

EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



THE LIFE OF
ABRAHAM

MENTOR OF A LIFE LIVED IN FAITH

GENESIS 12:1 - 25:11

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© Revised 8 December 2021

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INTRODUCTION

THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM

Abraham was from the ancient city of Ur of the Chaldees in the Mesopotamian valley in what is now known as Iraq and Kuwait. He was born about 2100 years before Christ and is therefore as far before the First Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ as we are after it. Whilst those in Western Europe at this time were very primitive peoples, living in unsanitary conditions, those in Ur enjoyed the advantages of a sophisticated material culture, great literature, with upper class homes having hot and cold running water. He therefore represents a very great and advanced ancient civilisation. He was a leader in his generation and could have prospered and remained rich and powerful within his own City State.

Ur at the time of Abraham's birth and early life was a centre of prosperity and culture, and had relative peace to undertake commerce and retain the gains made, without losing them to the next invader. There was no financial benefit, nor any political or social incentive or advantage to leave his home, especially to leave it for the more primitive life of Canaan. He was leaving culture and moving to, what we would call, a third world area.

Although the cities of Canaan were significant at this time, they were small by Chaldean standards, and were heavily fortified, for the times were dangerous in Canaan, and the bands of tribes from the Arabian Peninsula would occasionally sweep in to loot and pillage. It was not the sort of place a good trader went to make wealth, for there was plenty to be made in the more cultured City States in and around his homeland. He wasn't moving west to a land of opportunity!

CLIMATE, POLITICS, AND RELIGION AT THIS TIME IN UR

Significant excavations have been completed in the area of Ur over the last 150 years. A great deal has been learned about the life and times of Ur and its neighbours in the second and third millennium BC. Abraham lived around the period 2100-1900 BC. It was a time of great prosperity and power for Ur as a city, which may have been the most prosperous of the cities of the entire Fertile Crescent (modern Iraq, Syria) in that day. The archaeological remains are still extensive, with two to three storied brick houses with internal courtyards the norm. In Abraham's day around 34,000 people may have lived in the city, with up to a quarter of a million people in the surrounding suburban area. It was a large city by ancient world standards, and sophisticated by our modern standards.

As a city it was dominated by its religious structure, a giant stone/brick pyramid, called a Ziggurat. This particular one was built by King Ur-Nammu around 2113-2096 BC, possibly just before the beginning of Abraham's life. Ur was being ruled by its third dynasty and was at the peak of its power and influence. Abram was born into the golden age of Ur.

He is born into a city that had stood for over a thousand years at this time. It is a city that was in a very fertile area. The climate was wetter and the sea levels different at this time than today. The entire area that is now desert in Iraq was very fertile in this time. The present delta area had not formed as it is today at this time.

The geography was much different to today. It is hard to get our heads around this, but at this time North Africa is also fertile, and even 2000 years after Abraham during the Roman Empire, the nations of the North African Mediterranean coast were the places where all the food for Rome came from. The Sahara is not desert in Abraham's day, but light forest and pastoral land! Ur was also the inheritor of the culture of the Sumerian civilization that had been established for over three thousand years by the time of Abram's birth!

This was the place where writing was invented/discovered, and it appears to have been in use by the Sumerians of this area around 4000BC! The form it took was cuneiform. It was a very flexible form of writing that was done with a diamond/triangular shaped writing implement (stylus), and so could be written very quickly, by pressing the end of the implement into damp clay tablets and then sun dried. Most museums have examples of these that you can see, as hundreds of thousands have been discovered. You will notice that I have underlined some words in the text. Look these words up in a Bible encyclopaedia, or on the internet using a search engine. You will discover just how much is really known about this time and these places. You will see quickly that we are not talking about myth when we speak of Abraham in his time, for much is firmly known by excavation and discoveries made. Excavation covers less than 1% of known sites, so beware to atheists who delight in "announcing" that they have disproved the bible – they never have/will.

Much is made by liberal critics about the "primitive" nature of these people and the illiterate status of Abram. They also speak of the "oral tradition" of the ancient peoples. This is absolute nonsense, for these people had lived in cities with plumbing for nearly two thousand years before Abram was born, and they had written records for that period! The language they used was the common one for commerce until the 3rd century BC. The Sumerian language and its associated Akkadian language were dominant in the Middle East for over 3000 years.

These people were more cultured, and had been literate and cultured for longer than Western Europe is today! There is a great danger that we see in the deliberate and mischievous ignorance of the western critics of the Biblical record. That danger is to read our own history back into the past. Western Europe was primitive and uncultured until the last few hundred years, but the Middle East has had culture and advanced civilization for five thousand years in some places. The West are the "hairy monkeys"... Beware the evolutionary theory of culture that has dominated European thinking, and sown doubts about Abram, when the real doubts were about their viewpoints!

Ur remained a powerful and cultured city until the days of King Hammurabi of Babylon around 1790-1750 BC, when Babylon ruled over the area. The city rebelled against Babylon at that time and was sacked. It was rebuilt then by the Babylonians, because it was a cultic centre for pagan worship, and the ziggurat, which was the focal point of worship, repaired by Babylonian kings around 1000 BC (the days of David and Solomon, over 1000 years after Abraham), and then later again by Nebuchadnezzar and his successor Nabonidus (between 605-535 BC).

Ur drops out of prominence around the 4th century BC, and after the Greek conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander, it is left to decay as a by-water of civilization and slowly fall into ruins. The Euphrates River changes course around this time and the silting up on the canals changed the city's fortunes and it was abandoned by 200 BC and was covered by the seasonal wind blown sands from the areas around. This is helpful as its ruins survived as a time capsule.

From this brief discussion, it is clear that there is no financial reason for Abraham to leave his home city. This is the centre of culture and wealth for the entire region, and even after the Babylonian State gains pre-eminence, it remains a great religious city, the focal point of pagan worship and pilgrimage. It is this reason alone that looks to be the one that made Abraham leave a place that had been his ancestor's home for possibly two thousand years or more. Abram leaves because of the religious nature of his home city; he rejects its paganism and seeks a pure and true relationship with the Creator God, not a pagan dance with the gods/demons of their fantasy. Specialists in the field of ancient religion tell us that there are over 3000 gods in the pantheon of the Sumerians and their descendents. Systematic lists of the gods have been found in a number of sites through this region.

The stories of the gods and how they came into being are many, but there are common themes that run through all the ancient cultures of man from man's common origin in this region. Names of some of these gods (in the biblical frame work – read “demonic forces”) crop up in biblical history. Prominent amongst these are MARDUK, BEL, ASTARTE, ASHUR. The great literary religious masterpieces of this area, the “Epic of Gilgamesh”, and the “Enuma Elish”, had been written for hundreds of years before Abram was born. These stories, the only ones amongst many to have survived in nearly complete form, tell of tales of evil and debauchery amongst the gods and goddesses. The pagan religion was one without real absolute morality outside power and position. The rulers could do what they pleased and the people were urged by their religion to relax, bring their worship to the State gods, enjoy their place in society, and change nothing.

Tradition ruled and it suited those in power. Religion was the true opiate of the common people, and the philosophical basis for the luxury and debauchery of the rich and powerful! It bound the people firmly into superstition and fear, with no hope for life eternal, but it was comfortable, and there was enough hope (if they obeyed and didn't question) to hold people under its spell. Also around this time of Abraham, in the civilization of the Indus Valley, the Rigveda is written, beginning the form of religion known today as Hinduism, and it also locked people into their social/religious strata.

The Epic of Gilgamesh ends with the hero weeping over the “dust” that is the lot of man. The second tale of Gilgamesh, titled “Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld”, tells of a visit to the after life, and describes the after death state of mankind. The state is far from a vision of heaven, because the dead are in all sorts of states, from relaxed, to in torment, and the reasons are not moral, but rather how they died and the care taken by the priests to do the funeral rites properly!

Pagan Religion was about the ordering of society and the keeping of the masses in their place in time and eternity. It was Babel type religion; and this truly satanic counterfeit was the dominant form of religious faith in Abram's day! It is this reason that he leaves his home and heads to a place where he can shine like light in the darkness, without the power of any satanic state putting the light out quickly. Had Abram started to worship the One True God in Ur he would quickly have been killed by the priesthood, and so all dissent may have been extinguished. He is told to leave, and head to the edge of civilization, where there is no “law and order”, because only there will he be free to worship and witness to truth without any centralized power being able to extinguish the growing flame of truth.

Ur's temple, and ziggurat complex runs a parallel course to the faith and history of Israel. The great centre of paganism of the early world was Ur. Abraham had been born into the Satanic Capital of fake religion – the very stronghold of religious evil. Abraham leaves it just after it gains absolute pre-eminence, and its ziggurat/temple is rebuilt again at the time Solomon builds the great Temple in Jerusalem, and then rebuilt and repaired again after Nebuchadnezzar destroys the Jerusalem Temple. It may be that this city was the satanic opposite to what Jerusalem would be in its day, and that the Angelic Conflict at this time centred around the conflict between Jerusalem and Ur-Babylon.

Abram will enter Egypt also in this period of history. With the two hundred year time frame 2100 – 1900 BC for the life span of Abram it is difficult to identify exactly the Pharaoh he met with, but an overview of Egypt at this time also is useful before we start. The Egyptian “Old Kingdom” dynasties ruled from around 2686 – 2181 BC. The great Pharaohs of the fourth dynasty, Snefru, Khufu, and Khafre, (2613-2494 BC), built the great pyramids at Giza. They had stood for five hundred years before Abram arrives in Egypt. The rulers of Egypt through the period of Abraham's life were the Pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom (2133-1786 BC). Abraham will enter Egypt and the Israelites will interact with the various kingdoms at just the right time in God's plan to achieve God's purposes – and we will see this sense of timeliness as the story unfolds.

Canaan gets its name from the Akkadians, in whose language the area was called Kinahhu. This was the word for purple dye in their language, and the land gets its name from this important commodity from the Mediterranean coastal communities. Abram lives at the time of the Middle Bronze Age in Canaan. It is a time of many City States, before the centralization of power in alternately the Egyptians, Hittites, or Mesopotamian Empires of later centuries. It was a unique

time where Abraham was able to get established and the later patriarchs were able to build up their strength to the time of the Exodus, ready to conquer the land of Canaan and settle and found a new state, set apart for God there.

It was a violent time, and all the great cities of Canaan of the time had extensive walls. Megiddo of this time had walls fifteen feet thick, built of brick upon a stone base. Even though a violent place and time, its culture was similar to that of Ur with two storied houses built around courtyards. Many clay tablets using the Akkadian language have been found in Canaanite sites from this period. Abram could move here and use the same language of his home land and be understood by all the cultured peoples of the city-states. Vast quantities of tablets in the Akkadian language have been unearthed from the period around Abraham's life from three cities, Amarna, Ebla, and Ugarit.

The Tell el-Amarna site has yielded up about 350 significant political cuneiform documents. They date from later than the days of Abraham, around 1400 – 1300 BC, but give good insights into the language, culture, religion and politics of that day. They are predominantly copies of letters sent to other kings and about politics of the day. As this is the time from around the Exodus and invasion of the land by Joshua, they shed good light on the times just before the conquest.

Ebla was a city of about a quarter of a million inhabitants in what is now Northern Syria, half way between Hamath and Aleppo. Over 20,000 tablets were discovered in 1964 and the years following in excavations here. They are from the palace and temple areas and record dealings of the kings of Ebla with surrounding areas, and the religious practices and belief system of the priests. The texts date from the two centuries before 2250 BC when the city was conquered and destroyed by a king of Ur, Naram Sin, who ruled Ur 2291-2255BC, which is before Abraham's life.

The fires of the city's destruction baked hard the mud brick tablets that formed the library and archive and preserved them for nearly four thousand years, until dug up fifty years ago! They give great insight into the times just before the life of Abraham and the cities of his day and their beliefs and trade patterns. These tablets provide vital extra-biblical information on the cities that existed in the Vale of Siddim, Genesis 14:1-10. We will make specific reference to these tablets when discussing Genesis 14.

The tablets from Ugarit, also called Ras Shamra, date from the years after Abraham's life. The city flourished on a site of about fifty acres from 1800 – 1200 BC. Tens of thousands of tablets have been uncovered from the libraries and archives, burnt and baked hard by the fire that finally destroyed the city. They provide parallel information to the Amarna letters and cover a similar time period.

I will refer to Abraham, as Abram and Abraham, at the times appropriate in the text, depending upon what part of his life I am referring to. Abram grew up in the post flood world, with the last vestiges of the major Satanic attack upon the plan of God in the form of the Tower of Babel still likely visible and real, and its pagan legacy strong. He grew up in a world of nation states, and the Lord will call him to establish a new people group by faith, under canvas initially, to ensure that truth is maintained without dilution through until the promised Christ/Messiah/Saviour can come. He is to be light in a dark place, and keep truth alive when most of mankind is pleasantly tranquilized by satanic counterfeits.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE SATANIC EVIL OF TRANQUILIZING RELIGION

1. Satan's false religious systems are always humanly acceptable ones with no "sin", just disobedience to the officials of the religion, no eternal judgement unless you stand against the accepted beliefs of the hierarchy, no Saviour needed, just actions prescribed by the officials, and no Hell. Paul describes Satan appears as a false and deceptive "angel of light". (2 Corinthians 11:13-19, 26). Satanic faiths have basic rituals to tranquilize the mind and remove fear of eternal consequences for ignoring the one true God – whose existence is denied or mocked.
2. Many forms of religion with all manner of "labels" push this Satanic policy, knowingly or unknowingly. (Isaiah 30:12, Jeremiah 2:8, 2 Peter 2:1-10). Satan's goal is a simple one – to ensure that each man or woman who can be deceived, fooled or tranquilized is brought to the place where they do not see religious faith as central – just another activity to enjoy or fulfil, in a lovely life.
3. Satan's strategy towards unbelievers is to keep them blinded to the truth of the genuine gospel, and that means their need for a Saviour as a sinner before a holy God. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Colossians 2:8, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). Such a need for a Saviour is mocked openly by some faiths – a Buddhist monk who spoke recently in Auckland began his talk by saying, "Relax – there is no God, no judgment, not hell, so enjoy yourselves...."
4. Satan's strategy towards believers in the Lord Jesus may be summarized as follows:
 - a) To confuse by false teaching that gets people away from scripture. (Matthew 7:15, Romans 16:18)
 - b) To appeal to pride and get people's eyes away from Jesus words. (2 Corinthians 10:12)
 - c) To promote idolatry – anything to be worshipped other than God. (Habakkuk 2:18,19)
 - d) To promote legalism and formalism – all that leads away from passionate worship. (1 Timothy 1:7-8)
5. Satan's policy calls for counterfeit faith – that fills the need for a belief system and blocks the truth of scripture.
 - a) Counterfeit gospel. (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)
 - b) Counterfeit pastors. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)
 - c) Counterfeit communion. (1 Corinthians 10:19-21)
 - d) Counterfeit doctrine. (2 Timothy 4:1)
 - e) Counterfeit righteousness. (Matthew 19:16-28)

- f) Counterfeit way of life. (Matthew 23)
- g) Counterfeit power. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10)
- h) Counterfeit gods. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4)

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMES OF GENESIS 12

Read through the verses Genesis 12:1-3. Here we are boldly introduced to Abram (as he is known here), and to the instruction that he receives that changes his life forever. God's instructions are clear and to the point. Leave your unbelieving extended family, and move north and then west. He is a worshipper of the one true God in the midst of people who worship many gods and his time there has run out in God's Plan for his life. He is used to religion that asks a lot by way of ritual, but demands little from the person's life. He was used to religion that acts as the glue of a settled society, and ensures everything stays in its right place. What he found when he sought the truth about the creator, was that to worship the true God, the creator of all, requires a relationship that is dynamic, rather than religion which is formal.

The people who followed polytheism were required to observe lots of ceremonies and pay their tithes, but their lives were unchanged by their religion, whereas Abram realizes that his very life itself is demanded as a living sacrifice by the one who made him, so Abram was to go where God told him to go, and do what God told him to do. He was called to be active in his faith, not passive; he was called to change and grow and learn, not slavishly follow tradition.

Romans 12:1-2. *"1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

2. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Ephesians 5:14-18. *"14. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;*

15. And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

18. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;"

He wakes from the sleep of polytheism and faces the challenge to buy up every moment in the service of the one who has placed him uniquely upon the earth to serve Him. He is a man now out of step and place with his culture and society; he is a Christ captured man, and must live as he is ordered, rather than as society expects. This remains our task today and Abram is our mentor – to hear and obey the Lord our God, not slavishly follow the traditions of men.

This was a radical departure from his society and it's norms. Abram does not "emerge" from his culture in a natural way, as the liberal theologians often argue. He does not "invent" monotheism – he is captured by the call of God as we must be also. There is no evolutionary process here; it is revelation based, and it is revolutionary in its impact on Abram and his family. God steps into history and calls this man, just as he will step in 2000 years later in the Life of Jesus, as he promises he will do to Abram.

We stand at equal distance from the Lord Jesus' advent as Abram was, and await his second advent. Abram's arrival upon the scene of history is startling and out of order with his cultural and religious background. His call and his life is supernatural, not natural; he sees beyond the details of this life and lives for the next. This is our call; to not let the worries of space-time affect our eternal task completion here! Matthew 6:19-21, 1 Timothy 6:5-10, 17-19, James 5:1-6.

After the Pharaohs of Egypt have started to lavish their times and money upon the great pyramids and later their great tombs in the Valley of the Kings, they still spend their lives enjoying all that culture could give them, and held tenaciously to religious tradition. They were religious people, but Abram becomes a man of faith, of relationship with God. Abram will establish new traditions and will move forward in understanding and relationship with God. Moses will do the same, as we will see in Exodus. They stand in a new path, the path of living faith relationship with God (not religion); determined to serve the Lord their God, rather than fulfil the expectations of their culture and live just as their ancestors did, in pleasant religious, ritualistic darkness. Ephesians 2:1-10, Hebrews 11:1-16.

Abram is not a Jew; at this point he is a Chaldean Semitic son of Shem. To be a Jew is to be a descendent of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (and Judah – from whom we get the term – not used until after the Exile). There are as yet no Israelites either, until the twelve sons of Jacob, who is also called Israel, but their ancestors, these three great and yet frail men, set the example of faith for us, as "Hebrews" in their day. Remember, in history the term "Jew" isn't used until the return of the exiles from Babylon in 535 BC, and denotes the remnant of the dominant tribe of Judah and the survivors of the other tribes that clung to them for their survival. Abram became a "Hebrew" by obeying God's Word. The scholars tell us that the word "Hebrew" means, "one who crosses the river"; the river being the Euphrates river of Mesopotamia.

It was a word that probably indicated derision and laughter on the part of the pagan/religious people; for to these people, why would you cross the great river, when all you have that makes life good is on this side. To face shame, derision, insult and misunderstanding is what it was for Abram to be a "Hebrew", and that meant to cross the river and head away from culture, religion, power and influence, and become a wanderer upon the earth. Genesis 12:1-3, Hebrews 11:36-40, 12:1-3. We will discuss this below when we examine the first three verses of this passage in Genesis.

In these verses from Genesis and Hebrews, you have got an introduction to what it is in essence spiritually, to be a Hebrew, Israelite, and finally a Jew. The Jews as a nation and people-group, were founded on being obedient to God, and stepping outside their culture of origin, with all its creature comforts and respectable, tranquil life style.

Stephen grounds his defence of the “new path” of Messianic Judaism, two thousand years later, firmly in the life and work of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. Acts 7:1ff. Stephen argues, quite rightly, that the Church is simply the next step along the path of faith-rest relationship with God, with its dynamic changes, ebbs and flows, that the Lord has called all his servants to through the ages. We step out of the traditional and expected, and do the demanded! As Stephen identifies, the true followers of God are always out of step with the political and religious power blocks in their society.

Hebrew means the “one who crosses the river”, leaving their old life behind, with all its comforts and going to the place God has for them, no matter how hard and strange it is at times. God's promises are that he will build for Abram a heritage. Re-read Genesis 12:1-3. He says, “I will” three times in these verses - I will make you a nation, - I will bless you, - I will make your name blessed. Abram had a nation and a blessed name and inheritance in his native city, but God promises him a greater place and blessing than he can have if he stays put in Ur.

God calls each of us, just as he called Abram out of the midst of our city Ur, and he has a plan for us, which has been in existence since eternity past, just as it was for Abram. God has the ability to deliver on his plan, just as he did for Abram. Our God is “able”; able to deliver, provide, support, encourage and bring victory into the dark places we may be called to walk.

The two dominant themes of the book of Genesis can be classified as faith and failure; or “on the narrow path”, and “off the path”. Matthew 7:13-23. Abraham is not your “plaster cast fake saint” type of person; he is a real flesh and blood, success and failure type person. What made Abraham great was that when he fell, he did not stay down, he got up, confessed his sin, got right with God, and moved on. We are called directly to be like our father in faith – Abraham – to be people who get up and keep moving forward. Romans 4:1-18.

This means that we are called to walk in the path of God, not the path of man. We are called to stand for the truth of God, and move out of our comfort zone in faith at times. We are to be people who “desire a country”, and that country is heaven. Hebrews 11:16, 32-40.

We are to be ready to walk the “narrow way” of God, rather than the broad way of man's pleasures, for our life goals are eternal life goals, not the goals of the temporary world we walk through. Matthew 7:12-14. We walk with Abraham when we walk the pilgrim path he walked. Hebrews 11:13, 1 Peter 2:11.

How did Abram fall short here this first time? The answer is given in Genesis 11:27. The answer in a word is Terah; Abram's father. Abram's father's name means “delay”. He was a delaying factor in Abram's life right up until his death in the city of Haran, in the north of the Mesopotamian valley.

As we will see as we advance in this study, the names of the people and places have significance. Abram meant “father of high and windy places”, or “exalted one”, whilst his brother Nahor meant “sleepy”, whilst Haran means “a dried up place”. Abraham's wife's name, Sarai, means “nag”, or “contentious one” (actually we could translate it “bitch” but most pastors are too polite to be truthful in this matter). She was apparently very attractive but argumentative/contentious. Eventually she became Sarah or “princess”.

Each of these names will be woven into the points Moses draws out as he tells the story passed to him on the clay tablets he received when the people left Egypt. In the ancient world names were given to babies after dominant characteristics emerged, or prophetic words were received, so they are not “Mythic memories” reworked by Moses, but actual names recorded on the clay tablets passed to him. Remember, these are literate people, and have been for 5000 years not primitive Germans in their dark forests until recent centuries.... Liberalism emerges from primitive cultures – like the Germans, but genuine faith emerges from Abraham, out of a cultured and literate people.

ABRAHAM – A MAN OF WRITTEN CULTURE AND RADICAL DECISIONS

The family of Abraham was his biggest problem until he was almost 100 years old, with Sarai being a problem to him until they were in their early nineties. The problems they were having socially and politically were a mirror of what was happening in their spiritual lives. They had problems until eventually Sarai bowed before the Lord and before her husband and called him lord as referred to in 1 Peter 3:5-7. As a result she was no longer physically barren, and spiritually she started maturing. She also teaches the principle of “faith-rest-obedience”.

The physical mirrored the spiritual, and often still does in our own lives. This is Moses' point as he writes up their story, from the material passed to him on the clay tablets he had received. Remember the story of the people of the line of Abram was on different clay tablets, and Moses inherits a pile of these, and from them writes up the books of the Pentateuch during the years of the Exodus. He works, much as Churchill did as English Member of Parliament, writing the “History of the English Speaking Peoples”, as he battled for their survival.

Genesis is divided into a series of “books”, or tablets. Genesis 2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 36:1, 37:2. Each of these sections comprise separate sets of tablets handed down to Moses. These were likely the clay tablets, upon which was the cuneiform writing of the day in the Akkadian language that was the lingua-franca, or common business

language of the day, and has been discovered in clay tablets from throughout the Middle East from this time. They are not heavy when dry and are easily transported.

Clay tablets with family information upon would be handed down from generation to generation as a record of family history, title to land, and lists of properties owned at different times. All these sorts of details are found in the clay tablets found in excavations, and all these details crop up in the Genesis account. The story of Abraham draws on numerous tablets, and this may explain its easy division into sections or stories as we go through, for each story/episode of the life of Abram and his family were recorded on separate tablets.

This is not "mythic history" we are handling here, but history written up from written records by Moses, who acts as the divinely inspired editor. Some of the liberal theologians, who hate the historical nature of scripture, attack the truth of the Genesis account with the argument that these people were pastoralists by lifestyle and as such were, oral in tradition, rather than valuing the written word. This is to ignore the story's specifically recorded details, and has been addressed above. Refer to the BTB BIBLE – INSPIRATION, PENTATEUCH, GENESIS AND REVELATION, and GENESIS 1:1.

If the tradition of Abram was a primarily oral tradition, it would be expected that oral memory feats would be recorded and encouraged, yet they are not! Oral tradition was secondary to writing throughout the biblical period. Forget the evolutionary theory based thinking that distracted European analysis of the biblical text! This argument comes from liberal theology, and began in the late 18th century of our era, and its purpose was and remains, to break down scriptural authority and reliability. It is based on false hypotheses and lack of archaeological data at their time. We now have enough of this information, and the recent clay tablet discoveries blow away the lying speculation of the Liberals, and establish Abram as a solidly historical figure, with this section of Genesis well grounded in real history.

This man Abram was a city dweller, and his family had been for 2000 years before his birth! Moses was a city man also, and a man educated to PhD level in all the education of the Egyptians, and it is he who ties the tablets together. The civilizations of the Middle East are places where written records were crucial in all dealings, and language was common for diplomacy, and so written accounts of past history and present ownership of things was the norm for Abram.

This continues in Israel's history, and when they enter Egypt 400 years later they enter another literate culture where lack of written records and written skills would not have given the family of Jacob any standing at all. Thick, illiterate pastoralists from the hill country were despised in all the great civilizations of the ancient world! It was culture that the Egyptian's valued, not herds! We will see the humour of this when the patriarchs arrive in Egypt and are told not to mention being shepherds, but they do! Genesis 46:31-34, 47:3-4.

This man Abram, and his descendents remained people of culture and writing through the centuries. Beware of accounts of Abram that refer to him constantly as a "sheik of the desert", for the authors show they are in the realm of fairy tale, not scripture. This was a cultured city man, who chose to live in tents, in the fertile hill country of Canaan, in obedience to God's Word, but who was a man of literature and culture, a man speaking a number of languages, and likely able to read and write in them all. He likely has his own library from the family archives bought from Ur with him.

By application to us today, Abraham sets the example of maturity, and revolutionary decision making, in the context of a deep literary cultural heritage. We are to model ourselves on this man, cultured and educated, wherever we find ourselves living. He set God's work and radical obedience to it ahead of all other things, yet took advantage of all that the world had to offer him to achieve the eternal goals God has given.

Just so, as we grow spiritually our capacity for life grows within us, and our mastery of the technology and culture of our own age will develop also. The best personal investment you can make for your happiness is to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. 2 Peter 3:18. This will not only help you in eternity with eternal rewards but your life here will be one of tremendous blessing and stable witness to the lost. You will have peace and prosperity in your soul that will make your friends envy you. It will enable you to witness to them as to how you are different and point them to Christ, just as we will see Abraham was able to do in his age. He was an ambassador by the way he lived to all he met.

SOME REFLECTIONS UPON THE CONCEPT OF AMBASSADORSHIP

1. An Ambassador does not appoint them self, they are appointed by the nation they represent, the king represented, the person represented. We were appointed by God and our earthly role is to represent the person, policy, and plan of Jesus to all we meet. (Acts 4:13, 2 Corinthians 5:20).
2. An Ambassador does not support themselves. Just so we are sustained and protected by God. (Philippians 4:19).
3. An Ambassador does not represent themselves. We represent Jesus on earth. (Matthew 28:19-20).
4. An Ambassador does not belong to the nation to which they are sent. Positionally we are in heaven, experientially we are in the world, but we are here to serve our King, not feel "at home" in our earthly culture. (Philippians 3:20, John 15:19, Hebrews 13:14).
5. All Ambassadors have instructions in written form. We have the Word of God (Psalm 119:105-107, 161-165, 169, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2).

6. An Ambassador representing their country does not treat any insult as personal, but takes all issues directly to the King he/she represents. (Matthew 5:11-12, 1 Peter 5:5-9). We do this by prayer.

7. When an Ambassador is recalled from a country it is tantamount to declaration of war. After the Church is withdrawn from earth at the Rapture there will be massive warfare on earth. All Christians will be recalled to heaven at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17) and a new phase of history begins. Until that moment we walk through this world as Abraham did, as God's pilgrim, never at home in any place, but at work as an ambassador in every place.

GOD'S GUIDANCE

Abram was ordered by God to leave his own town but he did not comply with those instructions completely, because he took his father along, as shown in Genesis 11:31-32. This was culturally "normal" but spiritually it was an apparent disaster and delay, for the carnal members of the family delay the spiritual application in Abram's life. God is gracious to Abram through this period, and slowly there is separation between those who walk with God and those who walk with men; the family divides. This is a sad reality that many of us face, where family members prefer the riches of this world to the glories of the next, and it takes time to get separation actioned fully. 2 Timothy 4:9-15.

In Genesis 12:1 Abraham had been told to go to a place that God would show him. In verse 7 we see that God commends Abram when he arrives in the land to which he was directed all those years before. However his father came along as far as Haran, the great trade terminus of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A read through of Genesis 11:27-32 records that Terah took Abram to the north, and lived in Haran with him for a time, yet other passages make it clear Abram was called "from Ur". How do we reconcile these apparent contradictions?

