will have rendered the ultimate reward. But honoring the Christian commitment in our marriages brings more immediate rewards.

Our prayers are not hindered when we do marriage God's way (1 Pet. 3:7). Have you ever tried to talk to God when you have argued in anger with your husband or failed to abide by His decision? You will find that you cannot approach the Highest Authority until you have submitted to His delegated authority. If you find yourself in that awkward place, go apologize to your husband and then come back and talk to your Father.

Our daughters receive invaluable training for submission in their own future marriages. This is training that they will rarely receive in other venues in our world of feminism. In fact, their guidance counselors at school will, almost always, scoff at girls who would like to marry and bear children in lieu of having a career. Their role models in secular society mock at the rare woman of God who openly speaks of submitting in marriage. So this gift of a godly mother's example is crucial. We must be constantly aware that we are countering a very convincing culture when our children watch us interact with our husbands. Our window of opportunity to etch this vision of what God wants and rewards indelibly in the hearts of our sons and daughters is extremely limited.

Our husbands will be better able to slay the dragons in their hectic and often godless worlds as they go about leading and providing for our families. A warm and loving haven where there is respect and admiration for a man enables him to do the tough stuff for his family in a culture of disrespect. He can take almost any courageous action for his wife and children if there is peace, harmony, and respect around the dinner table.

But the biggest reason is the one listed beneath the admonition to be obedient to husbands in Titus 2:5. It is this: "that the word of God be not blasphemed." If we knew nothing else about the rewards of doing marriage God's way,

this would be enough. I have seen this blasphemy in the words and demeanor of teen girls and young wives who wear the name of Christ, but whose moms failed to teach them the principles of respect in marriage. One teenage girl in class responded to a lesson on submission in marriage by asking “Are you telling me, Mrs. Cindy, that I will one day have to obey the man I marry?”

I responded “No, Heather. I am not saying that. God said that.”

To which Heather responded with folded arms and a steely resolve in her voice, “Well, I’m not doing that!”

This was a harbinger of disaster in Heather’s future marriage. It was blasphemy. It most certainly represented a breach in the promises she once made when she took His name. Heather had decided not to be a daughter of Sarah. She had decided not to do well. May you and I do well and may God help us to teach our daughters to do well.

Works Cited

King James Version. Print.

Cindy Colley, married to Glenn Colley, worships with the West Huntsville congregation in Huntsville, Alabama. Glenn and Cindy are the parents of Caleb Colley and Hannah Giselbach. Cindy speaks for women and teen girls across the U.S. and in mission areas around the world. She has authored several books, the latest of which is *Cindy Colley on Homeschooling*. You may read her blog and see her materials at www.thecolleyhouse.org.

CHAPTER 36

Cakes Upon The Hearth: Turning Strangers Into Friends Through Hospitality

Nancy Daniels

And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine

meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat. (King James Version, Gen. 18:1-8)

Whether it is Abraham receiving the three angels (strangers), the Midianite priest taking in Moses in Exodus 2, Rahab allowing Joshua's spies to stay with her in Joshua 2, or even Nehemiah extending hospitality to a random trumpet player in Nehemiah 4, the Old Testament is full of examples of hospitality being extended to strangers who become valued guests both during their actual time together and beyond. The New Testament is no different. The Samaritan woman invited Jesus the stranger to stay with her community which He did (John 4). The apostle Paul, who had previously been not only a stranger but also a vicious enemy of the Christian movement, was taken in by the apostles in Acts 9. Later in that chapter, it is said that Peter stayed with a tanner named Simon during his time in Joppa. In the above cases of Nehemiah and Peter in particular, it is worth pondering why seemingly obscure and even immaterial details about who stayed with whom are included in Holy Scripture. Perhaps it is because such accounts are not immaterial at all, either to the Biblical authors or to the actual people involved.

No matter where we may travel in this world; *hospitality* means the same: "A friendly reception and treatment of guests, or strangers, in a warm and generous way."

Considering our lesson text of Genesis 18, Old Testament hospitality, in some ways, begins with Abraham. He was a sojourner in the land according to Genesis 23 and was regularly depicted as moving from place to place. Therefore, Abraham became the prototype for hospitality in Jewish culture. We could say that the story of the visitation of Abraham by three angelic strangers became a model for Jewish hospitality.