The senior member of the family is in charge as far as the ancients were concerned. The explanation is apparently that Abram explained his vision and instruction from the Lord to his father Terah and the extended family, and father agrees to go half way, leads the family that far, and then stays there. Haran was at the half way point on the road to Canaan, and it was a place where the power and culture of Ur was dominant, and would be for another two hundred years.

It was a "safe" option and a prosperous one. These merchants could make serious money here and they did, but spiritually it was a barren place. It was a place of compromise, but a place of material prosperity. We must be careful in our own lives, because financial prosperity is not necessarily the sign that we are where God wants us to be! We thank God that he remains gracious to us, as he was to Abraham. Do not get the picture of God as a thunder bolt throwing God; that is Greek and German paganism/demonism, not biblical revelation. God knows we are dust, and blesses us as we learn what obedience really means.

Psalm 103:8-17.

"8. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

10. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

11. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

14. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

15. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

16. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

17. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;"

It was from here that they should have got their camel train through Syria and into Canaan. Abram however stayed in Haran until Terah died. Many believers get very entangled with their own family and do the "right thing" by family expectations and fail to follow through fully for God. This means that their obedience to the Lord is compromised. This may or may not be the case with Abram, for he certainly prospered here, and maybe he reasoned that this "set him up" for the move into Canaan. Haran was however certainly a spiritually dried up place for Abraham. He was a very good businessman and he grew rich materially, but spiritually he was impoverished by his stay here.

The Lord had to end Terah's life, so that Abraham could move on. Each of us, if called to great things by God (and all work that is "ours" before the Lord in his plan for us is the great work of our life!), will have delay/distraction factors that need to be addressed. We are called to walk in the Holy Spirit's guidance, and so release ourselves from delay factors.

From experience two things can happen to believers who do not proceed. One is that they are put on the shelf, and the blessings that would have been involved in their obedience, go to others. The other is, if they only go part of the way the Lord may get his pruning hooks out and prune off the reasons why they do not progress. **John 15:1-8.**

It is important to realise however that even if you fail God, He does not ever fail you. Thus even though Abraham has apparently wasted many years in Haran God is going to deal with him, teach him things there and bless him there, for he remains a child of God's, just as we do, even in our disobedience. Also if you fail and waste your time, the moment you realise what you have done, confess it and move on. If you are alive He still has a purpose for your life, and will bring blessing out of cursing, teaching you things, even through your disobedience. Romans 8:28ff.

When God has finished with us, we will die, and not one second beforehand. We know our role on earth is over, only when we are looking at the Lord face to face. Until we are called home to heaven we do not know how long we have upon this temporary planet, and we are to live each day as our last! Psalms 68:20, 116:15, Jeremiah 24:1-10, 39:17-18.

2 Timothy 2:11-15. *“11. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:*

12. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

13. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

14. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

15. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

PASTORAL AND LIFE APPLICATIONS

1. How ready are we to step out from our life style standards, and the cultural and family expectations of us? God can call us anywhere; the only issue for our life is serving Him where and when he calls. Traditional expectations are irrelevant to the Lord, and need to be for all who value God's opinion of them. Let us be ready to step out of our earthly family's expectations and plan for us, for our eternal family destiny!
2. Spiritual discernment is to rule over financial and cultural considerations when it comes to decision making. Abraham had no economic reason to leave Ur, but moved to the far ends of the world of his day in order to serve and worship the Lord God. Do we have this desire to worship, so that we would place all things we own into the plan of God, in order to achieve our spiritual goal? It is to this that the Lord calls every generation.
3. Religion has always been Satan's main strategic attack upon man to tranquilize him to the truth about God. Let us ensure we have no vestige of paganism that hinders our walk with the Lord, but seek the best way to worship and serve the Lord in holiness and in truth.
4. There have always been two paths for man, and the most attractive one, if time alone is the criteria, is administered by Satan himself. Satan pays his people well, but their reward rots with them. The Lord alone gives and does not take away. Let us celebrate the choice of the narrow way that leads to LIFE.
5. Abraham takes advantage of everything the culture and technology of the world had to offer him. Like Moses he was an educated man and used everything to serve the Lord his God. He distinguished between what was pagan and what was simply a neutral thing to be used in different ways to the pagans around him. Let us be discerning, through the application of the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, and bring all things, even all thoughts, into captivity to Christ, for his glory. 2 Corinthians 10:3-7.
6. Abraham became entangled in the family expectations of his day. God does not judge him, nor punish him for this, it simply delays his walk and blessing. Let us remember the character of God and apply this truth into our own lives. God does not blast us with a thunder bolt when we fall short of his standards, for he knows we are dust, just as Abraham was, and he waits until we re-open the door of our heart, and then we move ahead again. Revelation 3:20-22. God's grace, mercy and love are always towards us. Let us praise God that we are, like Abraham in the hands of the one true God, who is our maker and Saviour.

REFLECTIONS

DIVINE GUIDANCE- FINDING THE WILL OF GOD

1. There are three categories of will in history;
a) Divine will (sovereignty) b) Angelic will. c) Human will.
2. We are clearly told in scripture what the will of God is for mankind (1 John 3:23).
a) For the unbeliever - salvation (2 Peter 3:9) b) For the believer - spirituality (Ephesians 5:18)
3. There are three types of the "will of God" as relates to the human race(that is – to us). We see the "will of God" for Balaam working out in all three ways. Examine the texts below in the life of the prophet Balaam.
a) Directive (Numbers 22:12) - What God directs.
b) Permissive (Numbers 22:20) - What God allows.
c) Overruling (Numbers 23) - When God overrules.
5. There are three "Principles of Guidance" – if we lack any of these we will miss the right decision.
a) Knowledge of biblical principles in the believer. (Psalm 32:8, Proverbs 3:1-6, Isaiah 58:11, Romans 12:2)
b) Surrender and filling of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 6:13, Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 5:17-18, 1 John 1:9)
c) Growth - to eat meat and not rely on milk. (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)
6. Categories of the will of God.
a) Viewpoint will of God - What does He want me to think?
b) Operational will of God - What does He want me to do?

c) Geographical will of God - Where does He want me to be?

7. An example of the will of God being worked out (Acts 11) - the Guidance of our life mentor the Apostle Peter.
- a) Guidance through prayer. (vs 5)
 - b) Guidance through the mind. (vs 6)
 - c) Guidance through the word. (vs 7-10)
 - d) Guidance through providential circumstances. (vs 11)
 - e) Guidance through the filling of the Spirit. (vs 12)
 - f) Guidance through fellowship and comparison of data. (vs 13-15)
 - g) Guidance through remembering Scripture. (vs 16)

SEPARATION

1. To move forward in service of the Lord we often have to face the sad reality that some fellowship is counter-productive to our advance. It is a hard truth, but we have to pull away from some family, relatives and friends if we would achieve all God desires of us. Believers are instructed to be separated from habitually carnal believers; whoever they are, and whatever their previous importance. (1 Corinthians 5:10-11).
2. Separation is ordered from all apostate religious organisations. (2 Corinthians 6:17) As we saw in a previous reflection, religion without spiritual and holy life changing reality is satanic in origin. Religious people killed Jesus and they will kill your spiritual life if they can. No compromise is possible with evil without personal spiritual debility!
3. Separation is commanded from unbelievers where spiritual life and witness is compromised. This applies especially to marriage, and close business partnerships. In all close relationships we must be "pulling the same weight" or one of us will be hurt – and the believer is normally the one whose witness and eternal rewards are hurt. (2 Corinthians 6:14 ff)
4. Separation is commanded from all human viewpoint thinking. We walk in the Holy Spirit's guidance, not the opinions of man, and often the Lord wants us to do things that are well beyond normal unsaved human logic. (Romans 12:2, Romans 16:17, 18)
5. Separation is commanded from pseudo spirituality. (Romans 16:17, 18). Satan is a great counterfeiter and so are his best operatives in this world, and people who pretend spirituality may be the most dangerous deceivers we meet; for they have all the right words, but no genuine reality in their life. All fakes are to be identified and separated from.
6. Separation is commanded from those who seek pleasure in fast living - pursuit of parties, immoral situations. (1 Peter 4:4). A partying life style is evidence of a rampant Old Sin Nature, not anything spiritual, and we are to have nothing to do with such people, except to give them the Gospel message. We are to be visibly different to all who would lead us into dangerous places that we have no business being.
7. Separation is commanded from other believers who reject Bible doctrine and will not hear correction from the Word of God. (2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15)

Hebrews 11:8-17

- "8. 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.*
- 9. 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:*
- 10. For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*
- 11. 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.*
- 12. 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.*
- 13. 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.*
- 14. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.*
- 15. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.*
- 16. 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.*
- 17. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,".*

GENESIS CHAPTER 12

This chapter begins the life of Abraham, and the record of his life may be divided into four sections.

1. Chapters 12 - 14 The Call and move into Canaan.
2. Chapters 15-16 The promise of an heir and the Covenant made with him.
3. Chapters 17-21 His new name and covenant sign – circumcision.
4. Chapters 22 – 25 The final test and the conclusion of his life of Faith.

GENESIS 12:1-3

“1. 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: 2. 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: 3. 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.”

REFLECTION

We are not told exactly how the Lord spoke into Abram's life. God speaks in different ways at different times to different people, meeting the need of each person in the best way to secure that person's understanding and obedience. God speaks into Abram's life, and orders him to move from all he has known, and go into the unknown. There are no doubts in Abram's mind that it is God's voice he hears, and he obeys the specific orders received. The direction is apparently quite specific, as verse 7 makes it clear he has arrived at the place the Lord initially told him to go.

Moses is careful in his work with the tablets and records simply what is there, word for word in this case. Abram was told more than he records on the tablets, and from the context we can tell at times that he had more information, but selected only the key points to record. This was common in a time where each word had to be carved into wet clay and the process was fast but laborious. Moses will use economy of words as he writes on papyrus, and there is a limit to a papyrus roll length, and it is reached with the Genesis account.

Economy of words was the norm until papyrus becomes more freely available, and even then no words were wasted in correspondence or writing of books, which always had to be broken into lengths that were tied to the limit of a papyrus roll. Clay was used to record material until the fourth century of our own era, with broken pottery often used for letters and lists in the Roman period. With this in mind, we will see that liberal attacks upon the Biblical record are often arguments from silence in the text, and as such are illegitimate and betray a lack of understanding on the part of the critic. The minimum of material was recorded, and so we must be careful in our deductions and extrapolations from what we have before us.

Let us look closely at the commands and promises here. There are four clear orders received – that are to be obeyed.

1. Get out of your country.
2. Leave your father's house.
3. Separate from your extended family.
4. Go to a land that I will show you.

If Abram is obedient to these things then, the Lord promises four things, as certain actions of God that will occur.

1. I will make of you a great nation
2. I will greatly bless you, and exult your name.
3. I will curse/judge those who curse you.
4. All the peoples of the earth will be blessed “in you”.

Abram is told first, “get out of your country”. It is an equivalent command to “Flee!” From our earlier discussion of the culture and religion of his people we can see that paganism was strongly entrenched and it would be dangerous to stand against the falsehood in that city. We could even go as far as to say it appears that Ur was “Satan's stronghold” at this time. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, Revelation 2:13. His land was prosperous and strong, but was corrupt in it's wealth, and deceptive in it's religion. It was the place of tranquillity and distraction, and had he stayed there, there would have been no banner of truth unfurled, no light to the world. Acts 7:1-4, Hebrews 11:8-10.

Our country is to be heaven, not any place with a flag down here upon the earth. We may love our country, but our love for our land is to be tempered by our love for the Lord and our desire to serve Him and do his work. We are called, like Abram, to leave loyalty to nation state and love the Lord and his work alone, and leave all that in the natural man we value, and hold to and serve spiritual realities alone. Psalms 45:10-11, Luke 14:26-33, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. We may be called to stand for truth quietly, or openly in our native land, but we must be ready to stand for truth unto death, or flee if we must to be obedient to the Father's Plan – for it is God's plan alone that matters.

To leave your father's house was a thing unheard of in Abram's day and age. At this time most people grew up, lived and died within 5 kilometres from their place of birth. Unless catastrophe led to their enslavement, or they were merchants, people did not leave their home village and travel anywhere. They stayed within the bonds of family and kinship. To leave your father, and take authority over your own destiny, rather than accept his, was a revolutionary concept that

would have set fear in the hearts of all rulers and priests. We must remember that Satan loves tradition, especially where it enslaves the will and stops obedience to the will of God for that individual.

Abram needed to leave Ur, for to head in a different direction than his father was to rebel against the very order, stability and structure of the pagan nation state. To leave his father's religion, and adopt a new one was a thing unheard of. God was asking Abram to move beyond a point that no man had dared cross for years. Godly men and woman had kept true monotheism alive through all the years since the flood, but each generation had declined, and by Abram's day there were few who stood where the Lord had ordered Adam and later Noah to stand. Genesis 3:14-23, 4:25-26, 8:20-9:17.

Abram will leave also his extended family behind in Haran, although he will return there, for although they are not as committed to following the Lord as he is, they are still monotheists and hold the ways of Seth and the other saints. He will not have his children marry pagans, but only those who hold to the truths maintained by the godly line from Adam. 2 Corinthians 6:14ff. They are believers but within another generation even that family will be lost into the mists of paganism. If we do not advance in true spirituality the falsehoods of the satanic deception will ensnare us in time.

Abram does know where he is going, for he heads north-west rather than south, east or west, but the time frame of revelation as to the exact final destination is hidden from us. It may be he found the direction as Paul was to two thousand years later at Troas. Acts 16:6-12. Abram had to listen to God, and heed the direction received. He delayed in Haran, but he did not return to Ur. There was delay, but it was not fatal. God is gracious to us and knows our weaknesses, and does not push us too far or fast for our faith. Psalms 103:14.

The promises accompanying obedience are significant ones, but are further out than Abram's life will see. He is challenged to see beyond the confines of his own life, even though that is a long and prosperous one. Abram does not live to see the fullness of the promises, but he sees the first phase come through again and again. Notice this carefully, for the Lord makes promises to all believers, some of which we will see working out in daily life, but others will only be seen fully when we stand with the Lord and look back at time.

We are challenged by Abram to have the eternal life perspective, and not judge things according to time alone. Paul captures this when speaking of the Lord's resurrection and it's significance for our perspective on the things of this life and the eternal realities that we focus upon. 1 Corinthians 15:16-22, Galatians 3:14.

Abram will have prosperity, although it will be of a different sort than he would have had in Ur, and he will have a name that brings respect amongst those he walks amongst, although that too will be different than he would have had in Ur. We select our source and type of fame and prosperity by the choices of life path we make in this life.

Pause and ask yourself right now, by your choices, have you selected out company for yourself that is godly and focused upon eternal things? Do you have friends who honour God and praise your name for godly reasons? Do you have spiritual prosperity, so people praise God for you? This is the reputation Abram had, and this is the reputation we need to seek or desire. It is the praise of good men and women we need to be seeking, or God alone, not the approval of those who are doomed for the Lake of Fire! Matthew 25:31-46.

There is blessing by association for all who associate closely with believers who are walking close to the Lord. God blesses those who walk close with Him, and those close to them share in that blessing. Many businesses are blessed by having Christians within them, and are baffled when they fail after getting rid of the Spirit filled Christians.

All who walk close to God will receive the blessing of His presence with them, and all that this brings into a life. Note that God's presence makes us a blessing, it doesn't make us a "pleasure centre" of self centeredness. Blessing is a fruit of the Holy Spirit's presence in a life, so if a person's life is not a blessing to others, then the only deduction is that they are not walking close to God in the filling of the Holy Spirit, for where God is there is blessing overflowing to others.

Abraham will also be under the special care and protection of God, and we also have this great privilege. None will harm him as he walks God's path, and all who oppose him will be in effect opposing God. Those who curse him will have their curse rebound upon themselves, and they will be dealt with directly by God. Romans 8:28-39 will apply to Abraham, just as it applies to all believers who walk the path God has called them to. When we walk with the Lord and are sold out to Him and his purpose for our life, it becomes his responsibility to lead, protect, and comfort us, and he always will do these things. We are in God's hands and none can touch us without His express permission.

We leave our case in the Lord's hands when hated, cursed, or opposed, for we are the Lord's servants and so the matter is between the Lord, our master, and those who interfere with one on his business! It is a serious matter for a person to stand against the Lord's servant, for they directly oppose the Lord's business. Let us see our place this clearly, and relax as we serve the Lord, for none can oppose us without coming directly into conflict with God. We leave ourselves totally in the Lord's hands, and simply serve as we are called to, and let the Lord deal with opposition.

Abraham's life will be a blessing to all people who love the Lord through the centuries. For the last four thousand years men and women have stood and praised his name for the good things he teaches us about the Lord God our King and our Saviour. Abraham's obedience opens the door for the blessing of generations of obedient believers; both his children by genetics and his children in "Abrahamic faith". We also can have a part of this sort of blessing into the future.

We are called to serve the Lord in such a way as to bring honour and glory to his holy name, and as we do that our witness grows in its impact amongst man, and so others praise God for us and the work we have done. Many believers are praised before God long after their death because of the spiritual legacy we have left behind that encourages each new generation that comes along.

This is God's plan for each of us; that we might be a blessing in our own generation and that then the memory of us continues to bring joy and praise to God's holy name down the years after our death. Had Abram stayed in Ur, and not gone down the path of worship of the one true God, he would have had a great funeral from his town's people, and would have been honoured by them as one of their great citizens, but his tomb would be as forgotten as all the others are.

Abraham's tomb is not forgotten even today, and his spiritual legacy is celebrated before all mankind around the world by all who love God. In his day he must have seemed to be walking away from fame and renown, yet in obedience to God he was walking in the path of greatest fame and renown, and he was a blessing to all nations, world wide.

Truly our obedience to God's will for us opens the doors of blessing. Let us walk, as Abram did, in the place of greatest impact, and greatest blessing. If we simply love this life, then we will lose everything we value, but if we love the Lord and serve him with all our heart, then we have the best that this life can give, and we have the joy of life eternal. Matthew 10:39-42, 16:24-28, Mark 8:35-36, 9:41, Luke 9:24-25, 17:33, John 12:23-26.

PASTORAL AND LIFE APPLICATION

1. We are to value the walk with God to which we are called ahead of all the physical details of our life. The Lord challenges us to see eternal realities well ahead of our temporal success. He challenges us to be a blessing to the nations by our obedience, rather than a self centred blessing to ourselves, by our devotion to the wealth this world can give.

2. Satan distracts all he can into short sighted goal setting, and self centred decision making. God seeks us to lift up our heads and see the Cross, the Empty Tomb, and the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so set our hearts on things above. Satan magnifies self, but the Lord calls us to serve others in Jesus name. Real fame comes to those who lose themselves in the service of others in Jesus name.

Satan does pay his people well at times, although finally the "wages of sin is always death", but God's rewards are now and forever. The choice is **WORLDLINESS** or **SPIRITUALITY**. Let us choose eternal life above the temptations of time, and serve with all our hearts, like our father of faith Abraham, and so we will find the greatest rewards that we can know, and the greatest joy that anyone can know, now and forever.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TOPIC OF WORLDLINESS

1. "Worldliness" in its biblical usage means to follow the beliefs and philosophy of man rather than that of God
2. Worldliness is the opposite to Godliness; it is thinking/doing in opposition to God's revealed policies as outlined in his Holy Word. Titus 2:11-14.
3. All people are faced with the constant moment by moment choice of following God's way or the world's. The two viewpoints are actually "at war with each other". Romans 5:12, 3:19, 1 Corinthians 1:21, Ephesians 2:12, James 1:27, 2 Peter 1:4, 2:20.
4. Satan is the "prince of this world", and has power to deceive those who are negative to God's plans. He is behind all "worldliness" and indeed it is actually his policy platform. John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11, 1 Corinthians 4:4, 1 Peter 5:8,9.
5. We must not love the world, or the things that this world values, but love the values and standards of God our Father and Saviour. 1 John 2:15-17.
6. We must hate all the evil things that the world stands for, in thought and in deed. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 11:30-32, Galatians 6:14, James 1:27, James 4:4, 2 Peter 1:3,4, 1 Corinthians 3:18, 19.
7. We must not return to our old behaviour patterns that we followed as unbelievers. Ephesians 2:1-7.
8. This evil world system and the prince of this world will be condemned and destroyed, and replaced one day. Matthew 18:7, John 12:31, 16:11, 1 Corinthians 6:2, 2 Peter 3:7, 2 Peter 2:1ff.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE NATURE OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

1. The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) establishes God's framework for working with all who descend from Abraham, both Jew and Arab. God promises to bless his descendants – and that blessing multiplies as they live by faith as Abraham did.

2. It is confirmed with Abraham with emphasis on the land (Genesis 13:14-18), the spiritual seed (Genesis 15:1-6) and its everlasting quality is underlined. This covenant will last as long as the earth exists. (Genesis 17:6-8).
3. It is an unconditional covenant - God will fulfil it. (God caused Abraham to fall asleep as He ratified the covenant alone Genesis 15:12-18.)
4. The seven-fold covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) is fulfilled as follows:-
 - a) PROMISE "And I will make of thee a great nation".
FULFILLMENT Jews (Genesis. 13:16; John 8:37), Arabs (Genesis. 17:20), and all those who are "In Christ" by the same faith that Abraham expressed. (Romans 4:16-17, 9:7-8; Galatians 3:7,29).
 - b) PROMISE "I will bless thee".
FULFILLMENT To Abraham (Genesis 13:14-17, 15:18-21. 24:35), To believers in Christ (Genesis 15:6; John 8:56)
 - c) PROMISE "And make thy name great".
FULFILLMENT Abraham is renowned, not only in Christianity, but also in Judaism, and with the Moslems.
 - d) PROMISE "And thou shalt be a blessing".
FULFILLMENT With the work of fulfilment of Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ, he was a blessing. (Galatians 3:13,14).
 - e) PROMISE "And I will bless them that bless thee".
FULFILLMENT This is seen in the rise of many nations, eg Britain in the 19th century, the rise of the USA, while they treat the descendants of Abraham well. Persecution of Abraham's children leads to decline of any other nation.
 - f) PROMISE "And curse him that curseth thee".
FULFILLMENT The decline of nations such as the Spanish Empire after the Armada, the fall of Nazi Germany, the fall of the Czars of Russia, the decline of Egypt at the Exodus. Scriptural examples: Deuteronomy 30:7; Isaiah 14:1-2; Joel 3:1-8; Micah 5:7-9; Haggai 2:22; Zechariah 14. 1-3; Matthew 25:40-46.
 - g) PROMISE "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed".
FULFILLMENT The whole world can be blessed through Jesus, the son of Abraham. (John 8:56-58; Galatians 3:16).
5. It is clear that the we should pray for and support the Jews and Arabs, and especially bring them the message of Jesus/Y'Shua, Isa, as it is a sure means of enjoying divine blessing. All who abuse the sons of Abraham are putting themselves in the dust bin of history. Anti-Semitism is suicidal for any other nation.

GENESIS 12:4-5

"4. 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. 5. 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."

REFLECTION

At the age of 75 Abraham, now a very wealthy man, moves out of Haran and into Canaan, which means "the place of rest". This is significant because for Abram there is rest in his soul when he is in the place God called him to be. It is exactly the same for each of us. You will have rest in your soul when you are obedient to God and when you are geographically in the will of God. At times they have great hardship, stress, and threat in the land, for they are part of the Angelic Conflict, as we are, but they have rest (Shalom) in their souls in prayer and faith. **2 Timothy 1:7.**

When Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are in the land they have peace and spiritual prosperity, when they are out of the land they are out of blessed fellowship with God. We will, like these great past saints know failure at times in our own lives, and like them we can return to blessing by getting back in the will of the Lord for our life. We are at all times in our own lives either in or out of fellowship, as Paul observes in Romans 7. The challenge for us, just as it was with Abram, is to spend as much time in fellowship with the Lord rather than out of fellowship. Revelation 3:19-22.

Abram departed from Haran, and Moses indicates his obedience in doing this, which is quite right. Many commentators linger on, and discuss Abram's delay there, but Moses draws attention to his obedience. Let us be corrected by Moses, for God sees our obedience, not our failures, and does not remember our sins, but delights in our successes in application of his Word into the fabric of our daily lives. Confession will always restore fellowship because it depends upon the character of God, not the magnitude of our sins. Psalms 51:1-17, 69:5-6, 79:8-9, 103:7-13, Proverbs 10:12, Isaiah 1:16-20, 1 John 1:9-10. Chronicles will be used by God, through Ezra's reflections to make this point on history.

Terah, as the formal head of the household, went with Abram from Ur to Haran, and now Lot accompanies Abram on the journey forward. We must be careful here also, as many commentators rush to condemn Abram's choice to allow his nephew to join him, when the Bible makes it clear, Lot was called by Peter, under the filling of the Holy Spirit "righteous

Lot", 2 Peter 2:7. Although he compromised with evil later and fell to the point of being the father of fatal enemies of Israel, he was at this time positive to the leading of God and wanted to express his obedience also to the divine command to Abram. There was no error on Abram's part in taking Lot, and Moses identifies his presence, simply to remind us that many who begin the journey of faith with us will fall away, and may even become our sworn enemies over time. 2 John 9-11, 3 John 9-10. We are to welcome all who follow the Lord, and not have our eyes on all aspects of their their behaviours, only our own. We are to be alert for signs of evil however. Matthew 7:13-23. We are not ever to depend upon people for encouragement, only our Lord, for people will fail and let us down at times, but the Lord never fails us.

Abram also takes his wife Sarai. She will be a hindrance to his spiritual life, and a daily challenge to him for the next fifteen years, but Abram will receive blessing from her in the end, and she will learn from him, and both will be blessed in their old age with their son. This will be what we would term today, a "dysfunctional household", with contentiousness and adultery, and with severe and lasting consequences for their sins, but righteousness and God's plan will triumph in the end. It is also a reminder to people who despair over their partner's spiritual status and negativity, to persist in prayer and love towards them, for while they live we never know what the Lord may do through them. **1 Peter 3:1-7.**

Moses mentions the roll call of obedient senior participants in the journey to Canaan. He also refers to the significant wealth and servant numbers that they have gathered in Haran. There has been blessing in Haran, because God's hand remains upon his servant even as he delays. God can wait, and does for us. He seeks to bless us! Judgment is always God's strange work, never his preferred work; the Lord "waits to bless" always. **Isaiah 28:21, 30:18. Psalm 103:8-16.**

They all went out under the leadership of Abram and headed for Canaan, and into Canaan they came. Moses doubles up the language here as a way of emphasizing the journey, the challenges, and the goal directed behaviours that God seeks and finds from Abram, and seeks and often doesn't find from us. Many head out in a direction, but they never follow through and arrive at their destination. Abram follows through, and whatever becomes of the others over time, they also share the perils of the journey and they arrive in Canaan after many weeks travel. Moses leads and keeps his focus forward, and that is the burden of all biblical leadership; always looking upwards and forwards, never back except in praise for God's many gracious deliverances. **Hebrews 12:1-2.** Refer to EBCWA book 150 – Providence and EBCWA.

God seeks our follow through, and expects obedience to work out through daily application. This is the path of blessing and true ambassadorship. Abram has entered the place of his service. While Canaan is the place of spiritual "rest" in the plan of God, it is also a place where enemies are numerous. It is no picture of heaven, but a picture of service in this tough earthly battlefield, into which we are called to stand for truth and fight with spiritual power and focus.

PASTORAL AND LIFE APPLICATION

1. How well do we finish the task the Lord assigns us? The Lord calls us to walk in his path for our life and complete the task assigned to us. Each of us has a path to walk, and our completion of that task is the grounds for our rewards in eternity. Each of us is judged against our tasking, not the life or work of anyone else. Let us set our minds to the task before us, and no other. **John 21:21-23.** Satan's strategy is delay and distraction – anything to stop us reaching God's Destination for us.
2. We must take people at their promises, and encourage their good commitments. If a person wants to serve the Lord and walks out with us in faith, then we are to encourage and support them, so that they might reach the Lord's goal for them, but if they falter and head away, we are still to press on. We are not to need support from anyone other than the Lord and the Holy Spirit. God alone is to be our portion, and upon him alone we are to lean. Men and women will fail us, but God will not fail us. Let us press on, whether people stand with us or not. Abram was right in allowing Lot to express his faith, and he was right to separate from him when he had to. We are to be attached to the plan of God alone, and seek the Lord's "well done", not any praise from people.

REFLECTION UPON THE GREAT DAILY CHOICES WE MAKE - SPIRITUALITY OR CARNALITY?

1. All Christians have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. When we allow Him to control our lives, we are said to be "filled with the Spirit" or "walking in the Spirit". This is "spirituality" in biblical terminology and is the place of power and purpose in this life. It is God's plan that we might be spiritual and powerful in the Angelic Conflict. If we are not in the spiritual zone we have fallen into the control of our Old Sin Nature, and will achieve nothing of spiritual value until we confess our sin and return to the Holy Spirit's power.
2. The filling of the Holy Spirit can be lost by
 - a) Grieving the Spirit - by personal sin
 - b) Quenching the Spirit - by not submitting to His leading
 - c) This is called being carnal, or controlled by the flesh, the OSN – the "old sin nature".
3. The filling of the Holy Spirit can be regained by
 - a) Confessing sin (1 John 1:9)
 - b) Surrendering your life direction back to obedience to God's Plan for your life (Romans 12:1-2)
 - c) This is called being spiritual, or controlled by the Holy Spirit.

4. Only the Holy Spirit in us can produce good works acceptable to God - anything in our own strength is unacceptable and spiritually useless. Our OSN can produce nothing of eternal value. It only produces pride, arrogance and/or carnage. (Romans 8:8-9, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

5. The "spiritual believer"

- a) Imitates God. (Ephesians 5:1, 1 John 3:9)
- b) Glorifies the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (John 7:39, John 16:14)
- c) Fulfils the spiritual Law of God. (Romans 8:2-4, Romans 13:8)

6. In the Bible the human race is divided in three Categories:-

[a] Natural Man - A person born physically alive, but not regenerated. They may be highly sophisticated, civilised, gentle and kind, but is completely ignorant of any spiritual phenomena. (1 Corinthians 2:14) Equivalent to the cold person in the church in Laodicea. Revelation 3:14-22.

[b] Carnal Man - A person regenerated or born again but living their life under the power of the old sin nature. Prolonged activity in this area produces a Christian who is still a baby. (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Equivalent to the lukewarm person in the church of Laodicea.

[c] Spiritual Man - A person regenerated and living generally in the power of the Holy Spirit. He/She discerns the difference between the things of God and man. (1 Corinthians 2:11-13) They have fellowship with God in their daily life. (Ephesians 5:18-20) Equivalent to the hot person in the church of Laodicea.

7. Carnality

[a] The believer continues to possess an Old Sin Nature after salvation (1John 1:8, Romans 7:14,15).

[b]. The Old Sin Nature is desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9).

[c]. The believer under the control of the Old Sin Nature is called carnal (1Corinthians 3:1-3, Romans 7:14).

[d]. The Old Sin Nature frustrates bona fide spiritual production in the life of the believer (Romans 7:15).

[e]. The Old Sin Nature is acquired at the point of physical birth (Psalm 51:5).

[f]. We are therefore considered spiritually dead at the point of physical birth (Romans 5:12).

[g]. The Old Sin Nature has several facets; areas of weakness produces sins, areas of strength produces human good. It has trends towards asceticism or lasciviousness. In many cases asceticism is considered to be spirituality, but it is the fake that produces legalistic religion rather than genuine relationship with God.

[h] The Old Sin Nature is not found in the resurrection body – it is left behind with the old physical body. Praise God!

REFLECTIONS UPON CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

1. Forgiveness is obtained by means of the death of Christ for our sins. (Matthew 26:28, Revelation 1 :5)

2. Divine forgiveness is for all who believe in Christ. (Acts 10:43, Acts 16:31)

3. The penalty of sin was paid by Christ on the Cross. (Hebrews 9:22, 2 Corinthians 5:21)

4. When a believer sins his fellowship with God is disrupted. God forgives these sins upon confession and cleanses from the unknown sins in the believer's life as well as the known sins. (1 John 1: 9).

5. Jesus Christ is our propitiation. (1 John 2:1,2) His person and work is the ground of forgiveness.

6. In human forgiveness we are told to forgive others even as God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). This can only be accomplished by the filling of the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18, Galatians 5:22,23)

7. Steps towards restoration of fellowship after we have sinned and walked away from fellowship.

[a] Examine yourself for genuineness of motivation. [2 Corinthians 14:5]

[b] Act on what you see [Romans 4:7-8]

[c] Deal with any sin by confession. [1 John 1:9, Psalm 66:18]

[d] Forget (put behind you) the sin which you have confessed. Do not proceed into a pattern of guilt. [Philippians 3:13-14, Psalm 103:10-12]

[e] Resume your active spiritual walk. Avoid areas where you might be tempted by the sin which so easily besets you through your area of weakness. [Hebrews 12:12-13]

[f] Be reconciled to others once you have been reconciled to God. [James 5:16]

[g] Get moving and grow up spiritually. [2 Peter 2:17-18]

GENESIS 12:6-9

6. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. 7. 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. 8. 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. 9. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

REFLECTION

Remember the author of these words is Moses, writing some 500+ years later, during the Exodus. He selects from the records he has on the clay tablets, names and places on the journey of Abram, to make theological points, and underline principles that the Lord moves him to emphasize for the Exodus generation that he leads. The leadership lessons from the lives of the Patriarchs must be learned by the Exodus Generation and their children so that they can also have spiritual victory, just as their ancestors did, by faith through application of the promises of God into their daily lives.

From a number of places through which Abram passes, Moses identifies some key markers, the names of which give a pointer to the spiritual realities underlying the story. Abram heads steadily for the centre of the land and arrives at the point that is the centre, and where he can pause and reflect upon the call of God. He is now there; at the centre of the place he has been told to go. Sichem or Shechem, is the “bulls eye” of the land. He is now geographically where he is supposed to be.

At the place where obedience is completely fulfilled, the Lord speaks again to Abram. It is expected by some today that the Lord will speak to them about things every day, and through his revealed Word he will, as we open it, but direct instruction like what we see here is occasional, and occurs only after obedience is fulfilled to an earlier revelation.

The Lord's leading is constant, but he gives new directions when the old ones are fulfilled by obedience, and rarely before that point. Many wonder why the Lord does not speak often to them, but the answer is simple; they have not followed the first instruction, and until they do there will be no second! It is step by step obedience that the Lord calls us to, and the Word is a flashlight to our feet, not a floodlight showing us miles ahead. **Psalm 119:105, 123-125, 132-136.**

To celebrate and affirm the word of the Lord, Abram undertakes a sacrifice on the model received through the godly line of Abel and Seth. He celebrates God's revelation by approved and acceptable worship. Remember, there is a right way to come to the Lord and an arrogantly wrong way. This is at the heart of the story of Cain and Abel, as well as being Paul's warning to the Corinthians about the dangers of arrogant and stupid conduct at the Communion Table. Genesis 3:21, 4:3-8, also refer to 1 Corinthians 11:27-34. “Be holy brethren, for your Lord is holy”. 1 Corinthians 3:17, Ephesians 1:4, 5:27, 1 Timothy 2:8, 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Peter 1:15-16, Jude 20, Revelation 4:5. If you have any doubts about holiness being required look at each of these verses and reflect upon their power and precision!

Blood sacrifice was the only way to approach God, for man had to first accept his sinful state and bring the substitutionary sacrifice. Abram puts up an altar, offers the sacrifice from the flocks, and comes before God, as a “Son of Adam”, as a sinner in need of a Saviour. He picks a place that will have lasting significance to the Jewish people later, with Bethel [House of God] on the west, and Ai [Broken Down Place] on the east.

Even in Moses day Bethel was known as Luz (Genesis 28:19), and presently is called Beitin. The liberal critics point to this historic inaccuracy as evidence that this was written, or corrected, many centuries after Moses, but the use of Bethel may be prophetic by Abram. In the clay tablet lying on the table before Moses, Abram may have recorded this place as “the house/dwelling place of God”. The nick name of Abram may have become the place name later. We will only know the truth about this in heaven, but I would be sure that I am more likely to be right in my suggestion here than the liberal attackers of the scripture!

He journeyed through the land and marked it out, so to speak. He heads from north to south and nine things are specifically mentioned by Moses from the records he had.

Abram had nine things in the land:-

[a] Sichem – meaning, a shoulder or power. While he is in the land he has power from God, because he is where he is supposed to be.

[b] Moreh – meaning instruction or teaching. He had the teaching of God in the land. He could worship and study the records he had, going back to Adam, and he could learn of God, for he was in fellowship and where he was supposed to be.

[c] Canaanites - who were an opportunity for evangelism, as well as being a potential danger. When we are where we are supposed to be, we have both opposition and opportunity.

[d] God's promise - he will receive this promise where his descendants will inherit the land. He will not live to see the promise fulfilled, but he will die in faith that his descendants will see it and rejoice in it as long as time lasts. He was right, and he is justified in his faith. So are we, when we stand with Abram.

[e] He built an altar - showing fellowship with God. God seeks our free will response to his word to us, and for that worship to be holy and acceptable to Him. We are to be as careful in our worship as Abram was, ensuring nothing evil or sinful enters and that the holiness of the Lord is celebrated and honoured properly.

[f] He had a tent - In ancient history this period is one of the most violent in world history with most people living in seriously walled cities, yet Abraham lived in a tent, because he had faith in God. He was not unprepared to fight if he had to, and had his 300 male servants both armed and trained, but his hope was in the Lord. He was prepared like Nehemiah, who prayed with a spear in his hand, but his faith was in God, not his weapons. Nehemiah 4:14-18.

[g] Bethel - house of God. God dwells with us, and we can rest in the presence of God whenever we are in fellowship with Him. Abram knew the presence of the Lord when he stood in the place of obedience, and so do we.

[h] Ai - heap of ruins. We as Christians are walking the line between the house of ruins, the Old Sin Nature and the House of God or spirituality. There are only two paths through this life, the narrow path of God and the broad way that leads to a heap of ruins! Matthew 7:13-14. We are either in a spiritual place of sweet fellowship in prayer with our Lord and God, or we are in the carnal place of sin.

[i] Famine in the land - which provided a test for his faith. He was heading south anyway, and at a certain point there is a famine, and the food sources for his flocks dry up and blow away in the desert wind. The test is, what to do now? Egypt has food and pasture at this time, and Abram heads further south, but he heads out of the land of promise and into the place of spiritual danger, yet also the place of destiny.

It is too easy to say that Abram failed the test and went down to Egypt and stayed there, and that he should have stayed in the land of promise. However, the famine was bad and it was a logical thing to do to head for where the pastures were still lush and the food could be purchased for his flocks. God had told him to go to Canaan to live there, and build another altar whenever he got confused and sought God's plan and purpose in that situation.

Moses does not mention another altar, or prayer guidance being sought. We mustn't jump to accuse Abram of lack of faith here, as I once did, following my teachers, for heading to where there was food was not wrong. His grandson will be sent into Egypt to be preserved, and for the people to grow into a strong nation there. Genesis 47:27 – 48:7. Abram went to Egypt, which was logical, not necessarily the result of prayer, but it was not God's plan for him to compromise his character there. Had there been prayer saturation of this decision the outcome may have been different, and that is Moses point, not that Egypt is bad and heading there always wrong.

Remember, Moses was a prince of Egypt (and he is writing this), and God blessed the people through their time in Egypt. It was always however, a place of testing, and not to be escaped from by lies or deception, but gone through in faith and prayer. We want escape from our testing situations, but God often wants us to get far more than our plans for escape will give us. He has a way through every situation, and it will always involve the altar of prayer, and the path of faith. **Proverbs 3:1-7, 1 Corinthians 10:11-13.**

Having said these things, Egypt is nearly always the sign of worldliness in the Bible. Going down into Egypt is a sign that testing is on the agenda, and failure to follow the path of faith is a real possibility. Abraham follows logic, as we all have done, and he gets what human logic will produce. No matter how smart we are, we cannot work out all the possibilities and second guess all the other players, so all our human logic based plans will always have limitations. God's plan is without fatal dangers, for it alone is built upon all the facts, fully known from eternity past.

Abraham gets into what we can call a "chain sin" situation here in Egypt, where one miscalculation opens the door to another, and each one leads to a new sin, each one getting steadily more serious. When we are in the wrong place spiritually, it is easy to fall into the wrong place geographically, and it is a lot easier then to fall into the wrong actions morally. God will deliver him in grace and mercy, and that is the themes of the next section. That is the theme of our own lives also – we live and move and have our being only in the grace, love, and mercy of God our Saviour.

PASTORAL AND LIFE APPLICATION

1. God calls us to walk in a prayer saturated manner. We are not to trust our own wisdom, but the faith wisdom of God, revealed by the Holy Spirit through God's Holy Word. Proverbs 3:5-7. Let us pause and seek God's way of seeing things, and then his way of obedience in all the situations we face.
2. In every testing situation the Lord has a way through. 1 Corinthians 10:13. His way of escape is alone the one that brings blessing out of the midst of adversity and pressure. God delights in turning cursing into blessing, and he does it by worship and obedience through faith in his Word. Romans 8:26-32.
3. God has a geographical will for each of us at each moment of our life. There is a plan for us and we are blessed as we follow it, and we are safe as we tread the path the Lord has prepared for us. Look up the word "prepared" in your Bible concordance and see just how many times in scripture the Lord tells us that he has "prepared a place for us". Let us rejoice in the Lord's plan and his provision within the plan and let us walk with worship and obedience in the path into which he has called us.
4. Canaan is not a picture of heaven, and Moses reminds us of that by mentioning the Canaanites in the land at this time. This is the place of adversity, of battle, of faith under pressure. It is a battlefield, but in the midst of the turmoil there is the "faith-rest of God", as the believers rest in God's plan and provisions and express their faith in his victory and their ultimate destiny. **Hebrews 4:1-12**. Let us walk through our own battlefield in Canaan rest today.

REFLECTIONS UPON WORSHIP AND PRAISE

1. The Hebrew word used in worship is "Shoko" - to bow down. This begins with the right concept of worship, which is submission to the person, plan and power of God over our life. Worship begins when we seek God's path through this life and we praise Him for his grace in the plan.
2. The Greek words are as follows:-
 - a) proskueo - prostrate yourself. (1 Corinthians 14:5)
 - b) seboimai - lack of arrogance. (Matthew 15:9)
 - c) sebazomai - stand in awe. (Romans 1:25)
 - d) eusebeo - act with devotion. (Acts 17:23)
3. Worship is the mental attitude of the believer when we approach God in awe, fear, and respect. (1 Chronicles 29:20, Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:17)
4. We should never be casual or flippant when we approach God. It is not that worship is to be mournful, it should be joyous, but also serious, we are creatures coming before our creator, and awe is the right thought to have in mind first, and then proper joy can flow for our so great salvation. (John 13:13, Hebrew 10:19-21)
5. Worship is an expression of bible doctrine that a believer has within them and are applying. All expression of doctrine believed and applied is rightly called "worship". (Nehemiah 8:6-10, 9:3) Worship is both active and passive. It may involve actions of service done in the filling of the Holy Spirit, prayer, song, testimony, or just sitting in silence in the awesome realization of the wonder of God's grace.
6. We must worship the Lord in spirit, controlled by the Spirit, and in truth, reflecting doctrine accurately. (John 4:23-24)
7. It is therefore of critical importance that we worship in accordance with the truths of biblical doctrines. This is especially important in singing, as because of pleasant music, it is easy to forget or ignore the meaning of the words being sung. God wants our whole being involved in biblical worship – with emotions being enjoyed, but always grounded in truth and full understanding of that truth. Emotional worship alone is close to paganism, and may lead there!
8. People worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ. (Matthew 2:11, 9:38)
9. People who do not worship God will worship demons. (Deuteronomy 8:19-20, 11:16, 30:17-20, Romans 1:25)
10. All will eventually bow before Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord, either for blessing in time, or before they are judged eternally. (Isaiah 45:23, Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10)
11. In eternity there will be perfect worship as there will be perfect knowledge of doctrine. (Revelation 4:8-11)
12. Worship begins at salvation. (Mark 5:1-10, 18-20)
13. Worship expresses a believer's loving concentration on our Lord. (Psalms 29, 66, 96, John 12:1-11)
14. The great song of worship of the First Temple. (1 Chronicles 16:7-36)

15. We worship through:-
- a) Reading God's Word. (Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:27, 1 Timothy 4:13)
 - b) Studying God's Word. (2 Timothy 2:15, 3:15)
 - c) Teaching God's Word. (Acts 2:42, 6:7, 12:24, 18:28, 1 Timothy 4:6, 2 Timothy 1:13, 2:2)
 - d) Preaching God's Word. (2 Timothy 4:2)
 - e) The sacrifice of our praise. (Hebrews 13:15)
 - f) The sacrifice of our good works towards others. (Hebrews 13:16)
 - g) The sacrifice of our bodies in service to others. (Romans 12:1)
 - h) The sacrifice of our substance in giving to others. (Philippians 4:18)
 - i) The receiving of His Son. (John 1:11-12)
 - j) The keeping of the Ordinances. (1 Corinthians 11:2)
 - k) Through the singing of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs. (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, James 5:13)
 - l) Prayers, Intercessions, Supplications and Thanksgiving. (Acts 2:42, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, 8)
16. Praise
- a) Praise and thanksgiving are linked in worship. (1 Chronicles 23:30)
 - b) When they praised the Lord at the dedication of Solomon's Temple the glory of the Lord filled the house of God. (2 Chronicles 5:13,14)
 - c) Praise always glorifies God. (Psalm 50:23)
 - d) When Paul and Silas praised God by singing hymns in prison God acted for them. (Acts 16:25)
 - e) The Jews were delivered when they sang praises to the Lord. (2 Chronicles 20:21,22)
 - f) Praise is important in missionary work. (Psalm 96)
 - g) Praise is a feature of the Godly home. (Psalm 118:15)
 - h) Jesus Christ praises God in the midst of the Church (Hebrews 2:12)

REFLECTIONS UPON OVERCOMING BY FAITH

1. By faith learn to accept conditions as God's will for life and be thankful - Romans 8:28, 1 Thessalonians 3:3; 5:18
2. By faith maintain fellowship with God, walking in the light - 1 John 1:7
3. By faith consistently, day by day, examine your conduct, confessing all known sins - 1 Corinthians 11:28, 31 1 John 1:9
4. By faith receive the Word of God daily as being more necessary than daily food. - Matthew 4:4; 5:6, 2 Peter 3:18
5. By faith approach the throne of grace boldly in every case of need, requesting aid, casting every care on Him. - Hebrews 4:15-16; 1 Peter 5:7
6. By faith resist the attempts of Satan and he will flee from you. - Ephesians 6:10-13, 1 Peter 5:8
7. By faith maintain the habit of thinking and meditating on spiritual values and priorities - Philippians 4:6-9
8. Walk by faith and not by sight - 2 Corinthians 5:7

GENESIS 12:10-20

“10. And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. 11. And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: 12. 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. 13. 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. 14. And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. 15. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. 17. And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. 18. And Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? 19. Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. 20. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.”

REFLECTION

In **verses 10-13** Abram tells Sarai to lie about their relationship so that his life may not be in danger. His sin is a mixture of lying, cowardice, and worry, and it is of long duration. It is apparently something he had done since earliest days living with Sarai. Genesis 20:13. It is a weakness of Abram, and possibly also of his relationship with Sarai, for a veil was common in the ancient Middle East, and Sarai did not have to show herself to the men Abram met anyway. It was more normal for the women to be behind a tent screen than to be at the table in this day.

No man need ever have seen Sarai's beauty or sexual appeal; it was for Abram alone and in his culture should have stayed there. She has behaviour traits that lead to danger in this area, and Abram's weakness joins with his wife's behaviour pattern, and they both walk into danger with their agreed lies. If there is sexually provocative behaviour, by the man or the woman, and it is not faced, there will be disaster in any marriage. Don't jump to call Sarai a "Borderline" or "Narcissistic" personality, for if she was, then Abram shows the traits of the "Dependent", and that doesn't accord with his status in scripture. Let us stick with Moses portrait here, not current, and often inaccurate labels, and see that they both shared an area of conflict and vulnerability, and they didn't sit down and face it fully and finally with clear protocols to keep themselves safe from other's sexual attention. Both need to learn to "sit with" and resolve problem behaviours.

Abram is wrong here, for he adopts a ruse, a lie, when in morality and faith, with good behavioural protocols, he would be safe. His wife is not for parading around, as his "sexy hand bag" or trophy! Such a viewpoint by a man will open the door to adultery, and people who deliberately openly parade their sexual attractiveness cannot complain too loudly if they are "hit on" by others, and if they later find seduction and disaster. Marriage is meant to be a safe and sexually secure place for joy together. Sex is not meant to be a spectator sport or team activity – that is cultic and demonic through history!

In today's terminology there is a behavioural-personality problem in this marriage, and it is not one sided. Abram is going to learn to be humble before God and moral before men, and so is Sarai. Both receive the name change to testify to their joint changed faith-life approach, that is still a few years away. The error here will be repeated later again. Problems that are not "sat with" and solved will always return, and be more dangerous each time they return unresolved.

Once again reflect upon the grace of God. He does not cast them both over for their repeated sin, but in mercy and patient love deals with them, protects them, and educates them to the point of greatness. Sarai could have expected to be sexually seduced by Pharaoh that first night, yet God protects her. The Lord' hand is over us, and who amongst us cannot look back and praise God for his stopping of a sinful path that we were stupidly walking along, and his protection in the foolish way we had walked! Don't judge/condemn or mock Sarai or Abram, examine your own behavioural protocols, and ensure you are always behaving in a way to be sexually safe, and morally secure. **Romans 14:1-10, 2 Corinthians 5:9-16.**

Let us assess the risk that Abram and Sarai faced here. God has promised a son to them in the land. Abram is not going to produce a son if he is dead, nor is Sarai going to have a son by Pharaoh, for God's promise is by Abram. They are out of the land at this point, but they are not away from God, for none can flee from the Lord! **Jonah 2:1-9.** God will deliver his people, when they trust in him alone. He will lead and bring us through. Psalms 34:17, 107:43, 108:12-13, John 16:33, Acts 14:22. Abram and Sarai were safe heading into Egypt for food, if they had been walking in the Lord's will. Romans 8:26-39. Their lack of safety increases in direct proportion to their plots and plans to keep themselves safe in human strength and lies, rather they resting in the Lord and walking in holiness before Him in God's will, not their own.

Abram is out of vital spiritual fellowship with the Lord; he is still a believer, but he has stopped vitally trusting the Lord through each minute, and every minute he drifts further away from blessing and further into trouble. If you are out of fellowship for any length of time you will add on sin to sin. Keeping short accounts with God is the challenge for all believers, and not walking away from the only safe path he will chart for us. **Matthew 7:13-23.**

A lie does not stay still; it will always lead further and further into trouble, and the problem with lying is that you cannot recover later and tell the truth, without that too looking like a lie. Integrity is easily lost, and hard to recover again, indeed Abram will permanently lose his chance to influence this Pharaoh for the truth, for he crosses a line with his lie that this pagan king cannot forgive him, although he will not execute Abram as he could have. Abram is still beloved of God here, but he is under great discipline for his sin. **Hebrews 12:5-15.**

When they got to Egypt in **verses 14-16** the Egyptians thought Sarai was very attractive and Pharaoh attempted to get her for his harem. Pharaoh acted in a proper "pagan" way and paid a dowry for her to Abraham, as the tradition was to the brother, if the father was absent or dead. This pagan king acts as was the norm for honourable men in his day. As Pharaoh he could have simply seized her and killed Abram, and then taken all his wealth also. Had this man not been noble and moral Abram and Sarai's story would have ended here! God's over ruling grace and mercy is seen in this incident. This incident is a "training exercise" in God's Plan for them both.

Abraham would not die for Sarah. His apparent cowardice and lack of definitive action to hide his wife's sexual appeal from other men, has opened the door to disaster. No woman should marry any man who is not ready to put his life on the line for her, and that means being ready to correct her dress or behaviour if it is dangerous. Ephesians 5:25-29, Colossians 3:19. No man should marry any woman who deliberately sexually provokes interest in others, and dresses to seduce strangers. Both of them are not 100% right with each other or the Lord at this point. Paul was clear that both men and women as believers should put aside the dictates of the pagan fashion world of their day, and wear appropriate clothing that does not have as it's intention, or result, to inflame sexual passion in others. 1 Timothy 2:9.

That may not be the person's aim, but if their clothing achieves that result, then it is not well chosen for Christian witness. Sarai has drawn attention to her beauty and sexual power, and whatever she did, it has been successful. Both Abram and she are blamed for this, not just Sarai. There is no double standard in God's Word – from the very beginning both are to walk in holiness before the Lord and guard each other in the marriage relationship.

The Lord plagued this Pharaoh because of Sarai. God protected Sarai even though Abram did not. Abram receives great presents as a dowry for Sarai and he enjoys them, and retains them, even when he leaves. Moses draws the veil over Abram's sin here, but the mention of presents received may indicate that Abram's records on the clay tablets indicate he is a little too occupied with the wealth he gains, and records all he gets from Pharaoh when a man who was really worried about his wife would be more pre-occupied with other things! Was he almost pleased to get rid of her?

Pharaoh now challenged Abram regarding the position of Sarai. It is a very poor witness where a pagan acts more honourably than the believer, and shows more spiritual discernment. He knows something is not right and that God has punished him for an improper act, but he is baffled, as he has followed good pagan protocols. He sees that God has dealt with him, and what God does, indicates that he has done an unrighteous act, even though unwittingly. He takes responsibility for his actions and immediately he realizes he is wrong. Pharaoh becomes a model for believers here! Abram has not acted to protect his wife, but God does. Job 34:12-19, Psalms 105:14-15, Proverbs 21:1-3, Hebrews 13:4. God acts to convict everyone in the picture, and correct all their thinking.

Abram now realizes that he has sinned and he deals with it. Pharaoh is a moral unbeliever, and tells Abraham to start treating Sarai as his wife, and protect her from prying eyes and lustful actions of others. How embarrassing this must have been for Abram; the man who should be giving the gospel to the pagan is receiving a lesson in morality from him. He left Egypt and went back to Canaan, increased in wealth, but in shame he has been educated by the Lord.

Pause here and reflect on the prosperity gospel again in light of this, for Abram is blessed financially by his time in Egypt. They bless him with money, but he has not been a blessing to them. Do not be side tracked by wealth as a sign of anything except good business, or God's grace, and at times even judgment. It does not mean the person has been walking spiritually as they ought to have. Wealth has never been, or ever will, be an indication of spirituality. Abram leaves Egypt with his tail between his legs, he has fallen short of God's standards, but he comes out in greater wealth than he went in, and he re-enters Canaan, even though there is still most likely a famine.

Now note there is no further mention of a famine, and Abram, and his people live, and so do his flocks. Possibly there was no really pressing reason to go down to Egypt at all? Moses leaves us wondering. This is an account of faith working out in life, and Moses point may have been, that it was unwise to go down to Egypt in the first place, and like Jacob, perhaps he should have stayed put and simply sent servants there to trade for food. We are left with the clear message of the importance of prayer when facing adversity, rather than quickly acting to relieve our needs with pagans, and especially the danger of living amongst them. This will become fatal for the family of Lot within a few years of this time.

Our obedience will be a source of great blessing whilst disobedience will cause conflict and sorrow to ourselves and others. It would be two generations before the Word of God was brought to Egypt by the family of Jacob. Abraham robbed himself of the opportunity to be a clear witness to the Egyptians. He returns to Bethel, the place of blessing and offers again sacrifice on the altar. He confronts and deals with his sin and re-enters fellowship with the Lord in spirit and in truth. The altar is the sign of blessing, and he returns to the place of blessing, and the path of destiny for himself and his people.

PASTORAL AND LIFE APPLICATION

1. There will be many "famines" in our lifetime of battle in the Angelic Conflict, just as there were for Abram. The challenge to us is the same as his; to address the needs we have with prayer and faith, rather than negotiations with unbelievers. We are to be witnesses in the world, and so all our actions need to be underpinned by prayer and godly behaviours/protocols.
2. Sarai challenges all of us to examine our clothing and behaviours to ensure we do not give sexual messages to unbelievers, rather than the Gospel message. If people are sexually aroused, or could be by the believer's choice of clothing or deliberate actions, then that believer is out of the plan of God for themselves at that point.

Abram appears to have been distracted by wealth and it's acquisition, and Sarai by her attractiveness and sexual power. Both are distracted by temporal things, that are not wrong in themselves, but become wrong when directed towards the wrong objects.

Sexual desire and pleasure in marriage is approved by the Lord, but not outside of that bond. Wealth is a blessing when all we have is dedicated to the Lord, but it is a snare when we seek wealth for it's own sake without reference to the plan of God for our life. Let us examine our desires in these matters.

3. God's protective hand is over us, and he keeps his servants safe in their foolishness. Let us praise God for his protection over us at times when we strayed into things that were foolish. Let us not take advantage of this grace protection by straying further, but keep close to his path that we may be blessed more directly and serve more powerfully.

GENESIS CHAPTER 13**“RIGHTEOUS LOT” - THE CARNAL BELIEVER**

You can never view the Old and New Testaments as separate entities; there is continuity in the unfolding drama of redemption, with only some elements of discontinuity within the plan. If you do not see unity in God's Plan, it indicates that you are entering into some form of theological error. The great themes of the scripture and the character of God are uniform throughout the history of man; we begin with God's plan and his grace, and we end with the plan and his grace provision for all within it.

One of the great, but sad truths of the entire drama of redemption, is the fact of carnality. This is the theological term that as we saw above refers to the behaviour and state of believers when they start to act and think like unbelievers. They have spiritual life, yet live as if they are stuck in the world's way of thinking. The fact that carnal believers exist in the church still is shown in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 where believers in that church are told to confront their carnality and stop acting like unbelievers. Refer above to the Reflection upon SPIRITUALITY – CARNALITY.

It is a tragedy that many of the churches nowadays do not preach sound doctrine systematically, or even the gospel fully, and so we have many Christians who are staying as baby believers rather than growing in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18.

As we examine the carnal believer however in the form of Lot it is important to note that the believer who acts and thinks this way is saved, once and for all, at salvation, but their lack of spiritual growth steadily erodes their earthly value to the Lord in the plan, and their witness evaporates over time. Sadly their blessing and peace of mind and heart evaporates also in their time in carnality. While salvation status as a member of the body of Christ is a once for all thing, we daily either act in accordance with our new nature and status, or act like our old sinful self. We face the moment by moment choice each day, as to whether we will walk in the filling of the Holy Spirit, in spirituality, or whether we will, “walk like carnal men/women”, and be ruled by our Old Sin Nature.