Advancing to the Old Testament Law, the Israelites were repeatedly commanded to remember what it was like to be aliens in Egypt and how it felt to be strangers in that land and who were ultimately delivered by God who was leading them to a bountiful land they would call their own. God continually instructed the Israelites to do likewise to the orphans around them. “And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:33-34). Here we see both the moral dimension of hospitality and its universal applicability to the nation as a whole. In short, Israel’s identity was continually formed and reformed through the experience of being a stranger and a sojourner stuck in a temporary place, never quite at home, vulnerable to others, and always having to live according to God’s provision.

Their experience of being foreigners was also essential in helping them understand the needs of strangers in their midst. They received the hospitality of God, which in turn taught them to offer that same hospitality to others. Hence, Israel was the only ancient Near Eastern country with laws protecting the stranger and alien. “Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exo. 23:9). Judges

were commanded to deal impartially between aliens and Israelites. “And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him” (Deu. 1:16). Cities of refuge were open to aliens and native-borns alike. “These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them: that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither” (Num. 35:15). Sojourners were often classed with widows, orphans, and the poor as deserving the community’s provision and just treatment.

Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.
(Exo. 22:21-24)

In these laws, we see something of God’s own heart. We might ask ourselves whether our hearts are like God’s. Do we have compassion for the outsider and alien? In other words, if there is room in the heart, there will be room in the house!

Consistent with the Law’s commandment to be hospitable to godly strangers, the widow of Zarephath offered bread to the starving Elijah in 1 Kings 17. Notice two significant things about this account. First, it was God who directly commanded the widow to offer hospitality to Elijah. This reveals God’s heart for hospitable provision

for His people, just like during the exodus and wilderness wanderings, as well as in preparing for them a land flowing with milk and honey. The hospitable character of God does not change. Second, the obedience of the widow is remarkable given that the land was in a period of unprecedented drought and food was extremely scarce. Further, we learn in 1 Kings 17:12 that the widow had a young son to feed as well. Yet, she responded rightly to the divine Voice and gave food to Elijah the stranger. The widow was supernaturally blessed by God by having her flour and oil jars not go empty for the remainder of the drought.

A definite distinction was made between ‘aliens’ who wished to become part of God’s covenant community:

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you. (Exo. 12:48-49)

and those ‘aliens’ who actively opposed God through their attitudes and practices;

Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not

do so unto the Lord thy God: for every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. (Deu. 12:30-32)

Be Hospitable Without Complaint

“Use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1 Pet. 4:9). Yes, we will be faced with challenges in order to obey this command, and it should be obvious that God knew some of us would complain about it. It is human nature to complain about things we do not want to do. We in Sevierville are one of the hosting congregations for Polishing The Pulpit. We are called upon to house as many as possible of those who may otherwise not be able to afford one of the most enriching and rewarding experience in their lives. We have those who will provide to the maximum of their ability, while others will only complain about being asked to do so. Yes, it is possible this may be inconvenient, especially when working or dealing with children, or we may just be tired. It may also involve extra work like cleaning the house, cooking meals, and maybe, just maybe, giving up our own beds. Often, hospitality takes us away from other things we could be doing.

We should look at hospitality at a true test of our spirituality. Yes, sacrifices must be made to practice receiving others. One example of authentic hospitality stands out above others. Ladies, how would your husband react if you hit him with this proposal? Instead of adding a new family room, dining room, or a new den or office, to the house, let

us add a room for the visiting preacher, or a Christian who needs a place to stay while he is in town. This idea is nothing new. It comes for an amazing story in the Old Testament.

And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. (2 Kin. 4:8-10)

Elisha was so moved by their kindness that he offered to help them in some way.

And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood

in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life. (2 Kin. 4:13-17)

Not having a son was her greatest void in life. God rewarded her hospitality in a way she could not have imagined. Later, that son became sick and died in her arms. It was Elisha again who came to her aid and raised the son back to life. Yes, this little room paid enormous dividends.

Attitudes Are Paramount

The right attitudes of Christianity are absolutely necessary. “Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name” (Psa. 100:2-4). With the right attitude, everything we accomplish in the name of the Lord is enhanced and we then are able to live up to our fullest potential.

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving

the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. (Rom. 12:9-13).

This includes hospitality to both strangers and brethren. “Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb. 13:1-2).