Sadly Lot chose the latter course by default. He did not intend to be carnal and face the disasters he did, but he failed to build himself up in the power of the Holy Spirit. He was righteous in his initial morality, grieved by the sins that surrounded him, but he did not take Abram's lead example in leaving Ur, and so he never did flee from Sodom. Lot stayed within an evil place, and so the corruption of that place eroded his own morality, destroyed his witness, his moral fibre, and finally his family.

The moment we are saved we are spiritual, but as soon as we get out of fellowship through sin, we become carnal. You are at any point in space-time, either spiritual or carnal. Most churches are like the Corinthian church, they are a mixed group, with spiritual and carnal people, who all love the Lord, but who are often not bringing glory to the Lord by their lives. Churches can be full of Christians who are living just like pagans except on Sundays when they come to church, and so for much of the time are in such a state they will have little impact upon their world for Christ.

We now examine the case of Lot, who was saved, but never really got his spiritual life together 100%. As a result he lost most of his family, his wealth, but much more, his reputation, blessing, and peace of mind. He ends his life caring for his two daughters and their incestuously born children, in total and absolute shame and disgrace. When we slide into sin or compromise with evil, there is no stopping the slide without full confrontation with truth, and the resultant correction of our life and witness by Bible doctrine being re-applied into the fabric of our daily life.

Lot just doesn't take God's demand for holiness seriously enough, and in his foolishness he believes that social action will reform Sodom of its evil, whereas only the Gospel being believed and real life change will change the reality. The miscalculation is far more than that; it is a fatal error of thinking and belief. Evil is not defeated by logic, moral argument, nor is it moved by caring concern being showered upon it. Only the power of the Holy Spirit shifts the power of evil from a sin-captured life. John 16:8-11. Lot's error is repeated on the streets of every city every day, and often with the same fatal results for the liberal Christians and their family and friends. Carnality and theological liberalism are closely related.

You are not long in the ministry before you see people, who through habitual carnality lose almost everything, and have trouble filled lives, and are troublesome to spirit filled believers. These people consistently fail to deal with sins in their lives and live carnally, and they will absorb most of the effort of all church counsellors, and be the main source of distraction for the pastoral staff. The issue is wrongful thinking leading to wrongful actions, and the remedy is confession of sin, thorough and regular Bible study, and application of the truths of the Word into life. Anything short of thorough correction of wrongful thinking patterns will continue to see such people slide into disasters and drag others in behind them.

Lot, the nephew of Abraham, left Ur with him (Genesis 11:31). His name means "secret self-seeking". He certainly lived up to his name. Both Abraham and Lot had become very rich by the time they leave Haran, with so much wealth in cattle and other animals that they were unable to stay together because the land would not support the joint stock herds. (Genesis 13:6) This caused friction between the shepherds of Abraham and those of Lot. (Genesis 13:7) Abraham tries to defuse the situation (Genesis 13:8). Abraham now offers Lot first choice of grazing land (Genesis 13:9); something he didn't have to do as the senior man. Abraham is operating in the grace will of God for his life at this point.

Lot, the now carnal believer, surveys the scene, sees the green pastures of the Jordan valley before him and decides to choose that settled and prosperous area, near the great city state of Sodom. (Genesis 13:11) Abraham decides to leave his choice with the Lord and takes the area that Lot doesn't select – the hill country of Judea. Lot is selfish, pleasure focused, seeking the easy path, and self centred, and so, like all who take the "broad way", Matthew 7:13, his choice eventually causes his downfall. Abraham relies on the Lord and succeeds in what was harder and tougher land. The powerful Principle here is to be seen clearly even before we start the study. When you put your life in the hands of the Lord you will never be cheated or miss out. You never lose, if you let God choose.

GENESIS 13:1-18

"1. And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. 2. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. 3. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; 4. Unto the place of the altar, which he had make there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. 5. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. 6. And 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. 7. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. 8. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. 9. 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. 10. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. 11. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. 12. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. 13. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly. 14. 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: 15. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. 16. 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. 17. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. 18. 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."

REFLECTION

THE LIFE OF THE CARNAL BELIEVER CONTRASTED TO THE BLESSING UPON THE SPIRITUAL

Lot prospers in his choice, and for a long time he appears to have won, and obtained the best portion. His flocks are out on the plains, and he moves into town to a mansion, and even becomes a judge in Sodom. He is living the ancient world version of the "Good Life". This is shown by the phrase "*he sat in the gate*" (Genesis 19:1). He does not separate from the most sexually degenerate city on earth at that time. Lot, as the carnal believer, shows various characteristics in Genesis 19, and they will lead to the loss of everything. He emphasizes time and temporal prosperity in his thinking rather than eternity. He emphasizes reform rather than regeneration; he follows the social gospel and acts as a judge rather than an evangelist. This city of Sodom does not need more justice; it actually needs salvation.

Most denominations today preach a form of social gospel; of reform rather than regeneration. Every time mankind tries to do this we fall. e.g. Communism. When we allow God's power to be set loose into his society to do a saving work, then we will see a time of revival and great spiritual prosperity, but the social gospel produces only more deception and finally judgment. God stresses the individual's need for salvation as the first principle of reform of any nation.

Verses 1. And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. 2. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. 3. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; 4. Unto the place of the altar, which he had make there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Abram steadily heads back to the geographical place of blessing and there he worships the Lord at the altar again. Moses refers to two specific things in these verses also. The first is that Lot is with him, and has been there in Egypt. Abram has not set a good example to Lot in Egypt, and their mutual focus upon building their wealth will be one of the factors that lead into the mischief that follows. Abram returns to living fellowship with the Lord, but the wealth factor is still central in both men's lives and that has not been dealt with by Abram at this point. Since leaving Ur these two men have been distracted, with one eye on worship of the true God, and the other on wheeling and dealing for wealth.

From the reference to the wealth of Abram that Moses makes, I suspect that there was a full list in the clay tablets of what Abram had as he left Egypt. Abram is still obsessed with wealth, and his status as a man with a beautiful wife. He is a celebrity in his own eyes, and the world's opinions, at this point, and God must change him, and He does within months. Moses simply identifies that Abram had a great quantity of gold and silver, and I suspect Moses has read just how much there was recorded on the tablets he had in front of him. Abram is probably in active competition with Lot.

He doesn't record it for us, because such facts are irrelevant to God's purpose, although Abram is still impressed by what he has at this point. God will ensure that Abram has enough to do what he is called to, but Abram has to learn to walk away from central focus upon the wealth index for judging his life. This is what he will achieve in this chapter, and it will open the door to evangelism of the first Canaanites who will be saved.

Abram is back at the place of worship and he is able to rest and reflect upon what the Egyptian experience really means for him, especially as the famine has eased. There is still a shortage of fodder, but he is able to worship and think now. He is hungrier now for fellowship with God, than for more wealth, Psalms 26:5-8, 42:1-2, 65:1-2, 84:1-2, 10-12, Ephesians 6:14-19.

Verses 5. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. 6. And 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. 7. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

Wealth without spiritual focus to give it meaning, and modify its lust, will lead to self-centeredness and argument, and so it does here. The servants from both men's camps end up fighting each other. Blood is shed in this fighting; it is not a bit of yelling and pushing; very likely swords are drawn. These men were heavily armed in these days and this was serious strife, and was a bad look in front of the pagans, to whom both groups were supposed to be witnessing.

The after effects of the drought bring tempers to a boiling point and the staff are only reflecting the performance targets that their masters have given them. They are desperate for grazing and water, and it is clear from their desperate battle with each other, that they have been told by Lot and Abram to "go for it", and get the land and water, and that they are being assessed for production and stock losses, and are being judged if they lose too many animals to the drought.

Financial and business pressure is driving this, and the two older men are responsible for this atmosphere of rivalry. This is as bad an atmosphere as any lean and mean money hungry corporate business in today's world. It is a toxic business environment and the Lord holds these men responsible for it, and Abram as the senior man rightly, if belatedly, takes action.

They are both wealthy and are locked in a rivalry to be better and bigger than the other. There was no way that they could stay close to each other without spiritual revival on all sides. The battle was over cattle space, rather than sheep or goats, so it was the best pasture that was being fought over, for the smaller animals could fare on rougher land.

Strife is always a biblical sign of carnality. Heated argument over "temporary stuff" is a sign that people are self centred and have forgotten their godly ambassadorial role upon the earth. The behaviour of these men is a sign that their masters have operated in a spirit of carnality for some time. This is a fruit of the Old Sin Nature, and God has called Abram to live at a different level, and in the power of God he is able to, as are we all able when we walk in spirituality – the filling of the Holy Spirit. **Galatians 5:16-22, Titus 3:3-7, James 3:14-18, 4:1-3.**

Verses 8. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. 9. 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.

Abram now takes the leadership role, a role he should have exercised many months before this. He seizes the opportunity and directly addresses the real issue; there should not be strife between them as two groups of believers. The fact that he identifies that the strife is between not just the herdsmen, but between Lot and himself tells us that he has been neglectful of problem solving for too long. Their witness has been bad, and the Lord holds them responsible for this. **Colossians 4:5, 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12, 1 Peter 2:11-12.** These are all commands to be sure that our witness towards unbelievers is spirit filled, and not Old Sin Nature driven. We are judged for these things. **Colossians 2:18.**

It is the spiritual believer's responsibility to be a problem solver, and a restorer of relationships, where they can be restored. We are tasked by the Lord with the role of peace maker. Matthew 5:9, 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, Philipians 2:14, Hebrews 12:14, James 3:17-18.

This last verse is a serious one, reminding us that if we cannot work out our problems with men, then there is a block in our soul, and that has already separated us from God at that point! No one can please God who falls out with people over things that can be solved or resolved. Abram faces the issue now and his actions and words here are going to be true fruit of the Spirit. We are instructed in good business dealings in the scripture and the instructions are clear on this point that those without brotherly love are without a real relationship with Christ, whatever else they may say. Refer to Romans 12:9-19, Ephesians 4:1-3, 1 Peter 1:22, 2:17, 3:8, 4:8, 2 Peter 1:5-8, 1 John 2:9-11, 3:14-19, 4:7, 20-21.

Abram having taken the initiative finally to resolve this, identifies that they must physically separate to have any chance of relationship resolution over time. Sadly the conflict has gone too deep for resolution and friendship to be immediately restored, but with time he hopes it may be. He then gives Lot the first choice as to where he is to go, and accepts that by doing so he will have second choice, and certainly second best. Abram casts himself into the hands of God alone here. He steps back and by so doing places his destiny in the Lord's hands alone. Romans 12:18, 1 Corinthians 6:7, Hebrews 12:14.

By so doing Abram also accepts responsibility for the problem, and therefore accepts that Lot as the junior man should have first choice, even though seniority would give him that option. This is the noble path, and the correct one for a true leader, for by so doing Abram recognizes, that as the senior man he has failed to solve the problem before it came to this point. Abram, by doing this seeks to win Lot's favour back by his noble gesture, with a hope that spiritually he may be able to assist him at some later point. Confession and nobility opens the door for later assistance, even by prayer.

Abram seeks to restore fellowship with this man, even if it costs him seriously financially to do so. This is a good study in leadership recovery after failure to exercise good problem management. True biblical leadership takes responsibility for failures to exercise its function and takes definitive action to resolve what can be resolved, and end conflict quickly. Refer to the EBCWA LEADERSHIP MANUAL for a full discussion of biblical leadership principles.

10. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. 11. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. 12. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. 13. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

Lot is a carnal believer, seeing only as a pagan sees, and thinking only by means of his Old Sin Nature. He thinks of obvious sources of wealth, and obvious resources on that particular day. He looks down at the Vale of Sodom. Moses uses the phrase on the clay tablet exactly as Abram has carved it, for this area is totally changed by Moses day. It was in Abram's day an incredibly fertile area, down to 1000+ feet below sea level, with a micro-climate, lots of water and lush vegetation. It was like the Garden of Eden.

Lot makes his carnal/prosperity choice and heads east. There are no ceremonies, no altar, no prayer for blessing, no pleasantries, just the sad separation of men who used to be friends, and were still relatives, but would not see one another again for some time, and then only after tragedy. Genesis 14:1-12, Proverbs 27:10, Hebrews 10:24-25.

Moses uses the very phrases and place names that have survived in clay tablets from Ebla, from 300 years before Abram. None of these cities will survive the tectonic explosion that forms the Dead Sea, and the only extra-biblical record of these cities existence for 4000 years was discovered on these tablets from Ebla in the 1960s of our era. Until that time no-one had evidence in the modern world that the record of Moses was correct, but the Ebla discovery records the trade of that great city with Sodom, Gomorrah and the five cities of the plain, exactly the phrase Moses uses later. The clay tablets he had from Abram, and used to write Genesis, record truth, not myth. We have history before us here, not fanciful invention.

Lot selects with his eyes, not his spiritual discernment; he sees water, greenery and lush palm forests. In the tail end of a drought the Vale of Sidim/Sodom was a beautiful place, and so why wouldn't you select it? We don't get baffled when we look at Lot's choice, it is the normal human one, but that is Moses point here. This man does not figure on other things that the Holy Spirit would have directed him on differently. He does not factor in the evil of the people of the cities of the plain.

Their homosexuality has become a byword through the ages, but their murderous hunger for new sexual pleasures would lead them into even greater evils, as we will see in Genesis 19. God will surely judge those who go into such evils and stay there, but there is forgiveness available right up until the last minute, but they must be convicted and transformed by God's power. Lot does not keep his moral distance from this evil place. Lot pitched his tent close by Sodom, and it's influence will overwhelm him, and the next time we meet him he is in the city. Even after its capture by Chedorlaomer of Elam he will return and rebuild his enlarged mansion there. Hebrews 11:9-10, 12:22, 13:13-16, John 14:1ff. He, as a carnal believer, has no spiritual power to withstand it's evil and witness to the alternative truth of the holy God – he is no longer an evangelist, he has become a casualty in the angelic conflict.

The early church was made up of just such evil people as made up Sodom, transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 1:9, 3:8-11, Ezekiel 16:44-50, Matthew 9:10-13, 11:23-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 2 Peter 2:4-9. The people of Sodom could have been saved, but not by the "social work" of a carnal believer. Lot's chance to be an evangelist was only from outside their city with a holy and visibly different life, not from within their sphere of influence, where his compromises ruined his testimony and destroyed his family. Refer to the BTB study, EVANGELISM.

Lot ignores the moral reputation of the place, and the attendant dangers to his life, and the dangers to the morality and spirituality of his family. He does not see that to stand in such an evil place he and his family need to walk closely with the Lord in spirit and in truth and be evangelists, not social workers and judges. He also does not factor in the obvious attractiveness of this area, due to it's great wealth, to the kings of other areas. The very reason he selects it, is the reason others will lust after it's wealth and come to seize it by force.

It was an obvious place to attack, and in such dangerous times, warfare was predictable. In such a time, should he have sought the flat plains where heavy chariot forces and cavalry can move quickly and easily overwhelm a tented encampment? This will be the reason that he enters into the city of Sodom itself later. To live on flat land in a time of chariot warfare is to live on what the great Chinese General Sun Tzu later called "Dying Ground". Lot had selected

without discernment and would pay with the loss of all his goods, and all his family except two incestuous daughters. Refer below for the continued story in Genesis 19.

Abram does not weep or wail over his apparent “second best” choice, for it is in fact the best option. He has the high country, which is difficult for armies to move through, and unsuited for the great heavy chariot armies of the day. It has many places to hide in and sheltered places from weather and evil men. Abram clearly has made a covenant to pray for Lot and for his blessing, for we will see his intercession on Lot’s behalf in Genesis 18 below, and his readiness to use all his military strength to rescue Lot. Genesis 14.

Abram has separated from his nephew, but his heart is still bound to this man, who he knows he has failed, by his own poor example and his failure to act to stop financial competition getting to this place. Abram remains ready to pray, and I believe does so daily for Lot, and he is ready and prepared to act to save him if he can, risking his own life in the process. This also is our call when we separate from any carnal brother or sister. Galatians 5:25 – 6:4. If we have failed to act as we should have in the past, we have the God given burden to pray for them into the future.

Verses 14. 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: 15. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. 16. 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. 17. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. 18. 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

Notice the first words here. The Lord speaks with Abram after he has separated from Lot. When we compromise our faith in our associations with those who are not moving forward spiritually, we hinder the work of the Spirit within us and through us. When we fail to influence them for truth and spiritual advance, we need to separate ourselves from them and their organizations and move on to the Lord’s goals for our life, under the Spirit’s power. Abram can claim God’s character and promises, and rest in the certainties associated with God’s plan for him and his descendants according to faith. Psalms 37:21-40.

Lot believes he has the land of Sodom for his inheritance, but the whole land is given to Abram, and Lot’s blessing was only by association with Abram. God repeats the blessing and promise of the entire land to Abram. Lot’s tenure is temporary, indeed will only be a few years, before he flees into the Arabian mountains forever. Abram is encouraged to “lift up his eyes” in faith and see well into the future and see his seed inheriting the land. He is encouraged to look beyond the present reality to see the final one under God. None who stand against the promises of God will remain standing long. **Isaiah 49:18, 60:4.** Only God’s Plan lasts, and only God’s blessings go on forever.

As Moses read these things in the clay tablets his heart must have raced within him, for the Lord refers back to these very promises in his words to him. Exodus 33:1-3, Numbers 34:1-12, Deuteronomy 26:1-4. The psalmist also looks back and gives praise for this truth 500 years after Moses. Psalms 105:8-16.

In verse sixteen the promise regarding Abram’s posterity is repeated also. He will have descendents that are more numerous than the dust of the earth. He is told that it will be hard to number his descendants, such will be their number. If we calculate his physical and spiritual children, this indeed makes sense, for all those, Arab and Jew who descend from this man are in the million millions, and add to them the believers down the ages of other races and you have a vast multitude beyond man’s comprehension to number and conceive of. Lot’s choice has not changed the plan of God for Abram, nor has it reduced his blessing by one millimetre!

God’s plan is not altered, nor are we disadvantaged by any decision of any woman or man against us. We are in God’s hands, and evil or foolish people can do nothing to alter or detract from our blessing at the hands of God. Let us rejoice and worship, as Abram worshipped. This verse became an encouragement to further faith-rest walking for the early church, and so let it be for us an encouragement and a strength. Romans 4:13-25, Hebrews 11:8-16.

Abram is encouraged to walk again through the land and re-claim it by faith. The Lord will often call us to reclaim promises and relay our foundations, so that we might be strengthened as we rest securely upon the foundational doctrines of our faith. To study old truths again is a good thing. I rejoice in the advice I was given to read through the four gospels every year several times, (by a very dear friend, Anglican Vicar of Blockhouse Bay at the time), lest I forget the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in my theological study elsewhere. It was good advice and has corrected many false theologies down the years when I have done it! Saturate yourself in Jesus words and you will be protected!

In verse 18 Moses records that Abram builds another altar, this time in the plains of Mamre, and it will be here that he leads several tribal leaders to the Lord. He is now operating in worship in the heart of the land. Note he is in a plain, but he does not have danger, for he is in his tent, and he is in the place of fellowship with God. The danger of the enemy raider or invader is still real, and will become actual in the next chapter, but Abram is in prayer and worship at his altar daily, and so is well warned of the Lord, when he needs to head into the hills again for safety. With the Lord there is security in all the places he leads us. **Psalms 16:1-9, 23:1ff,**

PASTORAL AND LIFE APPLICATION

1. You never lose when you let God choose for you. In times of testing decision making, saturate the area with prayer, and make your prayer for the Lord's will, and ensure your will is held captive by the Word and the desire to see the Lord honoured and glorified. Be prepared to apparently "lose" before men, in order that you may win before God.
2. We are here on this earth as the Lord's ambassadors, and as such our "country" is heaven, and it is there that our true wealth ought to be. Let us ensure that our aim is spiritual wealth, not financial success here and now. The wealth we carry into heaven is the praise of the souls we have led to the Lord and encouraged to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. Our bank account and our property passes to others, but the saved who praise our name enter heaven with us, and we receive blessing forever from this spiritual work accomplished.
3. Separation is only for greater service to the Lord, not for more comfort and relaxation, and less stress in life. Separation does not have as its aim peace and pleasure, but opportunity and harder, more focused work for the Lord. Abram separates from Lot, but works harder for Lot's welfare, through prayer, and in battle. Nothing has a self centred purpose in the Lord's work; all we do is for greater service and focused godly purpose.
4. The eyes of human discernment may deceive us at times; what appears to be good from a human viewpoint may not be so at all. Lot does not utilize spiritual power to discern things, and so he loses even that which he has! He overlooks basic security considerations, and trusts in the walls of Sodom rather than the power of the living God.

Remember the lessons of **Luke 12:16-21**. Those who seek, by human means to save their own lives and prosper themselves, will lose their lives and their goods. Matthew 16:25-26, Mark 8:35-36, Luke 9:24-25, 17:33, John 12:25. The fact that this principle is repeated in every Gospel reminds us of its centrality for our survival. If we are not clear about this principle, then we can be clear about the certainty of eventual disaster.
5. In the place of fellowship with the Lord there is safety and security, for the Lord warns of trouble, and provides a way of escape for all testing that will come to us. 1 Corinthians 10:13. Abram and his people are safe, secure, prosperous and evangelical, and this will bear fruit in his life witness, and lead to the deliverance of Lord from the enemy army that is about to sweep through the lands.

REFLECTIONS UPON OUR OLD SIN NATURE

1. We are born with a nature, inherited from Adam, which is set in its deep attitude against God and is always prone to sin and evil. (Ephesians 2:1, Romans 5:12).
2. The old sin nature is perpetuated in the human race by physical birth. (Psalm 51:5, 1 Timothy 2:13, 14).
3. We are therefore considered spiritually dead at the point of physical birth. (Romans 5:12).
4. There are various names for the old sin nature:
 - a) Flesh - Galatians 5:16
 - b) Old Man - Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9
 - c) Carnal - Romans 7:14
 - d) Sin - Romans 5:12
 - e) Heart - Jeremiah 17:9
 - f) Member - Colossians 3:5.
5. The believer continues to have an old sin nature after salvation, but through the indwelling Holy Spirit we gain the power to defeat its influence when walking in the Spirit's power. (1 John 1:8, 1 Corinthians 3:1).
6. The believer under the control of the old sin nature is called carnal. (Romans 7:14, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3).
7. The old sin nature frustrates true spiritual production in the Christian life. (Romans 7:15).
8. The old sin nature has two tendencies (Romans 6:6).
 - a) Area of weakness - pushes us towards lawlessness and sins (Hebrews 12:1)
 - b) Area of strength - pushes us towards asceticism and self-righteousness (Isaiah 64:6).
9. The old sin nature is not found in the resurrection body. (1 Corinthians 15:56, Philippians 3:21, 1 Thessalonians 5:23).
10. Victory over the old sin nature is by achieved by considering your old life dead, surrendering to God, confessing sin and relying upon the filling of the Spirit. (Romans 6:6,11, Colossians 3:9-10).

REFLECTIONS UPON THE TRUE NATURE OF "EVIL"

1. DEFINITION Evil is Satan's policy in opposition to God's doctrine. Evil is therefore a collection of beliefs and practises that back up Satan's viewpoint rather than God's.
2. Evil is not necessarily "bad", it is simply a policy that will take you away from the path that God has for you.
3. False religion may be very moral and even ascetic (and therefore look "holy"), but if it is leading people away from God's revealed will it is evil.
4. Often evil can masquerade as "good". People who believe that their "good works" can satisfy God's holy demands are deceived by evil doctrine. Romans 7:19,20,
5. Only God's Word, Bible Doctrine can help the believer distinguish between true good and evil, Hebrews 3:13,14.
6. Only a soul saturated in God's Word is truly protected from the subtlety of Satan's policy of evil. Proverbs 2:10-14, 3:7, 19:23.
7. Only applied knowledge of God's Word negates and neutralises evil. Psalms 54:5, Romans 12:21, Isaiah 45.
8. The issue for the believer is the daily choice to accept God's Word and therefore protect oneself against evil. God watches for our choices. Proverbs 11:18,19, 22:3, 24:1-4, Ephesians 5:16, 2 Thessalonians 3:2,3.
9. The company of evil people will distort the thinking of the believer and confuse his/her witness. Isaiah 5:20, 1 Corinthians 15:23.
10. There is no evil in God at all. Psalm 5:4, 1 John 1:5, 4:4.
11. God judges evil and will condemn it to the lake of fire for ever at the final judgement. Psalm 34:16, Isaiah 13:11, Revelation 20:11ff
12. In spite of evil still existing in the world due to Satan's on-going presence throughout the Church Age, the Lord is still on the throne, and his hand is on all things.
13. Satan only does things by "permission" and we are in the Lord's hands and so are, in Christ, safe. Job 1:6-12, Proverbs 16:3, 4, Isaiah 45 : 6, 7.

Notes

GENESIS CHAPTER 14

OVERVIEW OF THE “BATTLE OF THE SLIME/TAR PITS”

Abraham has separated from his carnal nephew Lot. Here we see an example of the door being opened for the carnal believer to return and be rescued by a spiritual believer. This involved the war between the Kings of the Plains and a group of kings under a great Mesopotamian king named Chedorlaomer. In this day kings would expand their dominions by alliances and confederations and seize control of the political power of other states. The result was to form a trading empire that greatly enriched the kingdom, through or to which the wealth flowed.

Chedorlaomar was such an imperial king, and like the great kings of Babylon and Ur he had established quite a power base, covering much of the Middle East. He did not try to directly rule by placing garrisons in cities, but by treaty, alliance, and threat. In today's term he ran a Mafia type operation, where the fear that others had of him and possible death at his hands kept everyone in line and paying their annual tribute to keep his army away from them

Elam, where Chedorlaomer came from is now in Iran, and from where Esther was going to operate some 1500 years later. He was the chief of a confederation of kings and a very powerful person, receiving tribute or taxes from nation states that were obliged to him for his protection, right down to the Dead Sea region. The kings of the plains of the Jordan Valley were in effect paying protection money to him.

We are reminded again here of the Lord's temptation in Matthew 4:8-10. Satan offered the Lord the rulership of the kingdoms of the world, and they were apparently his to offer, for the Lord does not debate his offer, but accepts it was a legitimate one. Politics is about power, and the satanic influence over the powerful interactions of rulers and their nations has been a fact of life in this fallen world since it's inception. Arrogant people love to be called “lord”, or have other “titles”, and to exercise power over others. Matthew 20:25-28. Chedorlaomar is no different to others as a proud man, but more successful than most. Satan's pride based success is however always for a “limited time only”.

We are not told of his first attack into the region, which must have led to these cities surrendering to him and paying his tribute as their superior. Moses may have had that information in the tablets, but omits it, for he is only interested in how this second invasion affects Lot, and demonstrates Abram's love for his carnal brother. Remember, Moses is an editor, and selects only the information that is useful to the theme of redemption. He is not writing a history of his times, for these tablets record things that at the time were well known and well recorded in the archives of all the nations.

The liberals who attack these chapters as mythic history tell their story as if there was not a great deal written at the time, yet archaeology discovers vast clay tablet libraries and archives in each place where the libraries were burned and the clay bricks baked hard. Moses will mention all the kings by name. Their names mean nothing to us, but in his day other nations archives could be checked and the truth of Moses words checked out. He is recording things so that the people who hear his words can check them, verify them, and so trust the record here and believe, and so depend upon his revelation later. God's revelation is historical throughout; it is evidence that demands a verdict! We believe it!

The people of the valley by the time we enter Genesis 14 feel that they were powerful enough to take on the Elamites, and throw off their rulership, but they were wrong. Chedorlaomer left Iran, and followed the Fertile Crescent caravan routes, traversed Iraq and came down through Syria into Canaan. This was a classic military strategy to deal with any enemy in the Vale of Sodom. He did not come down the rift valley from the north, where he would be watched for by the Plains people, but fought the Rephadim, who were giants, in the hills of Canaan, and surprised the cities of the Plain by an attack from their side (west) and rear (south).

In the ancient world the troops would come down, they would kill any of the men who opposed them, sell the rest of the population as slaves, and the troops were paid out of the plunder from the cities, and the sale of their people and goods. This made it a great incentive to complete the military task, for the soldiers only received plunder as wages, so they were hungry for it. The invading army came right down to Kadesh Barnea, and having eliminated the possibility of any reinforcements for the kings of the valley, they then turned north. If they had come down the rift valley the kings of the valley would have been on higher ground and would have had reinforcements in the hills, and could all have fled there easily, but by his strategy Chedorlaomar had cut off both their reinforcements and way of escape for all but a few.

There were five cities in the plain that were then attacked. Recently a clay tablet has been discovered in Ebla in Syria that noted cities with which Ebla traded at this particular time. The five cities of the plain were listed on the tablet in exactly the same order as those given in Genesis 14:2,8. These cities were flourishing at the time of Abraham and Lot. This tablet not only shows archaeological evidence of the existence of these cities but also that good written records were in existence at the time of Abraham. When you talk about Genesis being history, keep on remembering that you are on solid ground. Go on line and check the entry EBLA and read the tablets there, or in texts in your local library.

It is recorded that the battle of the Valley of Sodom, where the city states of the area fought the Elamites, occurred where there were slime pits containing natural gas, oil and bitumen. By fighting amongst these pits and marshes, that the locals knew well, they tried to gain the advantage and limit the use of the enemy's chariot forces. It was a good strategy, but they still lost! The kings of the valley fled north, the king of Gomorrah being killed whilst the king of Sodom survived and was able to get away with some of his army into the hills of Arabia. The invading army, having taken their prisoners as slaves, took Lot and his family as prisoners of war, with them also, as they headed north, back to Elam.