As we approach Scripture, the act of hospitality is basic both to our identity and practice. It is undeniable that hospitality was viewed as the foundation upon which the moral structure of society rested starting with Abraham and going forward. “For there is no respect of persons with God” (Rom. 2:11). Therefore, Christian hospitality broke down all barriers involving gender, race, and or social status. Hospitality, which was a spiritual statement, proved to the world the sincerity of first-century Christians. No doubt, this added to the growth of the early church. After all, we are to imitate Christ. But, unlike Christ, we exist with frailties, weaknesses, and limits on our abilities. What’s more, we live in world of limited resources. Our time is limited, our space is limited, our money is limited. Worse yet, the need for hospitality is virtually unlimited.

The book of Acts is an extended historical account of the growth of the church of Christ, and episode after episode shows hospitality as integral to this growth. Acts 10:24-48 is the pivotal story of Peter at the house of Cornelius. While Peter was staying with a tanner in Joppa, Cornelius anxiously invited Peter to his home (Acts 9:43). Once in Cornelius’s home, Peter proclaimed the truth of the Gospel which Cornelius and his household obeyed and became Christians. Peter and Cornelius were mutual

strangers in the context of hospitality. Peter was a Jewish Christian, and Cornelius was a Roman centurion. They represented different cultures, different allegiances, different histories, and different peoples. Yet, hospitality was the bridge that overcame these differences and became the avenue through which God's salvation is extended to these Gentiles. Hospitality became the setting through which the Gospel was spread.

Another example is Paul and Lydia in Acts 16:11-15.

Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there.

Here Paul's acceptance of hospitality confirmed his belief in the certainty of her salvation.

The idea of Christian hospitality is linked with the teaching of the incarnation. God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, became a guest or stranger in the world. When God became man in Christ, He entered humanity as an alien or a stranger. He then lived His life in such a way that He was always dependent on the hospitality of others. Jesus, therefore, experienced the vulnerability and rejection of a stranger. “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). “And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).

Practicing hospitality, especially toward Christians, is one way a Christian shows love to Christ Himself. Consider the narrative of Matthew 25:31-46, where Jesus explicitly identified Himself as “stranger.” Jesus divided the sheep from the goats, and He said to the sheep, “For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me” (Mat. 25:35-36). But to the goats He said the opposite. Hospitality toward fellow saints, even “the least of these my brothers,” is a demonstration of love toward Him.

Several points of application can be gleaned here:

1. Jesus identified Himself with strangers.
2. Service to strangers is equated with service to Christ Himself.
3. The reward for being hospitable to strangers is Kingdom inheritance.
4. The penalty for inhospitality to the least of these is eternal punishment.

The claim of Jesus is that hospitality to the vulnerable and desperate stranger is a defining mark, an essential characteristic of one who is part of God's Kingdom and is loyal to its King, Jesus the divine Stranger. Those who treat strangers as strangers rather than inviting them in as part of the process of changing them to valued guests are entirely out of step with the Matthew 25 ethic.

Hospitality Is Not To Be Repaid

We need also to understand that hospitality is linked to God's grace in salvation. Consider Jesus' own practice of welcoming the lost and eating with people who ordinarily would have been excluded from fellowship. Not only that, Jesus' teaching on hospitality is distinctive in its emphasis on welcoming those who have nothing to give in return.

Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. (Luke 14:12-14)

Rather than inviting those who can repay, Jesus said we should invite the poor, the needy, and those generally unable to repay us. After all, God is gracious to welcome miserable beggars to the feast of His kingdom.

The act of making one welcome is basic to Christian identity and practice. For most of the church's history, Christians located hospitality within a vibrant tradition in which people, needy strangers, angels, and even Jesus were welcomed, and through which people were transformed. Considering our lesson text of Genesis 18, we find that it is undeniable that in the ancient world, hospitality was viewed as a pillar upon which the moral structure of society rested. Hospitality addresses the physical needs of food, shelter, and protection. But hospitality also radically affirms the high worth and common humanity of all people. Common table fellowship is an extremely important way, even today, of affirming the equal value and dignity of people.

In the feeding of the five thousand in Matthew 13:13-21, hospitality is extended to the masses without regard for their spiritual condition or any other distinction. We know from the end of John 6 that not all people who were blessed by this miraculous feeding followed Jesus in the end. Yet, the omniscient Jesus extended hospitality to them anyway. The same dynamic can be found in the foot washing episode of John 13, where Jesus extends hospitality to Judas knowing full well his imminent betrayal.

When interacting with "strangers," we should proactively be seeking Jesus the Stranger who directly linked Himself with the strangers of this world. Guests feel valued and appreciated when their hosts pay attention to them not just in outward preparation, but in conversation and personal attention, as was the occasion with Abraham and the angels. This is a vitally critical lesson for us today. Do not neglect your guest; make time for them, and like Jesus' hosts, you will be surprised at what you discover. Hospitality, though difficult and sacrificial at times, is a joy, not a burden.

We as Christians are to be different from other people in the world. Though hospitality may be as prevalent in our society as it was in the days of Abraham, we must imitate the pattern contained in God's Word. Jesus said the world would know that we are His disciples by the love we have for one another (John 13:34-35). Therefore, hospitality becomes one of many ways of letting the world know we are Jesus' disciples, as opposed to others who are wrapped up in a worldly lifestyle.

Always remember, hospitality is the friendly reception and treatment of guests, or strangers, in a warm and generous way. Remember that being hospitable is about obedience to God, whereby people are encouraged and uplifted, and whereby the world sees that we do belong to Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Works Cited

- King James Version*. Spokane: Olive Tree Bible Software, n.d.
Digital file.
- "Hospitality." Random House Dictionary. Print.

CHAPTER 37

Hagar: Hated Handmaid Of Sarah

Sheila Winstead

The story of Hagar is told in a few short verses in Genesis 16 and 21. However, her story continues to have far-reaching consequences even in today's world and provides invaluable lessons for us in our Christian journey. Hagar's story is inexorably linked to God's promise to Abraham:

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (King James Version, Gen. 12:1-3)

Abram obeyed God and took his wife Sarai, along with all of their possessions, servants, and his nephew Lot, and went to the land of Canaan to dwell. At this time, Abram was seventy-five years old, and his wife sixty-five.

God told Abram, “Unto thy seed will I give this land” (Gen. 12:7).

As time passed by, Abram and Sarai continued growing older, and Sarai remained barren. Abram was very rich in material things but was still lacking an heir. Becoming impatient while waiting on God’s promise, Sarai decided to take matters into her own hands and gave her Egyptian handmaiden, Hagar, to Abram to bear an heir for him. Sarai and Abram both exercised poor judgment in this case. Why did Abram not refuse his wife’s offering? Why did one or both of them not seek God’s counsel before deciding to “help” God’s plan along? Hagar, as Sarai’s handmaiden, had no choice in the matter. She was basically a personal servant or slave subject to Sarai’s orders (Fletcher, “Hagar”). According to the custom of the time period, it was acceptable for a barren wife to have children through a surrogate, in this case Hagar (“Hagar’s Legal Status”). When Hagar became pregnant, however, Sarai realized she had made a big mistake.

When Hagar became with child, Sarai’s jealousy became unbearable. All of a sudden, the shame and sorrow of being barren hit Sarai full on. She could no longer a doubt that her barrenness was to blame for Abram not having an heir. Although the wife of an incredibly wealthy, powerful, and well-respected man, the one thing that her heart desired had been denied her. Hagar, on the other hand, saw a chance for her status to improve greatly. Although she still belonged to Sarai, she would now have respect and wealth of her own as the mother of a great man’s only heir. Although still required to obey Sarai, she now did so with disrespect, having come to despise her mistress (Gen. 16:4). Because of this disrespect, Hagar was treated hardly and cruelly, to the point that she fled into the wilderness on the way to Shur, heading towards Egypt. An angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar by a fountain

of water and instructed her to return to Sarai and submit to her. The Bible records these words of the angel of the Lord:

I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. (Gen. 16:10-12)

Upon hearing this, Hagar said, "Thou God seest me" (Gen. 16:13) and returned to Sarai as God commanded and bore a son. At this time, Abraham was eighty-six years old.