GENESIS 14:1-11

“1 And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; 2 That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar. 3 All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea. 4 Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. 5 And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim, 6 And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan, which is by the wilderness. 7 And they returned, and came to Enmishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezontamar. 8 And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim; 9 With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five. 10 And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain. 11 And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way.”

REFLECTION

LOT HAS COMPROMISED WITH EVIL

Notice how careful Moses is with his listing of names and places that can be checked in his own day. He is writing for the Exodus Generation directly, and they are passing through the very territory that he mentions. He specifies these places and names so that the people are grounded in history, and the certainty that if this pagan king defeated these people of Canaan, then the children of Israel will surely get the victory under God’s direction and power.

On a Bible map check these places out and through an internet search engine, or Bible Encyclopaedia check out each entry and see what is known of these places. The kings are mostly unknown outside Moses record of their names here, but each year excavations in Israel uncover more of the life of the Canaanites and their cities, so much can be learned about them. Read through these verses and notice that Moses writes as if he is tracing the army’s movement on a map of some sort.

Moses would have had Egyptian maps of the land when he left Egypt and used them as his guide as to where places were and the cities that existed there. We tend to think of map making as something that exists only in our own day, but these people thought in terms of space and distance and so were well able to develop maps and other aids to assist their invasions and tribute gathering. Liberal historians write as if these people were simpletons; yet they gained and held great empires and their surviving records indicate they audited every commodity down to the smallest items to ensure their tribute was being accurately paid. They were smart people, literate, and careful with their facts, especially where wealth was involved, for under satanic lust’s power they sought it above all else other than power itself.

It should be noted from these verses also that Lot dwelt in Sodom by this time, not in a tent as Abraham was. He had moved into the city. By doing so he had compromised with evil and the walls of the city would not protect him from the enemies of it. In Lot we have perhaps a good picture of the social action type of Christian, the type of believer who thinks he can reform society from the inside by getting alongside evil people and trying to make them better by political action, legal changes, social welfare or other social engineering tools. We do not need reform, we require far more than that. We need thorough thought, full repentance, and we then need a living and real relationship with the holy God.

As we will see below, Lot was a judge, or elder of the city of Sodom, and was trying by politics and law to make things better. Now, while it is also important for us to stand up for the truth and holiness in our nation these things will not be achieved by our sitting down with evil men. There is blessing by association and there is judgment by proximity! It is a dangerous thing to sit too closely with evil men who the Lord is about to judge. Don’t get caught in the cross fire....

As a Christian, if you are with evil people who are going to be disciplined by God, you are going to receive discipline as well. You should therefore distance yourself from evil people. It states in the New Testament, that it grieved Lot about what was happening in Sodom, yet he stayed there. Rather than going in and out to preach righteousness he went down and lived with them. As a result he will lose his whole family with the exception of two younger daughters who he can order to follow him out. The girls are sadly however perverted by their association with this place.

Notice how surgical Chedorlaomer is in his precise invasion of the land and his destruction of all who oppose him. He is thorough and ruthless, and none can stand against him. He has had total victory first time so as to be able to demand tribute, and this second invasion is the same. The kings of the Valley fall or flee.

Moses records the slime pits and the fact that in his day it is simply the “Salt Sea”. As the people pass through this area they must have wondered at the great events that went on here in places now buried by meters of salty water. This place will form a border of the land the Lord gives to the children of Israel. Numbers 34:10-12.

Some of these places can be visited today. The town of Hazezon Tamar is the modern resort town of En Gedi. It will be a number of centuries before it gets that new name, and so Moses does not record it, but does note the name change for Kadesh, which will figure greatly in the Exodus. Abram has a sizeable encampment, with possibly a thousand people with him, plus animals. He would have been a target for these invaders, but he is able to slip away, and we see his actions in the next section. The higher country hides him. God's choice for him has been the right choice for him.

PASTORAL AND LIFE APPLICATION

1. Abram is safe in the midst of great violent events in his time. He is in the place of the geographical will of the Lord for him, and so is able to take evasive actions and avoid the conflicts that do not have any concern to him. Evil men will come and go, and as believers we are to keep our eyes fixed upon our eternal destiny and our heavenly calling. We are not to play politics, and to avoid the entanglement of it. 2 Timothy 2:1-10.
2. There is no safety in numbers, defences, investments, or any human strength thing. The only safety we have in the Lord's service is the Lord's provision and his protection. In His Plan alone is safety geographically.
3. Do not be impressed by great shows of power and wealth, for all can be swept away in a moment. The five cities of the plain were great and powerful in their own eyes, but against the might of the Elamite confederacy they were nothing and easily overwhelmed. This once powerful area is now buried by the silt of 4000 years of Dead Sea over the top of them. Do not be side tracked from the work of the Lord by the things of this life, for they do not last. Only those who do the work of the Lord last forever!

GENESIS 14:12-16

12. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. 13. And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram. 14. 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. 15. 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. 16. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

REFLECTION

ABRAHAM REVIEWS THE SITUATION

This is the first time that we have Abram referred to as "the Hebrew". Remember, from earlier discussion, the term means, "one who crossed the river", and records his testimony of faith, now in the sight of the other people of the land. Abram has a reputation as a man who left civilized Ur and crossed over the mighty Euphrates to live in a tent!

In **verse 13** Abraham was told of the situation by a survivor from the plain. When disaster strikes even unbelievers start to wake up, so this pagan came to see Abraham the Hebrew. Abraham had separated from Lot and his witness was known even in the cities of the plain. He is seen as a man who is so different to them, that he might be able to do something. Their wealth and their gods have failed them, but this man hopes that Abram's God will not fail them.

When trouble strikes, if you have a witness, the unbeliever will come to you. You can give them the gospel and doctrine only because you have been a witness to them over a period of months or even years. Our lives are tracts to people and what they see in our daily walk will bring them to the place where they do ask the right question in God's right time. Our challenge is to have the answer ready.

Abraham is living with three noblemen of the hill country; Mamre [dignified], Aner (the Amorite man), and Eshcol [cluster of grapes] and had a covenant with these three. As Abraham would only have a covenant with believers it is highly likely that these three were the first converts resulting from the witness of Abraham.

Separation from Lot led to an immediate reduction in numbers, with a halving of their forces, whilst in the long run it was beneficial. He had pruned his group by getting Lot to leave, but God had now provided an increase in numbers. Abram has a larger army to call on than he had with Lot there, and they are all active believers now. Lot was clouding Abraham's witness.

Lot is now a prisoner of Chedorlaomer as he has been for years to his old sinful nature. Abraham was ready to fight, but not looking for a fight. He was not an aggressor to any man, but was ready if the Lord directed him to fight to defend the weak and needy. He has trained himself in warfare, and had trained and armed his servants. Lot is still considered to be Abram's brother because of their spiritual connection.

Even if Lot is carnal, he is still a brother to be assisted. This is the mental attitude of the mature believer, who sees all believers as objects for his/her care and concern. "Others" is to be our motto, and a brother/sister in need isn't a pain, or a drain on resources, but an opportunity to show love and care. All we hold we hold to use for the Lord.

ABRAM'S ACTION

Abram immediately swings into action because his carnal brother is in trouble. He armed his trained servants, having arms for every person in his household. Abram was prepared for war and trained his people; and they clearly had regular military training. This is known from the fact that men cannot be given a sword and be useful unless they have practiced with it daily for years, nor fire a bow with effect unless they have practiced daily also for years. The trained band of Abraham moved very quickly, and marched for many miles, with all of them being very fit, including Abram. To move this many men quickly and have them battle ready indicates extensive training over many years.

They were able to speed march for over 50 miles in ranks with weapons prior to fighting a battle which they were going to win and were going to go all the way to just outside Damascus. They may have ridden on donkeys or camels, but either way, these men are fit and ready for action. Abraham had a maximum of a 1000 men, including his men and his allies, who were going to fight a group at least ten times their size; a group who had already beaten an army of giants and the kings of the plain and their armies. The same element that had helped Chedorlaomer, surprise, now however helps Abram, for the Elamite King is not expecting any attacks now.

By principle, faith and military preparedness are not contradictory, as Abraham is used as an example of faith. Abraham ran the 50 miles and thereby proved he had got into his own training through the years, even though he was well over 75 years old. Abraham's faith was not in his weapons, it was in God but he said "Amen" with his sword. Nehemiah 4:14-18, 6:3, 11-15. Abraham was ready to fight under the Lord's guidance and he was fit enough to be used of the Lord. Many believers drop off their fitness as they grow older and wonder why the Lord is unable to utilize them in places outside their home. Some quote Paul, from, 1 Timothy 4:7-8, as if Paul is saying don't go to the gym. That is not his point. Timothy is urged to emphasize godliness with fitness, not ignore either. The body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit and the Temple should be fit for use by the Lord! 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20, 2 Corinthians 6:16.

THE LORD JESUS AND THE MILITARY

In a number of places the scriptures deal directly with the subject of the Christian and our attitude to the military, and to warfare. Some biblical verses that challenge us to think about this issue are:-

Luke 22:36 - The time will come when people with money or books should go out and sell them and buy weapons.

Luke 11:21 - The strong man armed keeps his house and is at peace. When the stronger one comes he will take away your goods.

Luke 3:14 - The soldiers came to John the Baptist and said, "What shall we do". "Do not be thugs" he said, and "do not bully the people you are supposed to protect". We should do our job as unto the Lord, and that means that a soldier does his job as unto the Lord, in honesty and with righteousness. A great military force under God's guidance can be of great value to a nation and to the innocent who they can protect from great evil.

Matthew 25:41 - There will be wars and rumours of wars until the second coming of Christ. We need to ensure that we have a balanced view as we look at pacifism and the military in the Christian life.

Numbers 32:23 – This is the much quoted line, "be sure your sins will find you out". This refers to those who will run away from battle. Sin in this context is cowardice; running away from the enemy.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE BELIEVER AS THEY ACT AGAINST EVIL FORCES

Moses does not record that Abram goes to the altar to pray at the point he hears the news. He may have, but he likely didn't need to, for he prayed as he moved. He hears, he arms, he moves. It was clear to Abram what he should do; he should move to rescue Lot and the others. He has prayed for years for Lot, now he needs to move out and act with speed and precision. He knew that at some point he would be required to do this, he has trained for the day, and so he now acts. There is a time to stop praying on your knees and do what is required on your feet as you work for the Lord.

In Nehemiah 4 Nehemiah records that he also had people who were ready to fight for their people. [Nehemiah 4:8]. He knew the enemy was coming, and so they prayed with weapons in their hands and set a watch against them. The soldiers were on the wall guarding; they were still in prayer but as they stood with their weapons. Nehemiah encouraged those who were at Jerusalem to have faith in the Lord and if they have to they are to fight to protect their families. The walls of Jerusalem were guarded by the troops of Nehemiah, but finally they were guarded by the Lord who led them. Read through **Nehemiah 2:11-15, 4:7-18, 6:3, 11-15**.

They also, like Abram, had good communications about the enemy's movements and intentions. Nehemiah did not have to fight because he was prepared. It is also of interest that the centurion who spoke with the Lord, Matthew 8:5-13, and the other one who later spoke with Peter, Acts 10:1ff, remained centurions, and none were told to become pacifists.

In **verses 15-16** we see Abram's strategy. Abraham attacked the enemy forces by night and defeated them and pursued them to near Damascus. He rescued Lot and all the other people and their goods. The battle was around Bethshan in the area that would become known by the tribe of Dan.

The hardest thing you can ever do in the armed forces is to conduct a coordinated night attack with a thousand men. However if you are well organized and trained in it, the night attack is always the best, especially when against superior numbers, as the darkness adds to the confusion of the defenders, and enables you to concentrate your forces.

Abraham doesn't just beat them, he and his men chase them for 50 miles making sure that they kept on running. This demonstrates the fighting fitness of Abram and his men. They kill the enemy in large numbers and free the captives. The great enemy army of Chedorlaomer are resting, feeling very safe and secure, and their camp is not well guarded, so once the attack is launched they are unable to gather their forces and the panic spreads. Well over 10,000 men are put to flight by at the most a thousand (Abram has 318 of his own plus his allies).

PASTORAL AND LIFE APPLICATION

1. If we wish to be used of the Lord we need to be fighting fit. This is a challenge for us all, at all ages, to be as fit and healthy as we can be for the Lord's work, or we limit ourselves as to what we might be able to do. Exercise and good diet is essential for service. If you cannot put in a twelve hour day occasionally without being debilitated by it you need to examine your fitness training and health and dietary preparedness.
2. Believers in the military do not need to leave armed service. It is not wrong to kill the enemy when they have attacked your country or others, nor is it wrong to defeat aggressors thoroughly. The elimination of evil forces clears the land for believers to be free, and for people to enjoy freedom and security. The protection of the innocent by arms is always permissible. Individual wars may be wrong, but the concept of the military is not, and armed forces will be needed until the Lord returns.
3. Abram is ready and trained and the time has come to draw upon all his training and preparedness. Abram is ready and so can be used. Many years have gone into this one night's fighting. This may be the only battle these men ever fight but they are ready to fight it and they are successful. Abram is ready to march all day and fight all night, and so he can be used to get the victory.
4. What do you need to do to get the victory in whatever the Lord has called you to do believer? It probably won't be military, but the principles here apply in all areas of endeavour. You may have one moment in your life when great things are required of you, and that means your whole life is a preparation, and you are always ready for that day.

GENESIS 14:17-24

17. 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. 18. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. 19. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: 20. And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. 21. And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. 22. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, 23. That 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: 24. Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

REFLECTION

FOUR MEN – ABRAM, MELCHIZEDEC, BERA, and LOT

The army of Abram has rescued Lot and all his goods, plus all the goods and survivors amongst the people of the cities captured. There is therefore a great victory and the pile of loot is significant. The king of Sodom comes out of hiding and makes a request of him. As a defeated king, under the rules of warfare of the ancient world, he has no right to ask anything, and by so doing God allows this man to give Abram a test.

The Lord however sends Melchizedek, the king of Salem, with bread and wine, as the priest of the most high God, to bless and prepare Abraham, before the king of Sodom has his chance to tempt him. The testing area is the one that has been the problem area for Abram and Lot; the area of wealth. With this victory Abram has just potentially become the richest man in his world, but he will walk away from most of it, using only what the Lord leads him to hold, and leave himself in the Lord's hands for his future. **Hebrews 7:1-25.**

This is a wonderful and accurate picture of the sort of thing that will happen in your own life many times; when evil people are allowed by the Lord to tempt, and when good men or women are brought to you to encourage you in the test. God provides all things for our growth and development in spiritual maturity. Each test we have in life is tailor made for our own spiritual growth, for each of us need different things to develop our faith and strength.

This section reminds us to have our spiritual armour on daily, and walk prayerfully before the Lord, for all that happens is from the Lord for a purpose, and God's purpose is always good. Abram walks carefully through each day and so he is

ready for the testing and answers this slimy king well, because he has won the victory over lust for wealth well and truly by this time in his life.

In verse seventeen the king of Sodom and the kings who escaped the battle are together and they come and meet Abram as he returns. They meet him in the hill country close by the city of Jerusalem. They would have approached him as a great conqueror, and paid homage to him. They will let the king of Sodom do the talking for them all, but they seek the restoration of their power through the people's return to them. They know they cannot ask for the wealth, but they will get some of that back also in grace from Abram. These men wait back to see what Abram will be like, they hesitate before approaching him and watch his interactions with the king of Salem, whose nation state has not fallen before the invader.

In verse eighteen the king of Salem, the mysterious Melchizedek, walks onto the page of history and says, "Blest be Abram of the Most High God which has delivered his enemies into his hands". The victory is the Lord's and this man immediately honours Abram as the Lord's man. Abram received this honour and gave a tithe of all he had to this priest-king. The booty is still altogether at this point; none has been divided up, and Abram, as the leader, has the right to divide the spoil. This first fruits gift to the Lord is Abram's evidence of victory over lust for wealth that had so dominated his life until this point. This prepares Abram for the test from the king of Sodom, who speaks up later on.

We must be careful at this point, because many commentators start to speak of Melchizedek as a type of Christ, and while the writer of Hebrews may indicate that, we don't want to make application before we get the significance of this man as a historic figure. Melchizedek is not a Christophony but a real figure in history, as the priest king of Salem. He is God's man at the correct time providing spiritual food for Abram.

After you have won a great spiritual battle you are psychologically relaxed, and can be vulnerable to a sudden test, and very subject to failure. You can win a great battle over giants, and stumble over the pieces of straw on the road. Always remember that it is the Lord who has won through you, and not you yourself. Let us be careful of not believing our own publicity, and keeping our heads safe from arrogance and pride. Keep trusting in the Lord who has given the victory and keep your occupation with Christ, your spiritual armour on, and walk in the Spirit as you rejoice in the victory. That way, you will maintain the victory.

Abram is a good picture of all these principles here. He stays focused, and does not let his victory go to his head, because he praises God for it, not himself. The food Abram receives is a beautiful spiritual picture of the body and blood of Christ; what God has done, and what God will do for Abram. Abram is being reminded of spiritual realities; that all he has is like this gift, a gift from God. The tithe is his thanks offering to recognize publicly before all, that what Melchizedek says is true; he is blessed by God.

Notice the blessing that this priest-king gives. Two blessings - you are blessed by doing what God says has to be done, and you are blessed from the results of doing what God required, because God's power ensures it is accomplished. You are also blessed by being reminded by another believer that you are walking with the Lord, and isn't God wonderful. God's grace and mercy are subjects for praise and these two men remind us of that fact.

THE TEST FOR ABRAHAM

The king of Sodom now approaches. He has just seen Abram give away 10% of everything he has captured to the king of Salem as a thanks offering, so he is hopeful that he can get his people back at least, and start to rebuild his city. He says, "Give me the people and take the spoil". Now in the ancient world the winner took all. Abraham is the winner. Everything and everyone is his.

The king of Sodom is nobody now with Abram officially being the king of Sodom as the victor over the king who defeated Sodom. The King of Sodom is trying to divert the focus from God to Abraham, with the deception in the middle of his words, that he has actually given Abraham the spoils. "I made Abraham rich", he is going to say, rather than the Lord being recognized as the source of Abraham's riches. Remember, getting wealth was a particular issue for Abram.

This is a spiritual issue, not just one of wealth and power. Abram replies to the king of Sodom that he has worshipped the true God, and that the king of Sodom is a no one. Abram is in effect saying, "I take nothing from losers, because I don't want any man to take credit for making me anything that God has made me!" He goes to the extreme and says, "I will not even take a shoelace from you".

Abraham would never take the smallest gift from an unbeliever, lest that thing hindered the gospel message to that person. This man needs salvation, and he doesn't want that, but Abram doesn't take advantage of that fact, he keeps the door of truth open for this evil man. He does not get in the way of his possible salvation by facing the truth later. God alone, the true God, can save Sodom in the future, not their restored wealth and people, nor their old useless god statues that are also in the pile of loot. Behind the events here is an interesting and sad aspect of free will, and corrupt human nature. These Sodomites will return to their evil ways and go downhill in evil even further than they had before. When people "will not" bow before the one true God, they will not heed any warnings, but go deeper into evil.

Corrupt people without salvation will simply make the five cities of the plain corrupt again. Indeed within years the Lord must send angels to destroy the whole area. The traumatic invasion and deportation makes them more focused upon their alcoholism and homosexuality as escapism. This invasion by Chedorlaomer was in effect God's last warning to the

people of the plain. They have been saved by a believer in the true God, and should accept his worship as their own, but they will return to their old gods; the very ones who let them down last time! The next action of judgment will be destruction. Moses will reveal the principle behind God's judgment of all nations in the "Five Cycles Of National Discipline", as he records them in Deuteronomy 26, and Leviticus 26.

No believer should take anything from an unbeliever if a spiritual issue is involved. This is because the free grace of salvation is critical. If we accept things from unbelievers our witness goes down significantly and they miss out because they may think that God's approval comes from human good works. It is too easy for the unbeliever to misinterpret any gift. Our job is to give them the truth, not anything else. Social welfare never assisted anyone to face truth, it only ever buys time for someone to tell the needy person the truth, and sadly it often cushions the person from truth.

Notice in verse 24, that Abram doesn't expect his men to follow his lead, nor does he place any limits on his allies taking what they want from the loot. He doesn't impose his mature standards on young believers. The men who fought with him are entitled to their share as payment for the time away from their flocks and herds, and Abram ensures they take whatever they feel is right, without any judgment from himself. A mature believer does not impose standards upon the weak or young that will crush their growth. Our job is to set an example, but not demand others follow it, until the Holy Spirit equips them to be able to do so.

PASTORAL AND LIFE APPLICATION

1. Be ready for testing to come after great victories are won. When testing comes do not accuse God of being unfair, because every thing that occurs is part of the plan for our growth. Always be asking what the Lord is doing with situations, and learn from them before they pass into history. Abram walks close to the Lord now and he is safe in the test.
2. Abram's area of weakness in his Old Sin Nature is his lust for wealth. It has led to the fall out with Lot, but he has well and truly solved it now and is ready to speak with Lot again. It is of interest that no interactions with Lot are recorded by Moses from the tablets. Sadly it appears that there was no hope of anything being achieved with Lot. He is still a believer, but has not seen that Sodom is death to his family.

He is not ready to admit he was wrong and make the changes that will save himself and his family. Lot stays on the path that will lead to total disgrace and total loss. Like the king of his chosen city he is not ready to learn from the grace of God in saving him this time. Free will is a double edged sword and opens the door always to disaster for those who choose the wrong path. We must respect the free choices of foolish people, but we must be accurate and passionate in our warnings of the consequences for their choices. Ezekiel 3 (Read this passage below – the Lord holds all pastors and prophets responsible for giving the truth accurately).

3. Worship protects Abram from the lies of the king of Sodom. Worship will be protective against all attempts of evil to distract us from truth. Let us join in the praise of God, and so keep ourselves from the lies of the enemy. Lust is defeated by love for God and worship that focuses upon his grace, mercy and plan. We have things in their right place when we have God central in our life.

Ezekiel 3:4-20. *"4. And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.*

5. *For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel;*
6. *Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee.*
7. *But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard hearted.*
8. *Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads.*
9. *As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.*
10. *Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears.*
11. *And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.*

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17. *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.*
 18. *When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.*
 19. *Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.*
 20. *Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand."*

REFLECTIONS UPON THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

1. DEFINITION. This is the sin for which Christ did not/could not die on the cross, and is the only basis for condemnation before the Lord at the last judgement.

It is the sin of individual volition (the exercise of an unbeliever's free will) of total and final rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. John 3:18, 36.

2. This absolute rejection of the Lord Jesus is called "sin" in Scripture. John 16:9.

3. It is based upon rejection of the ministry of the Holy Spirit within. Genesis 6:3, John 16:7-11, Hebrews 10:29.

4. Those who have committed this sin believe the Bible message of salvation is foolishness, and not relevant or needed by them. 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:14.

5. Synonyms for the unpardonable sin are:

Wilful sin - Hebrews 10:26-31

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit - Matthew 12:31

Resisting the Holy Spirit - Acts 7:51

Insulting the Holy Spirit - Hebrews 10:29

6. This sin is characterised by "strong delusion", and has its own path of false religion/evil that justifies the rejection and further blinds people to the reality of their need of a Saviour. 2 Thessalonians 2:11,12, 2 Peter 2:19 -22, Romans 1:22-32.

GENESIS CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

Abram, while he maintains a very high moral standard for himself, he did not set a similar standard for the younger believers who were with him. Abram divides the loot between his men and his allies, the rest goes back with the people who have survived captivity and they return to their cities as free people, due to the grace of God and the maturity of Abram. At the end of Genesis 14 we note that sadly Lot returns to Sodom, even though he should have got the message and stayed with Abram. He has lost most of his goods and people, and yet he doesn't want to admit he was wrong and he continues in that dangerous and evil dangerous place. Carnal believers often fail to learn from lessons that God gives them. Abram will continue to pray for him but when he heads back to Sodom, rather than stay with Abram, his fate and that of his family is sealed.

Once you have won a great victory or have been used by the Lord in a mighty way, that is the time when you need to continue your alertness, for an even bigger, but far more subtle test may come. Abram gave the people back to the king of Sodom, and the others with him. It is an interesting thing about human psychology, that those who you assist most can often hate the fact that they have needed your help, and hate you most. The king of Sodom is now angry with Abram, as he has failed to bribe or manipulate him in any way. Do not underestimate the malice of those who have actively or passively slipped under satanic control. The Lord himself directly warns us of this. John 15:18ff.

Abram is however quite relaxed about the threats from the pagan kings, but he has a secret worry and the Lord will address this with him here. **1 Peter 5:5-7, 1 John 4:18-19**. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ you are God's, and not your own, so you can leave your problems in the Lord's hands, and he will deliver you. It is God's responsibility to look after you, for you are his. 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23. God taught Abram significant doctrinal principles through these years. He believes that God can protect him from both the king of Sodom and from Chedorlaomer, if he ever chooses to come back.

GENESIS 15:1-6

"1. 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. 2. 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? 3. And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. 4. 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. 5. 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. 6. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

REFLECTION

ABRAM'S PROBLEM

Abram, like us all, has weaknesses, at this time it is the lack of a personal family and heir. He suggests to the Lord that Eleazer of Damascus is his heir, and the unspoken feeling here is that he fears that he has run out of time for the Lord's promise of his having a personal family coming through. He is in effect expressing his sadness to God for the Lord not giving him a son. Abram is worried about who is going to succeed him, and he has selected the most noble of his men to be his heir. Worry quickly becomes a sin and one that he needs to address, and the Lord is there to assist him, and so when the Lord speaks he lays his major concern immediately before the Lord. 1 Peter 5:5-9, 1 John 4:18-19.

Note verse one closely. Abram receives the direct guidance from the Lord in a dream. This is one of the ways the Lord speaks to believers through the ages. Dreams may deal with all sorts of things, mostly they are reflections of the concerns of the mind and have symbols that help us see what our inner computer is trying to work out, but at times the Lord has used them for those who need a direct word in a special time. Numbers 12:6-8. This particular text makes it clear that Moses is a special case. This is important to note, for what happens to Abram and Moses is not the normal thing.

These men had a special role and great responsibilities. Be very suspicious of those having many visions, dreams, and “divine words”, for even the greatest of these men had few of these experiences. The words of the Lord never return to him void, and that means anyone having any direct words from the Lord will be very active in the Lord's work and what they do will be important. If this is not the case, you can be sure God is not speaking to that person; they are simply narcissistic, fakes, or deluded. Isaiah 55:11, Jeremiah 7:1-4, James 2:14-20.

The first encouragement the Lord gives Abram is regarding fear. Fear and faith are incompatible; one will squeeze out the other over a short time frame. Abram is told not to be fearful about the lack of answer to the promise of God regarding his Son. 1 John 4:17-19. Abram is challenged to have faith in the Holy Character of God, trust His Word, and eliminate the fear that presently rules his heart. Psalms 27:1, Isaiah 35:3-4, 41:9-14, 43:1-7, 10-12, 44:6-8, 51:9-12.

As believers in the Lord we are urged to get our armour on each and every day. Ephesians 6:10-17. Paul takes his inspiration, not from the Roman soldier beside him in his room, although he draws on his appearance. The image of God being like armour is actually one of the Old Testament's strongest pictures of God's protective care over the believer. Deuteronomy 33:27-29, Psalms 3:3, 5:12, 18:1-3, 91:1-4, 119:114, Proverbs 30:5-6. Note particularly the verse from Proverbs below; for every word from God is a shield, behind which we can shelter under attack. God is the best source of protection and power for all we need as believers, and we need to know his Word and get down behind it daily and seek refuge from any fear that assails us. We don't need fake promises from false prophets, we need the truth of the Word.

Proverbs 30:5-6. *“5. Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.
6. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.”*

Abram is also told that he is to look to God for his reward, not to any military actions he may fight. It is easy to look for great wealth quickly, through a “windfall”, a “sweet deal”, a Legacy, or a lottery. Such desires lead to further sins, as lust for wealth may quickly get hold and eat away the soul. Abram is to look to the Lord alone for his great reward. The Lord promises not just any reward, or even a great one, but an “exceeding great reward”. Psalms 16:5-6, 142:5, Proverbs 11:18, 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, Hebrews 13:5-6, Revelation 21:3-6. Read these verses, reflect upon the promises here, and praise God for them, for they are all ours!

Hebrews 13:5-6. *“5. Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.
6. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”*

Where do we want our blessing? What sort of blessing do we want? Many are clear that they want it “here and now”, yet such things do not outlast time. Matthew 7:13. God's plan for us is to give rewards that last forever. It is eternal rewards that Abram receives in greatest abundance, and he is still receiving blessing even now and will continue to do so as he rejoices in his legacy and his descendants service for the Lord. How much better are God's blessings than anything that any man or woman can offer?

Note that every person entering heaven will bless Abraham as their father in faith. As the verses from the Psalms above make clear, we will always have enough to achieve the goals the Lord has for us here on earth. Just as we see Abram was not short of goods to do the work to which he was called, neither will we be short of what is required to accomplish all we are called to do here. We are to claim these promises, regarding these things, for they are for us, as they were for Abraham and David.

Many today grapple with the challenge that childlessness brings in their culture. In many cultures to be without a male heir is great disgrace, and it destroys the family's happiness and stability itself. For believers this ought not to be the case

where ever they live on the earth, for our destiny is heavenly, and whether we have physical descendents or spiritual children we are blessed.

Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Paul had no physical children, yet they are not alone and never were, for "God was their portion/reward". Each of these men rejoiced in their spiritual children, and millions look to these men because of their faith example and will greet them as "fathers in faith" in heaven. What is the nature of blessing that you seek believer? Seek the blessing of these great saints and rejoice now and forever.

Many children were a blessing in an agricultural economy, for it meant many hands to the plough, or the sheep fold. Children are referred to as "arrows in the quiver", and safety in old age was assured with plenty of strong, and well armed sons around. Psalms 127:1-5. Even today I have heard people refer to their family's children as a "quiver full of bright and shining arrows". Many have children as security for their old age, yet unless the children are led to the Lord and hold doctrine, they will be of no use whatsoever to the parent, and may bring great grief and evil. It is not physical progeny that guarantees anything except broken sleep in their childhood and worry through their teenage and adult years!

Abram is told to "look up" at the heavens, remember his destiny is heavenly, not just earthly, and then see that his children will be more numerous than the stars he can see. Our children should be a blessing and a joy, and they will be if we first "look up", and ensure that heavenly realities guide our life planning and child rearing practices. Romans 9:6-8.

God said, "Abram look at the stars, you are going to have a child, and the descendents of that son will be as numerous as the stars". This promise may also mean (more below), that the story of the Messiah for mankind who will descend from this son is written in the stars. Abram believed in the Lord's word to him, and it was counted to him as righteousness. When you are worried, upset or anxious follow Abram and cast your cares on the Lord. 1 Peter 5:5-9. The answer to your worry may be a long time coming but you can look to Him in the interim and know that God keeps his words. You can know that He loves you and remember the character of God. Psalm 91:2.

Even though you do not know the specific answer to your problems at this point, you can accept the principle that you trust in the character of God, and rest upon his perfect character. It will be an experience as you will grow through application of the promises and character of God into your life problems, and as you meet testing with the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit to cut through any fears and worries. If you have problems, Trust - Rest - Apply - Keep moving forward in faith, like your father Abram.

By the large numbers of star systems God was also able to demonstrate that He is in control. God's challenge to Abraham is blunt. "Abraham, face your choice, decide whether you are going to try and solve your own problem or are you going to let the God who formed the galaxies do it for you? Will you believe God's Word or not? God's power has brought you thus far, and He is not going to let you down now." Think about these issues believer right now in your own life. Worry is an insult to God. He thought about you, He died for you on the Cross. Is He going to leave you now? Of course not! If He loved you that much when you were a sinner, how much more is He going to care for you now that you are His friend? Romans 5:9-20, 1 Peter 1:7.

Go one step further believer also here, for Abram was told to "tell/speak the stars" - not "count" them only, but recite their names. One staggering thing that is all too often overlooked by commentators on this passage, is that if you simply read the ancient names of the stars in order of their galaxies in the "Mazzeroth/Zodiac" you have the Plan of God spelled out in a precision that is still amazing. This applies in all cultures and languages, as the ancient names of the star systems have a common origin for all people groups in the post flood world. Refer to Book 146 - "The Eternal Plan of God" and study this and be amazed at how Abram could read about the Eternal Plan by simply reciting the star names from Virgo (the Virgin who gives birth to the Saving and Ruling Son) through to Leo (the returning King who comes to rule the universe). Abram will be the ancestor of the virgin born Son of Man who will be the Saviour and King.

To be childless as a man was to be called a eunuch, and despised by many in Abram's day. Daniel and his three friends were made eunuchs by the Babylonians, and that was to render them powerless in society other than through the power-position the Babylonian Empire gave them. The viewpoint of the many is corrected by Isaiah with words of comfort from the Lord. Isaiah 56:3-5. Eleazer was a good servant, and a man who could be trusted with all things, but he is not to be the heir of Abram. As his trusted man Abram was entitled to call him son as the writer of the proverb is later to identify, but he will not be his heir in the Plan of God. Proverbs 17:2. He had a different destiny; we each need to find our own!

It is a reminder that physical descent does not guarantee good results in the child. Genetics involves the passing on of the good and the bad, and unless a child meets the Lord and is transformed by Him, that child will bring grief later. Abram is challenged to see what is to come, as if it is now, and praise God for his great gifts, well before he receives them. Acts 7:4-5, Hebrews 10: 35-39, 11:1-2. Let us stand with Abram and praise God for his gifts right now, before we meet them face to face, for the reality of the things God will give is already sure. Let us be sure and claim them by faith now and rejoice in the Lord for all his goodness to us at least three times; before, during, and after their reception!

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Abram praised God for his goodness at the time he received the promise of them. It is this that is credited to his account for righteousness. To stand with Abram, we need to stand in the same place of faith, and that means we see the future, as if it has already occurred in the plan of God. This means, we praise God for what he will

yet do, as if he has already done it, because we are so sure of the final result! Let us walk in this daily expression of faith.

2. Fear is to be faced with the promises of God's Word. We are called to stand in the truth, and the truth is that the plan of God will work out in the lives of his saints. Let us knock fear out of our daily life with faith. Let us feed on the Word daily, rather than feeding fear within by our ignorance of the character and promises of God.
3. Children are a blessing only in the Lord. They bring joy only as they walk with God. Let us ensure that heavenly realities alone guide our steps, and that we do not tie ourselves into thinking as unsaved men think. Let us see our destiny with Abram now, and live as he did, with the upward look to guide the earthly focus.

REFLECTIONS UPON FAITH AND FEAR

1. Fear is seen in two ways in scripture.

[a] Firstly as a mental attitude sin that is incompatible with our status as children of the most high, the ruler of the universe.

[b] Secondly it is used to describe the correct attitude towards God the Lord for all his creatures.

There is godly fear, awe, and respect for God as God, and there is inappropriate fear, which is the cringing fear of one who believes the other is about to hurt them. This second kind is wrong for us as children of God, for none can harm us without God's permission for we belong to Him. We were bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus was shed for us, and so we belong to God now. 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, 1 Peter 3:4.

2. Our occupation with the person and majesty of God is often spoken of as "fear" in the legitimate sense for believers. We walk in the "holy fear of the Lord" – a fear/awe/respect that purifies our heart and lives and focuses our mind on doing what is pleasing to our heavenly father. 2 Samuel 23:2-3, Nehemiah 5:9, Job 28:28, Psalms 19:9, 34:11-12, 111:10, Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 10:27, 22:4, Malachi 3:16, Ephesians 5:21.

3. Fear as a mental attitude sin is spoken of in, 1 Samuel 17:11, 24, Proverbs 29:25.

4. In God's grace plan for us slavish and debilitating fear has no place. His plans for us are always divinely good, and any testing situation is for our good. Romans 8:28-39.

5. Slavish Fear is an expression of a failure of faith in the plan of God for us. The "fear of the Lord" is an expression of expectation that Almighty God will do great things through the power of the Holy Spirit through our lives. Exodus 14:13-14, Deuteronomy 31:6-8, Joshua 8:1, 1 Chronicles 28:20, Isaiah 41:10, 2 Timothy 1:7.

6. Spiritual death is one way of describing Satan's kingdom, and it is the place of the source of fear. We have no place in satanic thinking or viewpoint but rather we are to live in the light of the Word and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 2:14,15.

7. In spiritual death, Adam was afraid. Genesis 3:10, this fear motivated Adam to produce religious activity (fig leaves) and lies. Genesis 3:7.

8. Salvation removes the basis of fear, which is condemnation from the Justice of God (spiritual death).

9. Spiritual maturity provides freedom from fear. 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 13:6, 1 John 4:18, 1 Corinthians 13:5b

10. Carnality and any form of fake religious activity that leads us away from grace and daily obedience to the Word enslaves the believer to Satan through fear. Galatians 5:1, Romans 8:15. As believers he cannot eternally destroy us, but if he can capture our mind by fear he ruins our joy and robs us of eternal rewards.

11. The mature believer is commanded to fear nothing he may suffer in life, for by means of God's grace provision all we ever may need is provided for us. Revelation 2:10

12. The baby believer is sustained by believing God's Word, obeying his commands hour by hour to daily life, and resting upon his promises. Hebrews 4

13. As we become mature believers we continue with this resting upon the promises, but in addition to this we are sustained by our understanding / application of entire categories of God's Word - we have then moved beyond the promises to confidence in the very character of God itself.

14. Illustration: A woman who asks every hour, "Do you love me?" needs assurance through many promises, and many actions backing the promises up. Once she gets to truly know her husband, and her love is fully established in him through his faithfulness to her, she has absolute assurance, and doesn't need constant reminders of his love by specific words. She is full of confidence through knowledge of her husband's character.

15. Chapter's 3-6 of Hebrews deal with the falling away from growth and confidence by these believers. The spiritual principle of Chapter 4 is the means of getting them back on target.
16. In Hebrews 13:6, we see the objective of the writer, freedom from fear by their daily, moment by moment living the awareness of the love of Christ for them, and the power of Christ available to them.
17. The writers of Scripture identify correctly that when the believer is fearful, he imitates the unbeliever ("cowardly" – Revelation 21:8), and that is not right given our great position. Hebrews 11:27 "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is unseen." This is our standard!
18. Fear is a mental attitude sin that shows our mind has moved away from thinking of the Lord. 1 Samuel 17:11,24
19. Fear is a sign of falling back into domination by the "prince of this world". 1 Samuel 18:12,29 21:12 28:20
20. Absence of fear is a big part of maintaining a dynamic mental attitude. Hebrews 13:6 11:27
21. There is only one legitimate fear; it is the fear of failure to enter spiritual maturity. Hebrews 4:1
22. Love demands absence of fear. 1 John 4:18. They are two opposing mental attitudes.
23. Slavish Fear is not part of the Divine Plan for the Believer. 2 Timothy 1:7 Exodus 14:13-14 Joshua 8:1 Isaiah 41:10 2 Samuel 1:7
24. Courage and lack of fear is a sign of mature spiritual status. Psalm 3:6 Psalm, 56:3 Hebrews 11:27
25. Fear is the power by which the Evil of Satan rules among mankind. Hebrews 2:14-15 Genesis 19:30 (Lot) 1 Kings 18:9-14 (Obadiah), both Lot and Obadiah show how the failing believer lives in constant fear.
26. "The Fear of the Lord" in contrast to slavish fear is the phrase used to mean "Occupation with Christ" when related to the attitude of the mature Believer toward Christ. 2 Samuel 23:3 Nehemiah 5:9,15 Ephesians 5:21 Job 28:28 Psalm 19:9 34:10 Proverbs 1:7 9:10 Proverbs 10:27, 1 Peter 2:17.

GENESIS 15:7-20

"7. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. 8. And he said, LORD God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? 9. And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. 10. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. 11. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. 13. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; 14. And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. 15. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. 16. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. 17. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. 18. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: 19. The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, 20. And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

REFLECTION

In **verse 7** God says to Abram that He is the Lord who brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees. Abram wonders still how God will do the things he has promised. Abram says, with Thomas, I believe, but give me a sign so that I will know more. This is not sinful, for Abram is asking, as does Thomas, to have his faith built up. Mark 9:24, John 20:28. The way we build up our faith is to exercise it in action, and in worship. God combines action and worship for Abram. God says for Abram to take a heifer, she goat, ram, pigeon and a turtle dove. They will be the sacrifices at a special ceremony.

Notice the promise again, and it's strength. God says, "look back", and reminds Abram that it is he who has brought him through from Ur to Canaan. It is he that will continue to do the good work through him. He does not stand alone, but with the Almighty God. What God has promised he will perform; what God starts, God always finishes.

There is a plan and it is working out in his power, never in ours. Philippians 1:3-8, Psalms 105:1ff. Abram is encouraged to remember and then focus forward again. He will receive the land, and the same certainty that he can look back with, he can look forward with. This is the principle for us to get hold of and live by ourselves.

Note this! God is the creator of space and time itself, and as such stands beyond these categories of this creation. To God the future is just as certain as the past is. Meditate upon this for a second and see that you stand in the place of stability and certainty. The sign that these things will be so, is the sign of the coming Saviour-King, and we today spin our year around Christmas and Easter, because they are the great signs of Immanuel; God become man.

These are the sacrificial animals which will later appear in Leviticus. Moses must have had a strange feeling as he read of this patriarchal sacrifice, for it is the fore-runner of what the Lord will establish as the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law. The sacrifices speak of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. Fellowship that had been lost needed to be restored. God is saying to Abraham - confess your sin and be restored to a relationship of faith and trust in me. It is God's way of calling for Abram to confess, restore his faith fully, and openly and publicly confess his faith in the Lord by acting out the sacrifices, and then watching over them for many hours until he sees what God wants him to see.

Abram is to "sit with" the sacrifices long enough to understand what God is doing for him and will do for him throughout time and eternity. Worship is to be "sat with" long enough to enter into our being. We are not to rush through any service to the Lord, but reflect in all we do and so hear from the Lord as we go along, rather than just play act at religion. God wants real relationship, and that means pausing long enough to listen to our Creator-Saviour.

In summary the offerings stand for the following things. The heifer - the sin offering - confession of sin. The ram or she goat - the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross - reconciliation and propitiation. The turtle dove and the pigeon speak of the person of Christ, the deity of Christ, the hypostatic union, and the humanity of Christ. The birds are not divided because they speak of the person of the Lord, who is perfectly God and Man, and is undivided.

Moses is faithful as he followed the pattern God showed him for sacrifices on the mount of Sinai, and he must have been amazed and excited as he read the clay tablets from Abram and saw that he also did the same thing six hundred or more years before. Hebrews 8:5.

THE MAKING OF A COVENANT

When men wanted to make a covenant in the ancient world they did what Abraham was instructed to do. It was common practice in those days to walk between the divided animals to demonstrate commitment to a covenant. The offerings made on the altar were cut in half and placed so as to form a blood sprinkled aisle down the middle. Those involved in the covenant walked between the carcasses together hand in hand.

In this case it is seen that only God, in the form of a smoking oven and flaming torch, passed through between the pieces showing that it was an unconditional covenant, one based on the character of God alone. Abram is to be obedient to the instruction to offer sacrifice for his sin, a series of sacrifices that speaks of his sin and God's grace provision to meet his needs, and God's forgiveness. Once he has done what God demands he is to stand and wait for the Lord to act. Psalms 50:5, Jeremiah 34:17-20.

This is a blood covenant, and speaks of the blood of Christ. Abraham is being invited to see ahead in time and hear the Lord's words, "you can trust me because I am the one who is to come, the Saviour". Abraham did what he was told. It spoke of forgiveness of sin and relationship with God. The answer of fear, worry and doubt is to be occupied with the person of Christ and His Word; to be in living relationship with Him.

We have the Cross and Empty Tomb as our focal point today - Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, John 19:20. As he is offering these things his mind is on the Saviour. We must get our eyes off our problems and on to the Lord. We stand in the character and plan of God alone, not in any strength we have.

SATANIC COUNTER ATTACK

In **Verse 11** when the raptors came down on the carcasses Abraham drove them away. The birds are vultures and speak of evil. He keeps these birds off the sacrifice portraying on-going tenacious resistance and victory from Satanic attack. He keeps his mind on the sacrifices and keeps his eye on them, so that nothing is carried off by the enemy. It is vigilance and tenacity with toughness that the Lord is teaching him here.

Those who are ready for battle do not need often to fight, but to be unready is to be surprised and defeated. Vigilance is called for regarding the enemy for he is "subtle", a "liar" from the beginning, and seeks to destroy the life and very joy of the believer. He hates us! We need to really understand this and take daily action to walk in the Spirit in full spiritual armour at all times. **James 4:7-8, 1 Peter 5:8-11**. Remember the malice of our enemy – it doesn't weaken over time.

Having driven the birds away until nightfall, they go, and he falls into a deep sleep of physical and mental exhaustion. Abraham now has a powerful nightmare. When you are mentally exhausted this will quite often happen. It is called here, a "horror of great darkness". Abraham has dealt with his conscious sin of worry but this nightmare fear comes from deep in his soul and it needs to come out so that God can deal with that as well. The Lord is the healer of all our cares and fears, and he sifts the deep intents of our hearts. Hebrews 4:12 – but look at all the verses noted in the next paragraph.

Having faced the real issue which is faith in God, we need to bring all thoughts into captivity to the person and plan of Christ. **2 Corinthians 10:1-6, Hebrews 4:7-16**. Both these passages are good ones to have any home study group read

through and meditate upon as you examine this part of Genesis, as they form a good commentary on what is happening within Abram here.

PROPHECY AS A CURE FOR WORRY

It is a dream that shocks, frightens, and hurts him, yet at it's heart is a great promise from the Lord. Prophetic truth hurts! When God speaks there is warning and there is fearful consequences for those who do not listen and obey. Beware of those who believe they are prophets and only say good things all the time. They are not prophets! Prophecy gives warning and hard truth! Isaiah 30:10 reminds us that most people want "smooth things", but God wants us to "sit with" hard things and face reality in the filling of the Holy Spirit. Satan desires us to walk in escapism, for then he is able to deceive further and destroy us more thoroughly.

God said to Abram, "Know of a surety thy seed will be a stranger in the land which is not theirs and will be there 400 years". He also says that He will judge the nation whom they serve, and afterwards they will come out with great substance. The nightmare is not only what is going to happen to his family but the Lord also shows him what is going to happen to Egypt. All these things are hundreds of years later, and God shows him this to emphasize to him that the plan is going to go a lot longer than his lifetime.

Abram is again thinking, "Will God keep His promise?" It worries him when he sees what is coming. This is encouraging to us all, for we all have our doubts and concerns when we see what is coming in the plan, especially when we meditate upon the Great Tribulation and see just how few of mankind will emerge from it. It can look at times as if there is not much hope for man at all. It is not wrong to feel despair at times, for that is human, it is just sinful to stay there! God wants our despair brought to the Cross, and there we see that we are loved and the plan is bigger than our sins, or Satan's, or man's greatest evil. God says in effect to him, "Abram this is all going to happen, nevertheless my promise will last forever. In the long term I will work my purpose out". I have brought you this far, and I will carry you through.

We have to learn this lesson if we are to serve the Lord's people. In order to be a teacher you have to go through things that others are going through so that people can see that you are real, not just a play actor. James (James 3:1-2) says not to ask to be a teacher, as it is a trying existence, but if that is your call, then relax and enjoy it and serve the Lord in all things, and in all things learn how to serve him more. To whom much is given, much is required! Luke 12:48-59.

A great deal is required of all those who lead others in truth; the first thing is total obedience to the truth they have received. Refer to the EBCWA Leadership Manual for a full discussion of the personal cost and powerful training of leaders for the Lord's work.

Through the pain and pressure you will be able, with James and Abraham, to "count it all joy". You will not be looking at your problems but you will be looking at your Saviour and his purposes in your life and the lives of those he has given you. By this you will see the big plan unfolding and will have a relaxed mental attitude. God has a plan for each and every life, and each and every event in the days of our lives. Refer to the BTB studies SUFFERING, WORRY.

Although you may not know about your future at the moment the Creator does, and you are in his hands, not the "fates" or "good luck". God does not tell you everything at this point, for if you did know everything you would just worry about it more. The challenge through this life is to walk in faith and trust the one who called you to work things out through the path that he has chosen for you. It is about the character of God, and He is stable and securely good and righteous in all his dealings. We are to trust him for all things and be humble and relaxed in his arms. Deuteronomy 33:27-29, Matthew 6:28-30, Luke 12:16-40, 14:7-11.

These passages are excellent meditations for any group study, as they bring us to the feet of the Lord as we face pressure situations, whether we are leaders or followers, and remind us we are in the hands of the one who went to the Cross for us. We are beloved – we don't deserve it, and we cannot earn it, but we are beloved!

Verse 13. God strongly says, "Know for a surety" - be absolutely sure of my Word Abraham. If I say it I will do it, says God. The descendents of Abram are going to go to Egypt and suffer, many are going to die miserably as slaves, but they are going to be able to claim these promises just as Abram did.

Even before he has his son he has the promise of blessing and trouble for his son's people, and as the people of Israel in Egypt think upon these words, engraved upon the clay tablets, they can look at the body of Joseph and remember his faith and Abram's before and give thanks for the deliverance that will come to them in the right time for the plan to be fulfilled. God calls upon us to be patient and faithfully obedient to his demands for us, because he is faithful and will deliver us and accomplish his purposes with and through us.

The Lord provides the promise of Abram's own death in peace, and the deliverance from Egypt together. This tells us that Abram is in prayer as he hears the words of the Lord to him, and is concerned for the deliverance of his people, even before his own blessing. His heart is upon those who come after him rather than just upon himself. He is close to the heart of his Lord, just as we are to be. John 17:4-10.

God promises Abram that he will go to his fathers in peace. He will die, in peace and in a good age, and in the 4th generation after his descendents enter Egypt, they shall come out of Egypt and inherit the land of Canaan. Exodus 12:40-41, Psalms 105:23-38.

The reason for the delay in the inheritance of the land, is that the Canaanites are not to be dispossessed at the time of Abram, for the Lord is waiting for them to repent and become believers themselves. They will have maximum time for that, so that they stand before Him without excuse for their persistence in evil; for the iniquity of these Amorites was "not yet full". There is also a judgment of Egypt tied in here with that of the Canaanites. The Lord is dealing with three people groups during the Exodus as we see in that study. He works upon his people Israel, upon Egypt and upon the peoples of Canaan. God's plan covers all things and peoples.

The date of your death, and all others, and even how you die, is the prerogative of God. God's sense of justice is seen here, and these evil Canaanites will not be judged and removed from the land until they have had maximum opportunity for repentance. Your life and your death are in His hands and you can relax as his child in his tender mercies, right through until you see Him face to face. Refer to the BTB study DEATH. Psalms 68:20, 116:15, 1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Corinthians 5:1-9.

You walk with Him in life and death. There is a "dying grace" provision of the Lord for all believers so that we will have comfort in dying. We have saving grace, living grace, surpassing grace, and dying grace. We are to walk with Him. You can only be a good pastor when you have watched people die, and walked with them through their last days, and thereby faced your own departure in peace and confidence in the one who died for you. The Lord trains his leaders and will give you many opportunities to both suffer in/with Him, and walk with those who suffer and die in humility and love for the Lord. God will give you this opportunity so that you will be able to trust Him in life and death, and serve him in love and care for others in the midst of all things.

Abram sees his people's suffering and his heart's concern is first for them, secondly for the manner of his own death. "Others" is the motto of pastoral leadership, and all who serve the Lord must learn that, or they will not be useful to the Lord. This was the dying word of General William Booth – the founder of the Salvation Army and is a great motto for all biblical leadership. Remember, if you are not useful, you are pruned out of the vine! Relax and trust the Lord's training, and walk in the power and education of the Holy Spirit. He will carry you through. John 15:1-5, Jude 24-25. If you are walking with the Lord, you will go to be with the Lord in fellowship with him, just as you have lived, in joy and peace. Walk in the Spirit believer and there will be no fear of any thing that men can do to you!

In the 4th generation the Israelites will come back into the Land. Sodom and Gomorrah are going to be wiped out shortly, as their iniquity had become full, but the rest of the Canaanites were not totally degenerate at that time. In history when a nation becomes degenerate God removes them, and so there are no Canaanite nations left today. Four generations of being negative towards God cause that group's removal from history. Exodus 20:5-6. The only survivors will be regenerate individuals or those by faith attached to Israel.

By the fourth generation the Canaanites had become totally degenerate. This is why the Jews under Joshua were told to kill all the Canaanites, not because God was vicious and angry, but because they were so infected with the sexually transmitted diseased consequences of their sinful evils that they needed to be destroyed. They had run out of time and would be judged; God will move against all people who persist in their rebellion against his righteousness. Our job is to warn of God's holy demands and warn that the Day of Judgment is coming for all mankind. John 16:8-11, Revelation 20:11-15.

In **verse 17** we are told that this same night the Lord made a covenant with Abram, the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, a promise of a designated area of land. God walked between the pieces in the form of two objects that moved between the row of sacrificial animals. Both the smoking pot, and the fiery furnace are seen in slightly different, and more dramatic form in Exodus, firstly by Moses alone, and then at the centre of the Israelite camp. Exodus 3:1-2, 13:21-22.

The Israelites will see the presence of God daily, as Abram sees it this one night, and they are challenged to walk close to God, yet the entire first generation fails, except for Caleb and Joshua. Abram faces the question here from the Lord; is he going to believe the promise or not?

No manifestation of the Lord will overwhelm a person's free will; they still face the faith challenge, and the greater the sign the more serious is the challenge. The Exodus generation had many signs, and ignored them, and so they all died in the desert! Be very scared if the Lord sends you a sign, for it means much is demanded, and so let the fear of the Lord guide you into walking in the Spirit, and so be like Abram, Caleb and Joshua. To fail to move ahead with a direct sign is to be directly under judgment.

Abraham does not walk through the pieces with God. God walks through by Himself showing that it is an unconditional covenant. God will guarantee the covenant and bless Abraham unconditionally. The man does nothing except to accept the word of God and walk in faith that what God says he will do.

We have an unconditional covenant ourselves in Christ Jesus, as the Lord has blessed us and we will live with Him forever. Even if you do not get it quite right down here you will be with Him forever. We must surely live lives that glorify Him, and as we see more and more of the truth of this, so will our worship of the Lord become deeper and more powerful. We should also want to be recipients of eternal rewards for great service to our Lord, not for any glory they will bring to ourselves, but to bring even more glory to Him who died for us and has led us through the paths of this life in joy, and brought us through with peace and spiritual prosperity of soul.

Abraham had doubts but he dealt with them God's way. He confessed and trusted God's promises because he rested upon God's perfect character. He believed God's Word and recognized the source and solution to all his worry. God's Word can be trusted because it rests upon the certainty and stability of God's perfect character and plan!

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. God will continue to bless us, the question for each of us, is will we continue to obey his Word? To receive the blessing of the Lord depends upon our continued obedience to his Word, for the place of blessing is the place where the Lord wants us. Let us ensure we do not rob ourselves of the Lord's blessing by our lack of follow through on his commands to us.
2. We look backwards to gain strength, encouragement and confidence for the road ahead. We do not live in the past, nor waste time speaking too long about it. Our focus is forward, for the past cannot be changed, but the future can be made blessed as we walk with God.
3. Like Abram we are called to constant vigilance. The enemy crouches at the door always. Our defence is our spiritual armour, but it is only good if it is well fastened on daily, and we walk in spiritual power.
4. Worry is human, it only becomes sinful if we hold onto it, rather than passing it on to the Lord. We are the Lord's and that means all our worries are his also. Pass your worries over to the one who wants them and is able to deal with them in power. We are called to live like kings not fools, for only a fool holds onto a problem that belongs to another.
5. Suffering often will be part of training for service. When we face suffering in the Lord's work, we are challenged to see it as the Lord's training ground, and to take it before him. There is purpose in all that comes to us. Let us see the Lord's purposes in all that happens.
6. Your death is in the Lord's hands, as is every detail of your life. We are called to walk through this life and not slacken our pace as we walk out of it, for every step is ordered by the Lord. He walks with us through and out of this life. Let us see the Lord's presence in all the aspects and phases of this brief life of ours upon the earth.

SOME REFLECTIONS UPON WORRY

1. General scripture for the cure to worry (Genesis 15).
2. Scriptures where the believer is told not to worry: (Philippians 4:6; Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7; 1 Samuel 17:47; Exodus 14:13,14).
3. We are instructed to be imitators of God – and God never worries (Ephesians 5:1). When we worry we do not imitate God.
4. Three categories of worry:
 - a) Worry about problems of this life.
 - b) Worry about death and dying.
 - c) Worry about sin (guilt).
5. The example given is of Abram in Genesis 15.
First cure for worry - The Promises of God (v 1-7).
 - a) God tells Abram not to worry (v 1) -
 - b) "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward".
 - c) The promise of a natural child is given (v 4).
 - d) The promises of God are backed by the perfect character of God.
 - e) God provides an object lesson - the stars (v 5).
 - f) God reminds him of his salvation - a grace gift (v 6).
 - g) God reminds Abram of God's faithfulness in the past (v 7).
 - h) The challenge to Abram: trust in God or worry.
6. Second cure for worry - The Doctrine of the Word (v 8-12).
 - a) God instructs Abram to sacrifice five animals (v 9)
 - b) Animals sacrificed are:
 - i) HEIFER - representing CONFESSION OF SINS
 - ii) SHE GOAT representing SALVATION RECONCILIATION
 - iii) RAM representing SALVATION PROPITIATION
 - iv) TURTLE DOVE representing CHRIST'S DEITY

v) PIGEON representing CHRIST'S RESURRECTED HUMANITY.

7. Application to the cure of worry:

i) HEIFER - by confessing your sins they are blotted out. Do not worry about past failures. Confession of sins is essential before you can apply the doctrines of the Bible to cure your worry.

ii) SHE GOAT - God provided reconciliation through Christ by removing the barrier between God and man - we are reconciled therefore do not worry.

iii) RAM - God was satisfied by Christ's sacrifice. Jesus Christ can handle our problems in time do not worry.

iv) TURTLE DOVE - Jesus Christ as God is always faithful, He is always with us - do not worry.

v) PIGEON - The resurrected Jesus Christ is seated in the place of commendation at the right hand of God in a most powerful location - do not worry.

8. Satan counter-attacks in the form of birds swooping down on the carcasses, doubts form and there is a temptation to worry (v 11).

Abram drives them away - he refuses to worry (v 11)

Under pressure, Abram begins to doubt and worry about his descendants (v 12).