For thirteen years, Ishmael was recognized by everyone as Abram's heir, and thus Hagar, so far, had realized her wish. She was the mother of the heir who would someday receive all of Abram's great wealth. She had a special status and continued to despise her mistress who had so cruelly mistreated her. However, God had another plan, and Hagar soon realized that God would fulfill His promise to Abram according to His timetable and His providence. God repeated His promise to Abram that the heir to the promise would come through his wife Sarai and at that time changed their names to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:5, Gen. 17:15). When Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah ninety, their son Isaac was born.

When Isaac was weaned, Abraham prepared a great feast to celebrate, and Sarah saw the teenager Ishmael mocking

Isaac. This so angered Sarah that she told Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael, saying, “The son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son” (Gen. 21:10). Abraham was extremely upset because he cared for his son Ishmael. However, God told Abraham not to be concerned about Ishmael or Hagar because in Isaac would God’s promise be fulfilled. God promised that He would also make a great nation from Ishmael because he was also Abraham’s seed. Trusting in God, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away the next morning with just bread and water, to wander in the wilderness area of Beersheba. When the water was gone, Hagar put Ishmael under a bush to die and moved a distance away from him. God heard the cries of Ishmael and an angel told Hagar to arise because He would make a great nation of Ishmael. God opened Hagar’s eyes so that she beheld a well of water, and she and Ishmael were refreshed. The Bible tells us that God was with Ishmael, and he grew and became an archer, dwelling in the wilderness of Paran. Hagar obtained a wife for Ishmael from Egypt, the land of her people (Gen. 21:14-21).

We do not read anything else about Hagar in God’s Word. However, the Bible tells us that Ishmael was with his brother Isaac to bury their father Abraham in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 25:9), which Abraham had purchased for the burial of Sarah. We are also told Ishmael did indeed have twelve sons who were great princes over nations (Gen. 25:12-16). Ishmael’s sons dwelled from Havilah to Shur, or more commonly known as Assyria to the border of Egypt (Gen. 25:18). Most Arab nations today consider themselves to be descendents of Ishmael; however, some Jewish scholars attribute the northern Arab tribes to the descendents of the sons of Keturah, Abraham’s second wife (“Ishmael”).

The Bible does not tell us much about Hagar as a person. We know she was an Egyptian, and we know she was Sarah's handmaiden, or bondwoman. Many Jewish and Muslim scholars claim that Hagar was the daughter of Pharaoh himself, having been given to Sarah during the sojourn in Egypt to escape the famine. Hagar, and sometimes Pharaoh, is said to have felt it was better for Hagar to be a slave in the house of Sarah than to be a princess in her own house. They had witnessed the miracle God had performed for the sake of Sarah when Pharaoh took her into his own house (Nissan Mindel). Although this theory might be a possibility, it is more likely Hagar was an Egyptian slave given to Sarah as a gift while in Egypt. If she had been a slave in Pharaoh's household, it is likely she was highly trained and well-educated. After all, Egypt was the economic hub in the region, very advanced socially and politically. Going from a servant in Pharaoh's household to being a servant in a nomadic tribe would have been quite a change for Hagar. Another story says Hagar was the daughter of the King of Magreb and was taken captive and made a slave by Pharaoh (Hagar). Another possibility, of course, is that Hagar was acquired by trade with a traveling caravan or by other means any time prior to or after traveling to Egypt (Lockyer).

Hagar is acknowledged in all Abrahamic faiths, including Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. In fact, some Jewish scholars claim Abraham's second wife Keturah was actually Hagar whom Abraham sought to bring back after Sarah's death. However, the geneologies are separated in 1 Chronicles 1:27-33. Most scholars of all faiths believe Hagar did come to believe in the one God, eschewing her previous Egyptian gods. Having lived with Abraham and Sarah for many years, she would have been taught about the one true God. She was visited by angels twice and wells appeared

miraculously before her in the wilderness. She was still in Abraham's household when the three angels visited him, and she was witness to Sarah miraculously giving birth to Isaac at the age of ninety.

The Islamic faith incorporates stories of Hagar and Ishmael throughout their traditions. One such story says Abraham personally took Hagar and Ishmael and left them in the desert near what is modern-day Mecca on God's instructions. Hagar ran seven times between the Safa and Marwah hills looking for water before she sat down and cried. According to this story, the angel Gabriel told her to lift up Ishmael, and when she did, she noticed his heels had scratched a place in the ground from which a spring flowed. Hagar dug a well and named it the Zamzam Well. Today, all Muslims are required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in their lifetimes if they are physically and financially able. During this pilgrimage, all participants go back and forth between the two hills to mimic Hagar's search for water and drink water from the Zamzam Well. Today, however, the path between the hills consists of air-conditioned tunnels under a mosque, and water is pumped and placed in coolers throughout the mosque ("Hajj").