9. Third cure for worry - Knowledge of prophecy

a) In our future as believers we will have:

i) A resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

ii) A mansion in heaven (John 14:1-3)

iii) An inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-8)

iv) Blessedness and no pressure (Revelation 21:4)

b) God gave Abram five prophecies in (Genesis 15):

i) The Jews would serve the Egyptians 400 years (v 13).

ii) God would judge Egypt with ten plagues (v 14).

iii) The Jews would leave with great wealth (v 14).

iv) Abram would die at a ripe old age (v 15).

v) The Jews would return to the Promised Land (v 16).

c) Abram therefore was assured that his descendants would have a great future and to seal this, God, that same day gave Abram the Palestinian Covenant (v 18 -21).

10. It is of interest that the number of promises inferred were five, the animals killed were five and the prophecies given were five, the number five being that of GRACE, God's unmerited favour to man.

REFLECTION UPON THE PERFECT AND DEPENDABLE CHARACTER OF GOD

1. Whilst God is three persons all three persons have exactly the same essence or character:

a) **SOVEREIGNTY**

The Father (Ephesians 1:11 , cf Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 6:10, Hebrews 10:7, 9)

The Son (John 5:21, Revelation 19:16)

The Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11 , cf Hebrews 2:4)

b) **RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The Father (John 17:25)

The Son (Luke 1:35, Hebrews 7:26, 2 Corinthians 5:21)

The Spirit The Holy Spirit

c) **JUSTICE**

The Father (Job 37:23, cf 8:3)

The Son (Acts 3:14, John 5:22, Revelation 19:11)

The Spirit (Nehemiah 9:20)

d) **LOVE**

The Father (John 3:16)

The Son (Ephesians 5:25, 1 John 3:16)

The Spirit (John 16:7-11, 1 Corinthians 2:10)

e) **ETERNAL LIFE**

The Father (John 5:26)

The Son (Micah 5:2, cf John 1:1-2, 1 John 5:11)

The Spirit (Isaiah 48:16)

f) **ALL-KNOWING**

The Father (Hebrews 4:13, cf Matthew 11:27, 1 Peter 1:2)

The Son (John 18:4, cf Matthew 9:4, John 2:25, 1 Corinthians 4:5)

The Spirit (Isaiah 11:2, cf 1 Corinthians 2:11)

g) **EVERYWHERE**

The Father (2 Chronicles 2:6)

The Son (Matthew 28:20, cf Ephesians 1:23)

The Spirit (Psalm 139:7)

h) **ALL-POWERFUL**

The Father (Mark 14:36, cf 1 Peter 1:5)

The Son (Hebrews 1:3, cf Matthew 24:30, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 3:21)

The Spirit (Romans 15:19)

i) **UNCHANGABLE**

The Father (Hebrews 6:17, Psalm 33:11)

The Son (Hebrews 13:8)

The Spirit (John 14:16)

j) **TRUTH**

The Father (John 7:28, John 17:3)

The Son (1 John 5:20, cf John 1:14, 14:6, Revelation 19:11)

The Spirit (1 John 5:6, cf John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13)

GENESIS CHAPTER 16**INTRODUCTION**

Abram had three key personal promises from the events described in chapter fifteen; one that Eliezer of Damascus would not be his heir, secondly that he would have an heir by Sarah, and thirdly that he would die at a great age and would be very prosperous in every aspect of life, both temporal and eternal.

He had also received specific prophetic information about the destiny of his descendants, that through great suffering they would come to a great place amongst the nations, and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars he could see above his tent.

The first three promises he will live to see, the latter ones he will see in the eyes of faith and observe from heaven the results of the Lord's work through him. Abram will learn to rejoice in all the great promises of God, but firstly, there is a further area of sinful tendency that needs to be eliminated from his life.

At the end of chapter 15 he is at a high point spiritually, but behind the scenes, his wife is an unstable and contentious believer, and is still thinking in terms of human viewpoint, just like Lot. In that chapter Abram is objective, trusting in the promises of God, and is not double minded like the weak believer in **James 1:5-15**.

This passage of James could have been a commentary on the chapters we have read and are entering now. Read these verses from James and go through the www.ebcwa.com.au commentary on James for this section of the book, before starting your study of this chapter in Genesis.

Abram has won the long battle against preoccupation with physical wealth, and is now at peace in his soul, and sees with the eyes of faith towards his own and his descendant's future. He is "single minded" – the Lord's path for him alone is his focus now. From this strong position, Abram will make an error that his descendants are still confronting daily in the Gaza strip and West Bank.

This chapter is the warning that we must get the little details of life right, and not succumb to sexual temptations as if they are "little things", nor follow the traditions of our people, as if they are biblical doctrines and truth. Discernment in all things, and sexual morality at all times is required of us, and like Abram we can all go astray in a careless minute. James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8-9. A careless minute of sin and evil can lead to a life time regret, as David discovered, and it is only the Lord who can turn cursing into blessing. 2 Samuel Chapter 11, Romans 8:26-39.

Abram has, in the area of wealth and prosperity at least, ceased his subjective and self centred way of seeing things, and now sees that the promise that he is to have a son is certain, because it is backed by the Character of God. All his desires to be a great and wealthy sheik are gone, replaced by a satisfaction with, and embracing of whatever God will do with him and through him, in his own day and forever. He now seeks God's path and provision only for his life.

He now sees with the eyes of faith, that the eternal perspective is the right perspective upon time. He has learned this, but like all new knowledge, it has a fragile hold upon him and he is still vulnerable to specific temptation. Sarai however is still subjective and sees only her own age, position, status, wealth and title, and is limited to the "here and now".

Now, the Bible makes it clear, that it is Abram's role to set the example to his wife and teach her. He had failed to teach Lot, and sadly, he has failed to get doctrinal truth through to Sarai also, although she bears some responsibility. God does not judge Sarai too harshly, either here or in the New Testament, for the husband has the primary responsibility under God's plan to correct and challenge his wife, and be the example for her to follow.

If you are a Christian wife you should not have to give your husband spiritual guidance, as he should himself be spiritual, and be setting the example. If as a Christian young woman, you have to teach a man you are going out with biblical truth, and you are unmarried, he is probably not the person to marry, at least not until he gives spiritual growth based evidence that he is truly saved and matures more to the "fruitful" point.

Pause now and read through **1 Peter 3:1-12**. This is where Peter comments on Christian wives that are having trouble with their husbands, and on the need to grasp the reality of an objective faith, grounded in the certainties of the character and plan of God for marriages. It is always easier to be subjective rather than objective. The subjective person will always take things on a personal level or listen to only half what is said, but God challenges us to hear all his counsel and apply it all with objective certainty into the problems we face in life.

GENESIS 16:1-6

"1. Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. 2. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. 3. 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. 4. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when

she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. 5. And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee. 6. But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thine hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.”

REFLECTION

MAN'S SOLUTION IS NEVER GOD'S SOLUTION

In **Genesis 16:1-2** Abraham met his “little Egypt”. It was a custom in the ancient world that if a wife could not conceive the servant girl of that wife could be given to the husband, and if there was a child born, that child would be considered the wife’s child, and so could be the husband’s heir, even though it was born out of an adulterous relationship as far as the Lord God was concerned.

The custom of the ancient world was accepted as “moral” by all the ancient peoples, but was morally and spiritually wrong before God’s holy Word, and all such false satanic logic is just that; it is “evil”. Sarai was still doubting God’s promises, and from her old sin nature weakness, and her human logic, came up with a “human viewpoint” solution, to “help God fulfil the promise”, and so she gave Abraham wrong advice, and he foolishly took it.

Abram acted like an Arab sheik with many wives, rather than God’s man, true to the one wife the Lord God had given him. He had no business following traditional values, for he had a far higher standard to live up to. God’s will as far as marriage is concerned is given in Genesis 2:24 where it says a man will leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife, one wife until her death. Abram had God’s will clearly revealed to him, and he falls here, and every generation afterwards paid the price, for many of the descendents of Hagar still presently hate and fight against the descendents of Sarah. This will change in the last days, and all the sons of Abraham will stand against Iran and later the Anti-Christ – but there are many centuries of carnage and pain before this occurs in the end times. NOTE – This above was written in 2014, and now on 11 September 2020 we see it happening with the “Abrahamic Treaty” between the UAE and Israel.

Polygamy and promiscuity are wrong, irrespective of what a local custom may teach. In the Old Testament many of the patriarchs had more than one wife and it was always a source of trouble for both parties. If you do not do things God’s way, it is sin, and it **will** be trouble. Romans 14:23. No-one gets by with sexual sin, even if his/her culture accepts it.

This temptation that Abram faced is still common. Many people are offered lovers when away on business trips by their hosts, and they are told that such things are normal, and that you will insult your host if you do not accept the woman/man provided to you. At such a time a believer must stand up and say, “I am a servant of the one true God, and you insult me by offering me this person against God’s Law”. If you do not stand for God’s standards, you will find yourself waking up amongst Satan’s people in the morning.

POOR ADVICE

Verses 1-3. It is missing God’s mark not man’s mark that matters to the man and woman of God; thus you can be an upright “moral” person as far as your society is concerned, but be a sinful, wicked person in the sight of God. Abram now gets his eyes off God’s Word and on to Hagar and he falls because he listened to the voice of his weakness, Paul’s inner “old-man”, rather than that of God. Romans 7:13 – 8:2. Abraham’s work is to wait on God, not fall into a sinful sexual relationship that will not answer the promise of God. God does not need Hagar and Abram to do anything. When we try to help God we get disaster, and it may flow for a long time through history. Isaiah 30:18, Isaiah 40:31, Psalm 37:34, Psalm 37:7, 1 Samuel 17:47.

Sarah comes along and says that it is the Lord who has restrained her from bearing and clearly indicates by this statement that she blames God for it. This is not true, but her statement tells us that she has sat upon a lot of resentment towards the Lord for a long time. There has not been much faith here, but rather hurt and frustration, and left unchecked it will always lead to fear, doubt and resentment. If there are no children in a marriage the believers involved should be relaxed and prayerful. Christians should not be worried about their family name being carried on here upon this temporary earth. We are part of a larger spiritual family, and it is our eternal relationships that ought to be our focus.

As we have seen before, the greatest of the saints of old did not have physical children, but they will be surrounded by many sons/daughters in heaven, who will call them father or mother. You should be more concerned about your name in heaven rather than your family name surviving upon the earth. The lack of children may also give you opportunities to do things for the Lord that you otherwise would not be able to do. Childlessness is a painful thing for many, but in the Lord we are challenged to see what God is doing, rather than seek what man can do about it!

If you do not have physical children leave it in the Lord’s hands. Children do not make a marriage they make a family. If you are married and do not have physical children you can still have spiritual children. You should not get involved with anything that is akin to adultery to solve your problems.

As an adopted child myself, I am obviously not against adoption, for the Lord used it in my case to bring me into contact with a Christian family in which I was led to the Lord! This may be the solution for some, but each of us must ask the question, what is it that the Lord is doing with me? We are not the same, and there is no “pat” answer, simply the demand to look to the Lord, pray and listen to his words to you.

Sarai is bitter and it shows. In effect she says, "God hasn't given me a child, so I'm giving you a woman to get one for me". It is a blunt rejection of the plan of God, and the Lord's will delay His answer to this couple by over ten years. Unless the Lord builds the house those who labour, work their pathetic schemes in vain! Psalms 127:1-5.

It is interesting that the psalmist noted that the Lord must do the building of a family, or all the "arrows" in the quiver will be turned against you! Hagar's son will always be a slave born son, for he was not born of promise and the will of God, but of the weakness of man. He will be a thorn in the side of the son of promise all his life, and his descendents are still the problems for Israel as I write these things, although that is changing in 2021. Galatians 4:24-31.

PRIDE AND CARNALITY

In **Genesis 16:3-4** Hagar gets pregnant and then she starts to look down on Sarai, and show her contempt/pride. Both women are unstable, carnal believers, and like all carnal believers they will live in mental attitude sins; both are jealous of each other, and Hagar gets arrogant with it, and her arrogance is going to lead to violence. You cannot have a triangle in a sexual relationship without mental attitude sins at the beginning and at the end. You start with lust, move on to adultery that can move on to jealousy, bitterness, envy, lying, and finally even murder. Many plays and films speak of this "fatal attraction" and the destructive trail of violence and distress that flows from the adultery. If you get into these sins it will cause disaster – and the nature and scale of the disaster is simply a flow on result of delay in facing the truth.

The child born to Hagar cannot be the heir, because a child born of a slave cannot be the child of God's Promise. The real heir has to be born of a free person God's way. The child of the promise has to be the child born of God's will and not human lust; God does not use anything that is produced from the Old Sin Nature. **Psalm 66:18**.

Verse 5-6 shows that if you accept your husband or wife's advice, and it is wrong, you will be held responsible for the results of your decision by the Lord. No one can say to the Lord, "the devil (husband/wife) made me do it", and get away with anything! When you get out of the power of the Holy Spirit in your life you will do things that you would not think you were capable of, but your old sin nature is capable of anything. Don't blame anyone except your self.

Abram now reacts badly again, and says to Sarai that Hagar is in her hands. In effect he says, do what ever you want to her. Now Hagar has been an arrogant fool, and she has insulted her mistress and mocked her for not being pregnant; she is quite pleased with herself, and doesn't accept her sin. Proverbs 30:20-23. Both women are out of fellowship, but sadly, so is Abram.

Sarai now calls on the Lord to judge between her and Abram. She is right and wrong in this. She is right in that the Lord will judge Abram for his neglect of Bible doctrine and his acceptance of a non-biblical course of action for lust based reasons. It can only be this that Sarai is moaning about; Abram really enjoyed himself sexually with Hagar and she resents that. She sees his lust as the thing that gives her the "moral edge". Both have fallen to a low point here, but in God's grace they will all learn, and even Hagar, a believer, will be delivered by the angel of the Lord.

Abram's permission for physical assaults to begin on Hagar is shocking and disgraceful for a man of God, but adultery always opens the door to greater evils. Sin doesn't ever stand still, it slides further down hill every day it is not faced. This is a disgraceful episode in Abram's life, for he does not take responsibility for his actions and protect the woman who was given to him, and who he accepted as a wife. He cannot take her as a wife, and then treat her as a servant/slave again.

Sarah now starts beating Hagar. Hagar is in difficulties as she is still technically a slave, without rights, and is a few months pregnant, yet as she goes in to serve her mistress she is assaulted. Hagar therefore flees into the wilderness.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Problems are the Lord's, and are to be left with the Lord for solution once prayed over. We are not to seek a human solution to a divinely appointed problem on our path through this life. Our human viewpoint solutions create more grief, and that grief can go beyond even one life time.
2. Mental attitude sins always grow into physical sins, and then return again for another cycle of mental attitude sins. Sin not faced always grows and develops into greater evil, and the destructive impact of it grows/spreads.
3. Carnality grows in its power and destructive force. It creates discord and disharmony. If we do not deal with sin and walk again in the Holy Spirit, every moment will become worse and worse.
4. Exploitative relationships are evil at their heart. All abuse of children and marital partners is an evil, and indicates that the abuser is not right before God. The abused may also have a problem, in that they have entered into a relationship that is flawed in the first place. Their discernment is inadequate to keep themselves safe. Both need repentance and growth in understanding of Bible doctrine. The only solution to violence and abuse in society is for the people involved to face the holy demands of the righteous God and learn of him, and walk in the Holy Spirit's power, rather than the evil force of their Old Sin Nature.

GENESIS 16:7-16

“7. And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. 8. And he said, Hagar, Sarai’s maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. 9. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. 10. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. 11. 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. 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. 13. And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? 14. Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. 15. And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son’s name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. 16. And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.”

REFLECTION

ANGEL OF JEHOVAH

The Lord Jesus Christ finds Hagar by a spring in the very desert the Israelites are walking through during the Exodus. This is what is called in theology a Christophony; which is an appearance of the Lord before his first advent. The Angel of Jehovah is the Lord himself. He finds Hagar dehydrated and thirsty not far from a fountain (gushing spring) of water in the wilderness on the way to Shur, which is on the way to Egypt. God finds her – she is important in the plan of God.

As Hagar is an Egyptian this means she is on her way home. She is running away, but running away never solved anything relating to the Plan of God for a person. Notice that the Lord calls her “Hagar, Sarai’s maid”. The Lord Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate form tells Hagar to return to Sarah and serve her. Such an action under normal circumstances would have meant death, for that was the penalty for a captured slave who had run away and was recaptured.

However behind this command is the promise of the Lord that He will be behind her. “Go back and trust me in your situation”, is what the Lord is saying here. Another way of putting this would be, “Be faithful and you will be preserved”. Hagar is also promised that her descendants will be great, and she is told to call her son Ishmael, because the Lord has heard her affliction. Now she is told that he will be a wild man, but that means he will be a live one; Sarai will not kill her or the baby. She is to walk “in harms way”, but see that God is as good as His Promise – she will be kept and blessed.

LONG TERM RESULTS OF SIN

In **verses 7-8** it is clear that Hagar is a strong believer, and she has been praying close to the oasis, and she receives the answer to her prayer in the person of the one to whom she prayed. The Lord finds her because she seeks his answers to what she is to do. The Lord asks the questions of her that she has been asking of herself; “where have I been in these last years, and now, where am I going?” The Lord simply affirms that he has heard her prayer. The questions he asks her are the ones that challenge her to examine her own behaviours (“how have you come to this point?”), and also her own plans for the future (“where are you going?”)

To get back into the plan of God in our own lives, after straying away we need to address the same questions. How have we got to this particular point? We don’t do archaeology on our sins, and stay there for the next few years analyzing them, but we need to understand what we have done, so we can learn and not repeat this error ever again. We also need to examine our forward motivation and re-commit to God’s path forward for our life. Where are we going? Where do we want to go? The Lord wants us to commit to his path for our life with all our heart and mind. **Matthew 7:13-14.**

Hagar is “Sarai’s maid”. She has been part of a great plan since before her birth, as we all are, and she is called to play her part and not change anything until the Lord does. She is to take orders from the Lord her God and not seek her freedom or any other role until the Lord opens the door for her. This is a hard order, but this principle of status quo, (Texts to examine in the next paragraph), carries right through the scriptures and applies to us also. In whatever state we are called into the Lord’s family we are to remain, until the Lord changes things.

To superimpose our will over the Lord’s is to place ourselves outside the plan and to get second best or judgment. Only through submission and obedience to the plan will we see the blessing the Lord has for us. Once again we see the Lord’s demand of us, that we bring every thought into captivity to his will, and seek no changes that are not reflections of his plan for us. 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, 1 Peter 1:17-21.

Verses 9-10. Hagar receives an order and a promise. She is to return and submit to her part in the plan of God. She will serve as a slave for another fourteen or so years. She will then be freed and her son will support and care for her, and she will be the mother of a vast nation. She receives a parallel promise to Abram. As a believer, she seeks an earthly heritage, and she receives one, but she will also have an eternal destiny, and we will meet her in heaven.

The Lord has her submit for another decade or more so that she can have the chance to grow spiritually with Abram and learn from him. Sadly she fails to learn and her petty jealousy of Sarah, and the attitude of her son to Isaac, lead to her

dismissal from the household. Hagar had every opportunity to be blessed both spiritually and physically, but she has eyes mainly for the physical, although she and her believing descendants will possibly number millions in heaven.

Verses 11-12. She is told by the Angel of the Lord what to call her son. Ishmael is a good name; meaning "God will hear". Ishmael's descendants are some of the Arabs, and they are often fighting the descendants of Isaac. It is only the penultimate battle before the Tribulation that shifts this and sees the establishment of an alliance of the "Sons of Abraham" against Iran (this phrase was fulfilled by the Lord in September of 2020 with the Treaty of Abraham between the UAE and Israel), and then later against the Anti-Christ's forces also. Ezekiel 38-39, Daniel 11:36-45.

Abram's sin has therefore had very significant historical repercussions. The Lord forgives us for our sins, just as Abram, Sarai, and Hagar, are all forgiven for this sin, but the result of the sin may go on and cause great suffering in the future. As with all things in the Lord's plan however, there is blessing in the end, Romans 8:28, and the Arabs and Israelis join together to resist evil until the Lord's return to deliver them all in total fulfilment of the promises to Abram.

Remember all Sin is adultery against the Holy Spirit and an insult against the Blood of Christ. David in the Psalms states, "Against thee and thee only have I sinned". Psalms 51:1-4. We always need to remember this principle; with every sin, we have insulted and hurt the one who went to the Cross for us. He knows our affliction and hears us in our pain. We do not have a high priest who does not know our suffering, for he endured more than we can ever experience. Psalms 22:24, Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9, 7:25, 10:10-14.

In **verses 13-14** Hagar recognized that God had seen her and heard her and directed her path through this life. When Moses is writing this some 500 years later he is actually travelling in the wilderness and can point these places out. Hagar's descendants are out there watching the Israelites as they pass through the desert. Hagar is restored to fellowship with the Lord. She did not think that the Lord was listening to her at the spring, but finds that He is. "You have heard me and answered me", she says. Often we have to go to a low point before we come to the point where we understand that God hears, knows, sees and has a plan for us still. Psalms 3:3-4, 6:8-9, 28:6, 34:1-11.

Ishmael will live the life of the Bedouin and be a free spirit. He will be a herdsman and a leader of a wild bunch of men who will pillage others and take what they need. He will live a life without legal framework or too much moral constraint. Sadly he will never be a great believer; he will, as we will see later in Genesis 21, be carnal most of his life. Hagar will however see her son in heaven. The destiny of his people will be mixed through the centuries, with many believers amongst them, but with the majority in active rebellion against God's plan, just like the sons of Isaac, until the last days when there is glory for many of the "sons/daughters of Abram", as they stand against satanic evil together.

ABRAHAM LEARNS TO TRUST GOD

Verses 15-16. Ishmael is born into Abram's household. Hagar had to tell Abram the name and testify her experience to him. Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born. When we see him next he is 99 years old and impotent. There is therefore a 13 year long gap in his life where he learns again the lesson of trusting in God. Hagar teaches him the lesson of faith, and God's provision, but she fails herself. Both Abram and Sarai learn that the Lord is to be trusted and they are to wait upon the Lord. He will make them wait thirteen years before he speaks again. Their human viewpoint solution to their childlessness possibly delays their blessing for thirteen years (or is this just God's timing and their needed learning).

Abraham tried to do things his way but God says you do it my way or not at all. As at 99 he is now totally impotent and so he cannot be tempted again with any other woman, and having another natural child has become an impossibility. We should learn from the errors of others, so that we can quickly adjust and be in conformity with the Lord's will. Abram now watched his son Ishmael grow up, but sadly as a carnal believer, but he is learning in his impotent state to trust God.

Believe God's Word, hold to God's Word, be sanctified through the Word, and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. **2 Peter 3:18.** If you want God's blessing his way, then bring every thought into captivity for Christ, and deal with your problems God's way. **Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 10:5.** Adopt an objective way of thinking and living – and the only safe objective way of thinking is to have every thought anchored in the doctrines of God's Holy Word.

Do not blame God for setbacks or pressures, but rather seek the Lord's way through each and every problem you face. If you think doctrine you will be objective and successful in this life, but if you look at things from the human viewpoint you will be subjective and so receive only what man can do for you. This is a lifelong and daily battle. Rely on your Heavenly Father who will not allow you to be tested too greatly. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

God has a solution to all things, and it depends upon you and me walking in the Spirit, and not following the lusts of the flesh, or the arrogance of our own thinking, for we are limited creatures and must heed our creator. We are not smart enough to plan our own path forward – God alone has the best plan for our lives – lets hear it and do it...

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. God's way is always the best way through every problem, and every problem has come to us in the plan of God for our life. Everything has happened to teach us something. Let us look for the Lord's solutions to the challenges of daily life, and walk in the Spirit to deal with all things.

2. We are heard by the Lord when we pray. He meets us in our distress and our prayers are answered. We need to bring every thought into captivity to the Plan of God for our life and bring every concern to the Throne of Grace and mercy, for we are heard there. God is the “glory and the lifter of our head”, but we must come to him often to live in this place of joy where we know that daily.
3. We are part of the plan of God, and in every detail of our life the Lord wants our acceptance of the plan and our obedience to the part we are to play. Every change of direction we make needs to be prayer saturated, and guided by the Lord. Let us pray and move in the filling of the Holy Spirit only. We are each called to a different part to play in the great drama of the Redemption. Let us play our part well.
4. If God says “wait”, we had better wait until the way of escape is opened up, or we will not get the best the Lord has for us. Let us move ahead only as the Lord directs and leads us.

Notes

GENESIS CHAPTER 17**INTRODUCTION**

In chapter 16 we saw the failure of Abraham and Sarah, but they accept their discipline and keep moving forward in faith, and with God's silence for thirteen years. In their faith walk now they rest in God's last promise and await his next affirmation of the promise, and the specific next step of obedience for them to grasp. To introduce this chapter, read through **Romans 4:11-22**, as this is a commentary from Paul on the passage before us.

We must remember consciously a fact about how God sees us, as against how we see ourselves. God sees us from our end rather than where we are, or where we have been, because, to God time sequence is not relevant; he is the author of time and is beyond it's limits. We must consciously remember this, because it is not the normal, human thinking of creatures who are trapped at this point in a space-time universe. God looks upon us as we will be, not as we are. As a Christian that is the first thing to recognize and embrace when we consider the promises of God relating to us.

Here Abram will receive a re-affirmation of the promise that he will be the father of many children, and the father, through them, of many nations. He believed against normal human sight, and even hope, that he would be the father of many nations. He was fully persuaded by the promise of God, because he saw that the one making it could see the future, as if it was present, and he knew that God was not speaking a "prophetic word", but describing what he was seeing from his perspective.

This is the issue of faith for us, and why Christian faith is totally different from the faith people may have in the promises of man, or the "Laws of Nature". We often use physical and human analogies to illustrate the principle of faith, and we must, because we are trapped within space and time, and have to draw upon what we know to explain what we do not know. When we speak of God's promises however we face a completely different thing to anything within our universe, for God's Word to us, is eternal security, and certainty touching all things in space-time.

Abram breaks through in his understanding in this chapter of this essential difference between what God says and what space-time limited men and women say. He sees a different quality to the promises of God than any promise received from a man. Both depend upon the character of the individual, so in that they are a little similar, but there is still no certainty in the promise of a man. A woman or man may change, be affected by some outside thing, and so not keep their word, even though they intended and even desired to. God has no such character, or incident limitation.

But it is even more fundamental than that. God does not have to wonder how things will work out, for he sees all time events as if they have already happened, for he is the author of space-time. There is simply no doubt that God will not keep a promise, for, from his perspective it is as if it has already happened. There is no outside force that will change the final result of space-time, nor anything that will hinder the final wrapping up of this universe in ultimate victory for the one who made it, and all things in it. Abram can look at the stars, and he has done for fourteen years now since the mistake with Hagar, and he can reflect that it is the creator of the stars that has promised him these things.

Abram has walked quietly and humbly before the creator for these last years, and he has reflected on the fact that he, as a creature, does not have to "help" out the creator in any detail to ensure a promise of the creator is kept. God simply does not need our help. He was fully confident of the promise of God that he would have his own son, even though by the time the Lord speaks again, he was sexually dead. He was confident that God could accomplish what He had promised, because he had made the universe, so any little detail of our life is not beyond his power and ability. God's power is adequate for anything within this universe, and his timing is perfect.

Abram could not wait fourteen years before this time, so he had the "unfortunate incident" that produced Ishmael, but he has now learned to wait, and he will receive the promise and enter into greater worship than ever before. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is worship, and whenever a person has learned from God, you will see the evidence in their life at home and their worship within the community and the church. God turns all things to good in the end through salvation, and the Arab sons of Abraham, through Hagar and Keturah, will stand and bless the Lord God and their father Abraham in the last days.

GENESIS 17:1-8

1. 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. 2. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. 3. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 4. As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. 5. 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. 6. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 7. 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. 8. 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.

REFLECTION

Verses 1-2. God says to Abram, "Remember me, remember who I am". If I promise, then be absolutely sure, I will perform. I can keep my promises says God, and I will, because my character depends upon it. Our response is simply, do as God says, "Walk before me".

Notice it is God who has made the covenant, and would make the new covenant between Himself and Abram, it was, as the earlier one had been, an unconditional covenant. Such covenants do not depend upon the person, they depend upon the Holy Character of God. God's command to illustrate faith, and apply it into daily life, is blunt and straight forward.

- James 2:17-26.** *"17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.
18. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.
19. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.
20. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?
21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?
22. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?
23. 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.
24. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.
25. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?
26. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."*

Verse 1. Let us begin this reflection at the end of the first verse. God wants an outcome in life of Abram's faith. "Walk with me and be perfect". The word means completely faithful, sincere, righteous, and true in devotion 100%. In our own strength we cannot fulfil this command, but with God we can, for this is a gift from God through the work of the Holy Spirit. 2 Timothy 3:12-17.

How does He make us perfect, thoroughly furnished or equipped, for his service? It is our spirit filled application of the Word of God that makes us, through the Spirit's work, completely ready to serve him, and finally able to stand before Him. Often we will learn our greatest lessons through suffering or pressure situations, as outlined in 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Read each of the three New Testament passages again now and reflect upon them as we go further into Genesis 17.

Moses records the age of Abram, and later, verse 17, of Sarai also. It is important to realize just how many years have passed between the chapters here, for Abram has waited a long time to learn the lesson of faith that will be tested here. It will be encouraging to us all as we see that he doesn't pass the test 100% either, but that his doubts and failures do not stop the plan of God, and neither do ours. God is not limited by our lack of faith, and stumbles along the path, but uses all the faith we have, even the smallest amount. Matthew 13:31-32, 17:19-20.