One obvious problem with this Islamic tradition is that Mecca is more than one thousand miles from Beersheba, where the Bible says Hagar was when she saw her well. In addition, the Bible makes clear that Ishmael dwelt in the wilderness of Paran. While Islamic tradition may call the area around Mecca the wilderness of Paran, Bible geography does not support that. Ishmael lived near enough to have given one of his daughters to Esau for a wife (Gen. 28:9) and close enough to have helped Isaac bury Abraham when he died (Gen. 25:9). The Bible also states that Ishmael's descendants

lived between Havilah and Shur, which would put them a great distance from Mecca (Islam-Christian Forum).

In modern Israel, Hagar is sometimes seen as a symbol of the War of Independence in 1948 when the Palestinians were forced off the land (“Hagar”). To the Jews and Palestinians, the story of Sarah and Hagar is an allegory for the expulsion of the Palestinians. The Jews believe it was justified, as Hagar’s expulsion was justified, while the Palestinians believe they were unjustly treated, as Hagar was unjustly treated. The name Hagar is sometimes given to female babies by Israeli women who believe in reconciling with the Palestinians.

Hagar’s story is also symbolic in African-American history, comparing her treatment to that of early American slaves. She is symbolic of social and economic exploitation and represents survival in seemingly impossible conditions. Modern surrogacy groups also use Hagar as an example of how an infertile woman can obtain a child of her own. Hagar International, Hagar Center, and the Hagar Foundation strive to assist women who have suffered from human rights abuses, homeless and battered women, teenage mothers, and their children.

We can still clearly see the fulfillment of what the angel of the Lord told Hagar when he said in Genesis 16:12, “And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” Today, the descendants of Ishmael continue to strive against the descendants of Isaac, which, through Christianity, includes each of us. The traditions and stories of men continue to distort the truth of God’s Word.

In the New Testament book of Galatians, Paul used the stories of Sarah and Hagar as an allegory to compare the two covenants, the old law with the new law. Christians in Galatia

were trying to bind certain requirements of the old law, such as circumcision, upon new Christians. Paul compared those adhering to the old law as being the sons of bondage, as Ishmael was the son of Hagar, the bondswoman. Christians were compared to sons of promise, as Isaac was promised to Sarah. “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise” (Gal. 4:28).

Paul encouraged the Galatian Christians not to pursue the requirements of the old law, but to “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

Likewise today, we should not entangle ourselves in the bondage of sin, but stand fast in God’s Word. The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:21, “Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Paul gives us a list of those sinful works of the flesh to avoid being in bondage to and informs us on how to walk in the Spirit:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Gal. 5:19-23)

Paul also states in Romans 8:15, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” Jesus tells us not to fear those who can kill the body. He also tells us that God knows every hair on our head and that we are of great value to Him, much more than the sparrows of the field cared for by God (Mat. 10:28-31). Paul writes to Timothy, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). Having a fearful attitude will prevent us from being our best. It will hold us back from serving the Lord in every way possible. It will keep us from exploring our God-given talents and using them to their fullest potential. Being in bondage to fear will prevent us from teaching others about Christ and speaking up when we know error is being taught. We will not speak up when a sister in Christ is in need of reproof or sometimes even a kind and understanding word. Being in bondage to fear may prevent us from going to heaven. Paul makes clear that as partakers in the law of liberty, we should not be in bondage to requirements of the old law, nor in bondage to sin, nor in bondage to fear. “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6).

We cannot study the story of Hagar without addressing the issues between Sarah and Hagar and the behavior of both women. We certainly see instances of **impatience, jealousy, arrogance, spitefulness, lack of submission, and cruelty**. We can study these two women and apply lessons from their lives to our own.

First of all in Sarah, we see great **impatience** with the promise of God. In many ways we can understand this. After all, Sarah was sixty-five years old when she and Abraham first left their home to follow God’s commandment to Abraham to

leave their home in Haran and go to a new land (Gen. 12:4). God repeated the promise to Abraham (Abram) in Genesis 15:4 that the heir would indeed come from Abraham's seed. Ten years later, there was still no heir. At that point, Sarah took matters into her own hands by giving her Egyptian handmaiden, Hagar, to Abraham to produce an heir of Abraham's seed. She obviously thought she was doing the right thing, because, according to the customs of that time, it was acceptable to use a surrogate. Not being patient enough to wait on God's promises is a fault many of us possess from time to time. As the apostle Peter wrote in his second epistle, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). When we pray and make a request of God, many times we give up assuming that God's answer is "no." While it sometimes will be a negative answer, many times the answer is "wait a while." God's providence is not always obvious to us or according to our timetable. We are told in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Patience, or longsuffering, is something we should strive to have with all those around us and is named as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. The Lord has always shown great patience with His people, as stated in Numbers 14:18, "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy."

Jealousy is a sin many of us struggle with. Sarah and Hagar certainly had their share of jealousy. "For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance" (Pro. 6:34). Sarah's jealousy contributed to her hatred and fury in her treatment of Hagar. Sarah spared nothing in her vengeance against Hagar for her lack of

respect. Hagar's jealousy of Sarah for being such an important and beautiful woman, even in her old age, surely contributed to her poor attitude when she conceived a child. At last she had something her mistress could not obtain on her own. Are we sometimes jealous of talents or possessions another sister has, or jealous when something good happens to her? Remember what Paul said in Romans 12:15: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

Arrogance is something we see in both Sarah and Hagar. With Sarah, we see her arrogance in apparently not giving her slave Hagar a choice in becoming Abraham's concubine. We see her arrogance again when Hagar stops showing her the proper respect and ceases to be submissive to her. After all, the situation was Sarah's doing. When things got difficult, she actually blamed her husband Abraham (Gen. 16:5). Abraham reminded Sarah that Hagar was her slave to do with as she pleased, so Sarah began to treat her with cruelty. If God had not intervened, Hagar would surely have died in the wilderness. With Hagar we see arrogance in the way she started to despise Sarah after she conceived a child with Abraham. She saw herself as the mother of the only heir, which gave her respect and higher status in the tribe. She more than likely had a great deal to do with Ishmael's later attitude toward Isaac, mocking him at the feast celebrating his weaning.

Sometimes in the church, one brother or sister will become "puffed up" or arrogant, thinking themselves to be better than another Christian. Paul encouraged the Corinthian brethren not to be "puffed up for one against another" (1 Cor. 4:6). Just as Hagar was puffed up because of Sarah's failure to conceive a child, many times we have a puffed up attitude toward those who have committed a sin (1 Cor. 5:2) or become "vainly puffed up" by our fleshly mind

(Col. 2:18). Sarah and Hagar definitely did not show love for each other, in spite of being together for many years. Paul tells us “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up” (1 Cor. 13:4).

Spitefulness can be seen in both Sarah and Hagar. Hagar evidently showed some spitefulness when she revealed her despising attitude toward Sarah. She was spiteful when she allowed Ishmael to mock Isaac, probably encouraging that attitude in him. In addition, Sarah showed her spiteful attitude in being cruel to Hagar and casting her into the wilderness twice with no thought to her survival. In Ezekiel 25:15 and Ezekiel 36:5, God condemned those with despising minds. Jesus gave us instructions on how to treat those who act spitefully: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you” (Mat. 5:44). We need to be very careful not to have a spiteful attitude toward others, no matter what wrong we think they have done to us. The apostle Paul condemned those who are spiteful along with a long list of other sins which God considers worthy of death.

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, **despising**, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such

things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. (Rom. 1:29-32)

Hagar's **lack of submission** to Sarah came as a result of coming to despise Sarah. Hagar's position as handmaiden to Sarah meant that she was a personal slave or servant to Sarah (Handmaiden). Slavery was common during Biblical times. A slave was considered property or a possession, having virtually no rights. A person could be born into slavery, having slaves as parents. Others were captured during a war or purchased from a caravan. Many slaves resembled modern workers of today, performing needed jobs and tasks, but being provided food, shelter, and clothing in lieu of wages. Some became slaves because of debt, but in that case were treated as indentured servants (Fletcher, "Slaves"). In Exodus, the Hebrews were given rules for the treatment of slaves. Among these laws was one forbidding a master to kill his slave, although beatings were allowed (Exo. 21:20). When Hagar showed disrespect to Sarah, Sarah began to mistreat her. Genesis 16:6 tells us that Sarah (Sarai) dealt "hardly" with Hagar, bringing to mind the account in Exodus of the Egyptians making the lives of the children of Israel "bitter with hard bondage" (Exo. 1:14).

In New Testament Christianity, the richest person is no more important than the poorest. In Acts 10:34, Peter states, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." Paul makes this even clearer when, by inspiration, he tells us, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). When the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar in the wilderness, she was commanded to return to Sarah

and submit to her (Gen.16:9). Hebrews 13:17 commands us to, “Obey them that have the rule” over us and “submit” ourselves. In this context, Paul is referring to the elders of the church, but we are also commanded to submit to our bosses at work and the laws of the land, as long as we are not in conflict with God’s Word (1 Pet. 2:13). Jesus says in Matthew 10:24, “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.”

Christians are likewise to submit one to another (Eph. 5:21). How many conflicts could be avoided if we truly did this instead of always thinking our opinion or way of doing things is better than someone else’s. In matters of doctrine, God’s Word holds the only correct answers. But in matters of opinion, having a submissive attitude one to another and being willing to have a peaceful discussion about such things would solve a world of problems. Younger Christians are commanded to submit to the elder Christians (1 Pet. 5:5). In addition, wives are commanded to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22), as well as husbands being commanded to love their wives enough to die for them (Eph. 5:25). As members of the church, the body of Christ, we are to be subject to Christ (Eph. 5:24). If we are all submissive as commanded, Christ will be able to present the church “to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). James 4:7 commands us to “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Humility is required to properly submit to other Christians, to our husbands, to one another, and to God. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up” (Jam. 4:10). 1 Peter 5:5 commands, “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

While undoubtedly Hagar was cruel to Sarah in making her attitude known to her, Sarah showed even more **cruelty** toward Hagar. How many times have we heard sisters in Christ criticize others because of some lack of talent or action or a perceived slight? In the last few years I have heard sisters criticized for all manner of things, many conflicting: being a working mother, not working when the husband is in poor health and needs help, home-schooling their children, not home-schooling their children, having a messy house, spending money to have someone help with the housework, not visiting enough, staying too long when visiting. While we should all do everything we can in the Lord's work, sometimes circumstances dictate the amount we can do. We very often do not know the circumstances of others. Many have sick loved ones or friends they help care for. They spend time taking others to doctor's appointments, buying groceries for shut-ins or running errands for someone who needs help. Most times, these things are done quietly without fanfare or expectation of praise. How hurtful it is to find out one is being criticized for quietly doing God's work in the background instead of doing it front and center where she will be noticed and praised for that work? Many times, hurtful things are said that cause much pain and discouragement for other sisters in Christ. Gossip about someone's difficult circumstances can be extremely cruel. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (Jam. 1:26). In James 4:11 we are told, "Speak not evil one of another."

How much better it would be for sisters in Christ to submit one to another, show humility and compassion, kindness and love?

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Phi. 4:8)

Works Cited

- Fletcher, Elizabeth. "Hagar: Her Story." *Womeninthebible*. Web. 12 Mar. 2014.
- . "Slaves in the Bible." *Womeninthebible*. Web. 24 Mar. 2014.
- "Hagar." *New World Encyclopedia*. 25 Jan. 2014. Web. 24 Mar. 2014.
- "Hagar's Legal Status in Abraham's Household." *Answering Islam*. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.
- "Hajj." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation Inc. Web. 12 Mar. 2014.
- "Handmaiden." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation Inc. Web. 13 Mar. 2014.
- King James Version*. Nashville: Holman Bible, 1998. Print.
- "Ishmael." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation Inc. Web. 12 Mar. 2014.
- "Islam-Christian Forum." *Brother Pete*. Web. 22 Mar. 2014.
- Lockyer, Dr. Herbert. *All the Women of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967. Rpt. of *The Women of the Bible*. Print.
- Nissan Mindel. "Hagar." *Chabad*. Ed. Chabad-lubavitch Media Center. Kehot Publication Society, 1993-2014. *Chabad.org*. Web. 13 Mar. 2014.