Remember the biblical doctrine of FAITH again at this point, and remind yourself that this is the way we are to walk through this life, by resting upon the promises of the Word, placing our faith in the character, plan and promises of God. God sees the heart of his children and if our devotion and love is pure for Him, he can make up any deficiencies we may have in faith and works. He seeks first our loving devotion. Matthew 5:43-48, Revelation 2:1-5.

In verse one also the Lord announces himself and draws attention to his character as "the Almighty God". God is able to do all things he has promised because of who he is, and his character is perfection, and what he says he will perform. We rest our faith upon the one who is not ever short of any power to accomplish what he has promised to us.

In **verses 2 to 5** Moses records that Abraham fell on his face and God talked with his servant. He was flat on his face rather than holding his hands up. In that position he is totally defenceless, totally expressing his devotion to the Lord of his life. This posture of prostration is that used by Moslems today, and was the common posture for worship in the entire ancient world. Matthew 17:1-8, Revelation 1:17.

Here we have a second restatement of the promise that Abram would become the father of many nations, and in testimony to the truth of that promise Abram is to change his name well in advance of the physical evidence that it will be fulfilled. Romans 4:11-14, Galatians 3:14-18, 22-29.

Verse 5. Abram now has a name change from Abram to Abraham. Only after 13 silent years, where he was able to see that his solution was wrong, and that God in grace, was going to do what He had promised. He became with the name change the "father of multitudes", rather than exalted father, the meaning of Abram.

God gave Abraham the new name before the name is true in fact. Remember, from God's viewpoint on time, it is already fact! We wait to see the plan work out, but God has already seen it complete before it began! This is why we can have faith in God, for he is the almighty God the creator, who is therefore able to be the deliverer and Saviour. Abram has his name changed to illustrate his faith and God's victory over his circumstances, and there are more amazing name

changes to come in the future, to express faith, and the victory of the Lord over the things that men see in time. Isaiah 62:1-5, 11-12.

Romans 4 it tells us that God causes the things that are not to become, because they are part of the plan, and with God all things in time are as present tense. The things that God has promised, they are certain. God is all knowing and knows the beginning from the end. You may be a student of theology but God sees you as you are going to be, He sees you now for what He is going to do with you. Refer to the BTB study GOD – FOREKNOWLEDGE.

Just like Abram we all also receive the command from the Lord, "Walk with Him and be perfect, let Him refine you". Examine for a moment all the "I wills" in the chapter before us. Notice these, because they remind us that it is God who is going to do the things promised here, and humanity is going to get the benefit. God is saying to Abraham that he is in God's hands and God will look after him. We are in a similar position as shown by Paul who said, "I am persuaded that He is able to keep those things that I have committed unto him against that day". Philippians 1:6, see also, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 18, 1 Peter 5:10-11, Jude 24-25.

COVENANT AND CIRCUMCISION

The new name means more than the old one. Abram meant the "father of high and windy places", or exulted father. It meant the father of strong and mighty sons. Abraham means, "father of a multitude". It is a reflection directly upon the promise. God will make him exceedingly fruitful. When the Lord blesses it is with "more grace", never little grace. Our little faith is always met by God's "more grace". The Lord will bless abundantly. Let us look for the Lord's blessing and position ourselves in the place where it can be received; the place of obedience. "More Grace" = **John 10:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:1, James 3:17-18, 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5-7.**

The Abrahamic Covenant is now restated. In **verse 8** God refers to "your seed", a singular – referring to the Messiah in whom all the sons of Abraham will be blessed [see Romans 4:11-18, 9:6-9]. It does not refer to just those of the physical line only, but to all who share Abraham's faith. Not all Israel are Israel in the true sense, as Paul will remind the Romans; there are many people descended from Abraham physically, who are not true children of faith like their physical father Abraham.

There are three types of children of Abraham, racial descendants, who have the genes of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob. There are religious people who practise legalism, and then regenerate descendants who like their fore-father have genuine relationship with God through faith. It is these last ones alone who are the only true sons and daughters of Abraham in God's sight, and with them the people of all nations who stand with Abraham in faith are entered into his blessings. Many will praise Abraham and share his spiritual legacy, while the majority of his physical descendants, (Jewish, Arab and Gentile), will be outside his promises, because they did not stand upon his spiritual, faith-rest foundation and worship the Lord as he did.

Notice also that it is an eternal covenant; which means that it will last throughout time and into eternity the reality for all who are a part of this promise will be eternal. When we enter into this covenant, we are a part of something that has results that go on forever. Abraham is blessed forever, and all who share his faith, share his blessing forever also. When God gives, he truly gives above and beyond what we could ask or even think. 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 3:20-21.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. God gives above and beyond our deserts and his grace is sufficient for all our needs. We are to learn to rest upon his promises and rejoice in his deliverance in all things through the path we are called to in this present life.
2. We are to stabilize ourselves upon the certainties associated with the character of God. God's character is absolutely stable and his words rest upon his nature and stability in his nature. God does not change; what has been promised will be performed. We reflect that every time we take communion and say aloud, "until he comes", for in doing that we remember that this celebration is also a prophetic statement of faith; he is coming again!
3. Entry into the plan of God is for time and eternity; what is changed here and now "IN Christ Jesus", is changed forever. We have an eternal destiny with our father in faith Abraham.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE - FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

1. God's faithfulness is based upon his unchangeability - Hebrews 13:8
2. God's faithfulness is renewed "every day" - Lamentations 3:21-24
3. His promises are sure. - Hebrews 10:23
4. The faithfulness of Christ continues even when we are unfaithful. - 2 Timothy 2:13
5. Christ is a faithful and merciful high priest - Hebrews 2:17

6. God is faithful to forgive sins - 1 John 1:9
7. God is faithful to keep us saved - 2 Timothy 2:13
8. God is faithful to deliver us through temptation - 1 Corinthians 10:13
9. God is faithful to keep His promises to us - Hebrews 10:23
10. God is faithful to us in suffering - 1 Peter 4:19
11. God is faithful in fulfilling His plan for us - I Thessalonians 5:24
12. God is faithful to strengthen us - 2 Thessalonians 3:3
13. God is the faithful partner of our union with Christ - 1 Corinthians 1:9
14. Christ is a faithful and merciful high priest - Hebrews 2:17
15. Jesus Christ is synonymous with faithfulness - Revelation 19:11

REFLECTION UPON THE NAMES OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God reveals Himself and His character by His names.

1. EL - The strong one (singular) - 2 Samuel 22:33
2. EL ELYON - The most high God - Genesis 14:18-22
3. EL OLAM - The everlasting God - Genesis 21:33
4. EL SHADDAI -The almighty one - Genesis 17:1
5. ELOHIM - The all powerful one. (plural) - Genesis 1:1
6. JEHOVAH - The self-existent one - I AM Exodus 3:14
7. JEHOVAH-ELOHIM - Lord God, Creator - Genesis 2:4
8. JEHOVAH-JIREH - Jehovah will provide - Genesis 22:13, 14
9. JEHOVAH -NISSI - Jehovah is my banner - Exodus 17:15
10. JEHOVAH-RAAH - Jehovah is my Shepherd - Psalm 23:1
11. JEHOVAH-RAPHA - Jehovah that Heals - Exodus 15:25, 26
12. JEHOVAH-SABOATH - Lord of hosts - Psalm 46:7, 11
13. JEHOVAH-SHALOM - Jehovah is peace - Judges 6:24
14. JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH - Jehovah is there - Ezekiel 48:35
15. JEHOVAH TSID KENU- Jehovah our righteousness - Jeremiah 33:16

GENESIS 17:9-18

“9. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. 10. 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. 11. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. 12. 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. 13. 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. 14. 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. 15. And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. 16. 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. 17. 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? 18. And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!"

REFLECTION

The covenant the Lord made with Abram is unconditional; the promise of the land does not require anything on Abram's part. Abram watched as the Lord went through the avenue of sacrifices the first time, but here there is a response required, an act that will certify faith and obedience. In verses 9 to 14 circumcision is introduced and demanded, as the sign of the Abrahamic covenant.

As indicated in **James 2:14-26**, Abraham is going to have to do something to prove he believes God. Re-read the James passage and note especially verse nineteen. To believe in the existence of the one true God and affirm it is not good enough. Even to tremble in his presence is not good enough. The reason for this is that the demons believe God is the creator and the one true God, and they truly tremble at the thought of this truth. They acknowledge the truth and tremble, for they know it thoroughly and know what it means for them. Our faith must be at a higher level than the demon's simple acknowledgement of the truth. Faith is not "box ticking" mental agreement with truth; it is life change.

James says that by our works we will show the nature and quality of our faith. Our works will not produce our faith, nor will they earn points that are credited to our faith, but they will reflect the true reality of what our faith means to us. The demons have a belief that there is the one true God, for they cannot deny the facts they know, but they do not love, worship, nor obey God, for while they acknowledge His nature and reality, they hate him. They have been part of the rebellion of Satan against God, so they truly know their enemy, (the Lord God over all), for once they served him. This is a stark challenge to always remember "free will", for the demons, as angels once, truly knew God, and yet hated Him.

Our faith must reflect the quality and character of our belief and our love for God, and our actions must set us well apart from any statement that a demon can make. The demons know the truth and can "tick the box" in any multi choice questionnaire, for they believe there is One God, but they resent/despise/hate God, and reject worship. Our faith must be more than their acknowledgement of the truth about God! If there is no fruit of righteousness in the life, then the king of righteousness does not reign over that life. **1 John 3:7-10, 18-24, 4:13-21, 5:1-3.**

Refer to the EBCWA commentary on the Letters of John and examine these verses. The testimony of scripture is clear on this point. No fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life = no relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ! **Romans 8:9-11.**

A number of years ago a tract was handed out called, "The Four Spiritual Laws", and people were asked, as part of the evangelism associated with it, to literally "tick the boxes" in the tract if they believed in the statements. Mental assent was asked for by this; a belief in the facts presented. If a person accepted the statements in the tract they were pronounced a Christian, yet such an affirmation falls far short of the standard we will see here in Genesis and James, let alone the rest of the New Testament. Abraham has had more than fourteen years to sit with the facts, and the promise made then is now repeated, but this time he is to express his inner faith in actions which reflect for all the world to see what he truly believes God's Word, and openly affirm that he truly loves and worships the Lord, who is over all he has and is.

Read through the verses of this chapter now, for we will discuss this chapter as a whole rather than verse by verse. Notice that Abram is to do two things; change his name well before there is any physical evidence of what the name signifies, and then he is to circumcise all the males in his household. He is to circumcise every male in his extended family. Circumcision at an older age is a very painful thing without an anaesthetic, and he is to ensure every male is covered by this covenant sign. Abraham is to express his belief in the Lord's promise, explain it to all present, testify to his own belief in this promise publicly, and then set a leadership example by his actions and circumcise all the men, and also submit to circumcision himself. This is not "works salvation", it is the "working out" publicly of genuine salvation.

From this point on circumcision will be done on the eighth day, which has been shown to be the best day from a medical viewpoint, as the antibodies are developed to a stage where they can fight off infection. By nominating the eighth day God is again shown to be not only all knowing, but the Creator-God, author of this space-time universe itself, and so one who knows the details of the immune system of the creature he has made.

Most pagan nations at this time were uncircumcised. The act of circumcision shows that they are sons of the promise, not just son's of their age and peoples; that the Abrahamic covenant is theirs. When a Jew today circumcises his son on the eighth day it will be done with a flint knife. As the baby screams the father will be reciting his prayers claiming the promises for his son. The father in faith is saying "I believe God's Word; I believe that He will provide us with our land, I believe God has a destiny for us as a people". It is now however just a tradition to many, yet the prayers said still act as a reminder to the people in that room of this promise from four thousand years ago. This act of faith of Abraham opens the door for later generations to ask about their relationship with God, and will be the source of salvation for many into the future. Abraham's faith will mentor true faith to all later generations who seek for such a mentor.

The cutting away of the foreskin of the male sexual organ also represented a separation from the pagan religions that surrounded the patriarchs and later Israel, which were based on fertility cults and the worship of sex, prosperity, wealth, and power. Every time he looked at his sexual organ a Jewish male could say that he was separated for God and that he must not join himself sexually with uncircumcised people. To the believer it is not unlike the ritual of water baptism for today, not for salvation, but which is a public sign, or testimony, of faith already expressed in the heart well before the

action that reflects it openly. Abraham will eventually circumcise Isaac and he will be the son of promise, for through his descendants will come the Messiah.

What is the situation of the Jewish Christian? If you are a Jewish Christian you are still an inheritor of the Abrahamic promise, but you are also under a New Covenant, the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus. In the Church there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond or free, for we have all become new creatures in Christ Jesus, but that doesn't negate earlier promises and their associated blessings.

Paul certainly believed he was still an inheritor of the covenant promises to Abraham, but he also saw a bigger picture, and his new role within the new group established because of Israel's unbelief as a nation. Jewish people becoming followers of the Lord Jesus Christ today do not become less Jewish by accepting their Messiah! Such a viewpoint would be foolishness at best, for all the teaching of the scripture, as we have seen, identifies the Lord giving more and more, not less and less!

We are not told what part the Jewish believers in the Lord's Messiahship will play in the millennial kingdom, but from the whole content of prophetic truth we can deduce that all Jewish Christians (or Messianic Jews in another terminology) will have a special role to play, for they have seen and acted on the truth before the final days of the Great Tribulation when the survivors of their nation will repent, and so will be specially blessed for their early obedience.

Let us not however err by trying to specify what God has for them, for we are not told, and we can wait to see the special blessing that will be theirs then. Remember John 21:20-22. Let us remember, God is not finished with Israel, and he will take them up again after the repentance of their remnant in the midst of the Great Tribulation period. They will come to see the one who was pierced on their behalf and many will be saved. Zechariah 12:10-14, 13:4-6, 14:4, Acts 1:6-12.

Circumcision may still be practiced today by believers, but it is not a sign of the New Covenant, it is simply a preference, for hygiene or cultural reasons. The new covenant in Christ is an even greater covenant than the Abrahamic one and its covenant signs are participation in Baptism once and Communion often. This matter was settled by the early church in Acts 15:1ff. What you have in Him is greater than what you have in Abraham, but it is Abraham who lays the foundation for understanding faith, and he is our "father" in this.

Refer to the commentary on ROMANS chapters 9-11, and also study the subjects of CIRCUMCISION, and COVENANTS, and especially the NEW COVENANT. The biblical references in these studies should be looked up and reflected upon, for each of them makes commentary upon this section of Genesis. www.ebcwa.org.au

As far as Abraham is concerned he was cutting a piece of useless skin off a defunct organ at this time. He was already impotent at this time, and there was no human hope that he would ever have sex with his wife again, let alone have children from sex. As men age their sperm develops more and more deformity and degeneration, just as the man's body does. By old age, even if a man is able to have sex, he is more and more unlikely to be able to father a healthy child.

What God is going to do is a miracle of life from death; Abraham is going to be sexually reborn and will have a son. This is why in Romans 4 he is called a mighty man of faith. He could have said, "I will circumcise everybody else but I am too old, it has no relevance to me". Abraham saw past his sexual death and believed that God could make him alive again. Abraham is going to have a son by his wife. God is going to bring back from the dead their joint ability to procreate, for at this time neither was able to produce a child.

Sarai is also going to have a name change to Sarah. She is renamed princess even though she is not that at the moment. This illustrates faith – saying what is not as if it already is! She is to be told that she will be the mother of many nations, and that kings will be born from her. She is the mother of all the kings of Israel and Judah, and of many others besides through Esau her grand-son. Both Abraham and Sarah are required to affirm their belief in the revelation of the Lord. Abraham is required to preach to his people, and to his wife, and all are required to accept, believe and act upon what they are told by Abraham, for he alone has this vision. John 20:29-31, 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, 1 Peter 1:8-9.

BLESSING FOR FAITHFUL ABRAHAM

In **verses 15 and 16** Abraham gets a very definite promise about the fact that he and Sarah are going to have a child, and when he hears this he laughs. God reminds him of his adultery with Hagar, by the way he describes Sarah. God makes it clear that in his eyes, Sarah alone is his wife, not Hagar, no matter how "normal" such unions are in his society. God's promise is clear, "Sarah your wife, is going to conceive", but Abraham is still at this point considering Ishmael as his heir and his love for that boy is paramount in his mind.

Abraham knows he has done wrong, that is why he has no other children with Hagar; he has not considered her as his wife and continued having sex with her. We must be careful of drawing attention to Abraham's laughter as a sign of lack of faith here, for Moses does not criticize him in the text, and there is no sign anywhere in scripture that he lacked faith at this point. Abraham laughs deep within himself. This laughter may well be from a person who has heard something that is too good to be true, it probably does not reflect lack of faith that God can do what he has promised.

The reasons for Abraham's laughter is, I believe, joy and pleasure at the very thought that he and Sarah will enjoy their sexual relationship again. Sarai had been a problem for him in many ways, but clearly their sexual relationship was always a joy to them both. His prayer to the Lord regarding his son Ishmael illustrates his love for the boy. It tells us that

he does not want this innocent boy Ishmael to miss out on any blessing. He will circumcise him with all the other men as a sign that he is under the promise, and he wants him blessed as his son. Remember this, Abraham loved Ishmael.

Abraham has loved Ishmael, who is now 13. He wants God to bless Ishmael and God will bless him, and his Arab descendants will stand with Israel in the dark days of the Iranian invasion (Ezekiel 38-39) and the Anti-Christ's greatest evils. Abraham follows the instructions implicitly. They all are circumcised, with Ishmael first, and then the rest following, and having done all the 300+ men in his house, Abraham finally circumcises himself.

GENESIS 17:19-27

“19. 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. 20. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. 21. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. 22. And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. 23. 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. 24. And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26. In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. 27. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.”

REFLECTION

The name Isaac literally means laughter, and Abraham is told that the boy will be called laughter. God promises an everlasting covenant with the seed of Isaac. This confirms that throughout history there will be a Jewish race. God says that as far as Ishmael is concerned He has blessed him, speaking of things to come as if they have already occurred, because it is certain. Ishmael will be blessed mightily, and he will be father to twelve nations of the Arab peoples, but it is Isaac who is the son of spiritual promise and through whom the Hebrew prophets and the sole Messiah will come.

Isaac is going to become a believer, and it is in his line that the Messiah will come and through whom the world will be blessed. Hagar is a strong believer whilst her son Ishmael may not be. There is no direct comment that indicates that he does not worship God, but his behaviours towards Isaac will later show that he does not respect God's promise through Isaac. He will grow up apparently as a carnal believer, but many from his seed amongst the Arab peoples become active and powerful believers, and are so today, but they are blessed by re-entry into the faith of Abraham, and they are finally and fully blessed through the seed of Isaac, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this saving faith that transforms the ancient hatred between the two brothers and restores God's Plan for the lives of the individuals who enter into Abraham's faith.

The question as to where Abraham is regarding his faith in the words of the Lord is answered in verses 23 and following. His actions tell us that his faith in God is now 100%. If there was any wavering at all before, that wavering is blown away by faith in the promises of God. The Lord has spoken to Abraham and then goes up from him. The Lord is speaking to Abraham, and Abraham is listening to God. His response is shown by his actions once the Lord stops talking to him.

Whatever the reasons behind Abraham's laughter, when the Lord has finished Abraham says, "Amen – I believe all the Lord has told me", with his flint knife as he circumcises all his males. He also preaches this message to all the people and renames his wife, who accepts his words as true and worships the Lord her God and Abraham as her true and noble husband.

Abraham's obedience opens the door to a new phase in their relationship, and his wife truly becomes the princess she was meant to be. At 99 and 90 years of age respectively, they come into a new phase in their walk with God and each other. Many today seek a way to regenerate their marriage, yet they fall short in their obedience to the words of the Lord. The husband needs to take the leadership role here and lead his wife into the Word and so bring glory and worship into the heart of the marriage and family. Abraham has taken the leadership role and preached the truth, and acted upon it in a dramatic way.

Abraham and all the men will be nursing their wounds from the circumcision for at least seven days. They will be unable to do any work, and especially they will be unable to fight and defend themselves from any enemy through this time. The act of Abraham is an immediate act of faith in a violent time. This stand of faith in what God has said, and in the Lord's ability to defend them all, is a testimony to his growth in faith through the silent years since the events recorded in Genesis 15.

Abraham will become sexually active again at some point after this time, but during these days Sarah will be his nurse, as each woman will nurse her husband through these days, and in this time she is transformed, as Peter records. 1 Peter 3. Sarah and Abraham have a little more waiting to do until their sexual life is restored, for the Lord has another lesson for Sarah also before she conceives and bears Isaac. She, like her husband Abraham, needs to laugh with God and fully accept the promise of a son.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. So called "Easy Believism" has no place in Christian theology. Simple affirmation of the facts about Jesus does not save anyone, for the devils themselves believe Jesus is the Son of God, and that he died for the sins of man; they believe those things, because they cannot deny them, but they hate Him still. It is not mental assent, but the devotion of the heart to the Lord that saves. We are called to bow at his feet as our Saviour and Lord, to accept that what he did was for us. The sign of this heart prostration will be actions in our life that speak to the world of the transformation the Holy Spirit has made within us through the power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is the works of righteousness that will always follow genuine salvation. A person without the fruit of the Holy Spirit does not know the Lord as their Saviour!

2. Circumcision was both a sign of covenant separation for blessing, and from pagan sexuality. The call to those who are separated out from their people for the service of the Holy God, was that they be separated also from the sexual evils around about them. Let us take this challenge seriously and separate ourselves from every appearance of sexual evil that otherwise will lead us away from the loving intimacy and truth that is in Christian marriage.

This means we have no part in sexually explicit movies, magazines, television or any media that makes sex a commodity. We are to not allow such things to enter our homes, nor are we to speak of such things. Let us speak up for marital fidelity and sexual purity as loving intimacy between a right man and his right woman, and not accept anything this world has to offer as an alternative.

3. The Abrahamic Covenant is an eternal, unconditional covenant. It still applies. God is not finished with the Jewish and Arab people yet. Their remnant will be saved, and that remnant will, as a saved people, enter the Millennial Kingdom, to bring glory to the Lord until the end of time. The Lord Jesus Christ will yet be recognized by the survivors of the Jewish people as their Messiah. They will look upon him whom they pierced, and they will be delivered in that day by Him. The Arab sons of Abraham will also receive the promised Messiah in a future day and stand with their brethren through Isaac and welcome the Lord's Second Advent. Refer to the EBCWA book 121 –Rediscovering the Faith of Their Father Abraham – The Arab Nations in the Last Days.

4. Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant, just as Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic and later the Mosaic. We are called to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord and testify publicly to our faith by believer's baptism. This is our covenant sign now.

GENESIS CHAPTER 18

INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus as a Christophony appears to Abraham in the middle of the day with two angels. Abraham bows before them and asks them to stay and receive his hospitality, and noticing that there is something different about them, he personally serves them. He goes and tells Sarah that something very special is happening so that she is ready to receive these guest's words, and then goes personally and fetches a calf. He kills it himself and arranges for a meal to be prepared. This is a perfect picture of eastern hospitality. He is a good host, but more, he is alert to what the visit of these men may mean and what they have to tell him.

The leader of the three, the pre-incarnate Christ, asks "Where is Sarah your wife?" This would be a surprise in itself, for no stranger would ever even know another man's wife's name at this time, let alone greet her by her new name. Such an act would lend itself to be interpreted as adultery and swords would be drawn. It is clear to Abraham that these are angelic/divine visitors. The Lord then says that Abraham will become sexually active again. He repeats the promise of God received weeks or months before, "Sarah your wife will have a son".

Now Sarah was just inside the tent and heard this statement, which caused her to laugh inwardly. Her thought processes parallel Abram's ones those weeks/months before and she laughs within. Will I enjoy sex with my husband again? She laughs at the pleasant thought. The healthy enjoyment of sex between the husband and wife is important in a marriage relationship, and even in their nineties this couple can think of sex with pleasure and joy, even though it has been stopped for some considerable time at this point.

The Lord then said to Abraham "Why did Sarah laugh". This probably caused a clatter of pots inside the tent as Sarah realized that the stranger was reading her mind. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" - No.

If you are in Christ and doing His will nothing is too hard. There is a solution to all things in Him. The Lord was able to restore their sexual ability. She will have a son. Sarah came out of the tent and denied laughing but the Lord replied that her son would be called laughter - Isaac. This has already been told to Abraham and so the identity of the visitor is now sure and certain to them both.

GENESIS 18:1-15

“1. And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; 2. 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, 3. And said, My LORD, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: 4. Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: 5. 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. 6. 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. 7. 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. 8. 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. 9. And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. 10. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. 11. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? 13. And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? 14. 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. 15. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.”

REFLECTIONS

We are not told how many weeks or months have passed by since the events of the previous chapter. There is a waiting time before this elderly couple are restored to sexual health, and it would appear they enjoy extremely good health for the rest of their long lives. Abraham will live until 175 years of age, Genesis 25:7, and Sarah will live until 127 years, Genesis 23:1.

These are not excessive ages at this time in history, and indeed we have evidence of a similar age to Abraham with a man who is buried in Westminster Abbey in London, Thomas Parr. He lived from the 1480s – 1660s. Do not let anyone mock the great ages of the Patriarchs, for they lived simply, ate well, and were physically active all their lives, and so attained the age that was not uncommon then, and has occurred many times since in various cultures and places.

They do not know at this point how long they will live, and so each week must have seemed a long time, but in God's plan they are secure and they wait with relaxation in their spirits for the Lord's fulfilment of his promise to them. The next event is a Christophony, and Moses makes it quite clear that this is what is involved in the appearance of the "three men". They are not men at all, but two of them are angelic beings in the form of men, and one is the Lord himself. Refer again to the BTB study CHRIST – ANGEL OF JEHOVAH on page 89, and also refer to FAITH on page 37.

Verses 1-2. It was common for a great pastoralist to sit under his large tent flap, upon carpets or skins, and hold his "court" (in Arabic – his majlis), dealing with disputes, and acting as the judge of his clan. Abraham is simply exercising his role as the leader, and watching out for visitors or enemies, but his tent being in the place where he will see things first.

Once again we have the true leadership concept here; Abraham leads from the front, and his tent is not placed behind a protective shield of his men's tents, but it is in the forefront of the camp, in the place of greatest danger, with the best view. He is trusting in the Lord and he is ready to serve the Lord in any way he can with those who come to his encampment, and he is waiting for the Lord to come again to speak with him further. He has been waiting for fourteen years, but he is still "looking down the road".

Abraham sees these men and runs towards them. This was an unusual action, and not the action that was common in the ancient or modern Middle East. Abraham realizes that these men are not the normal desert or pastoral visitors, but angelic beings of great power and dignity, and he knows one of them to be the visible presence of the Lord his God. He acts in a way that would hazard his life if these men were strangers and potentially dangerous. He places himself absolutely at their mercy, and bows down to the ground in the posture of worship towards them. It is as if he has been waiting for a visitation from God again, and looking out for Him, and desires with all his heart to be able to give the Lord worship and hospitality again. **Genesis 17:1, Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 4:8-9.**

Verses 3-5. Abraham is not just going to get "a morsel", he is going to prepare a simple feast for these visitors, but in the traditions of the East, he does not arrogantly claim great wealth and try to put on a lavish banquet to impress the visitors but in humility offers all he has to meet their needs. The old arrogance and pre-occupation with wealth is gone, and we now meet a man who is solely focused upon all he can do to serve his Lord and Saviour, and those who love and serve the Lord also. **Romans 12:9-18.** This is our call before the Lord; all we have is humbly at the Lord's service.

To offer to wash the feet of guests was a sign of absolute humility before them, and a clear admission of their superiority, and your own servitude before them. Luke 7:37-50, John 13:3-17. These two New Testament passages are important commentaries upon the faith and thinking of Abraham as he does this act to prepare his guests for their meal.

Abraham is thinking of the needs of these visitors, and his provision is intelligent and timely. Many believers lack common sense and foresight, and so are unable to meet the needs of others and serve the Lord in practical ways. Abraham has been thoughtful, and has met their needs in the order most likely to be important. He has invited them to rest in shelter from the sun, he has given them fresh and pure water to quench their thirst, and washed their feet so they will feel comforted after their hard journey, and he has then gone to prepare a meal for them to enjoy. The meal may take an hour or two to prepare, so they are rested while they wait for that with a snack “platter” of breads, hummus, and vegetable dips made by Sarah; that remain common fare in any Middle Eastern restaurant today.

Verse 6. Abraham has involved Sarah in the service of these visitors, for he knows that what they have to say to him will involve her. He involves his wife and expects her to be a part of the spiritual events that will unfold. He has the expectation that she will gain something here also, and so he places her in the place where she can benefit. Often we do not involve our families in the place of blessing and then we wonder why they are not blessed. If Bible teachers arrive to a church, do we get all the people we care about to come and hear them? Do we place ourselves in the place of blessing and gather around us all we care about? Luke 10:38-42.

Verses 7-8. Abraham himself now takes definitive actions to prepare a meal for the visitors. Normally a servant would be sent to do such things, but Abraham wants no corners cut in his service to these three, and he leaves them to rest under the shade while he does this.

This is not rude, but shows his focus upon service. He knows they will speak to him when all is done to meet their needs, and so he focuses all his attention on meeting their needs first, and then he listens to what they have to say. First meet the needs or demands of the Lord regarding service, and then, from the place of completed obedience, listen to his words of instruction, and do what he says. How often do we get this order of things right?

Verses 9-11. Abraham’s expectation that the Lord has a specific thing to say to him and Sarah is not disappointed, for the Lord speaks directly of the promise made in the recent past. The Lord reaffirms the promise made before, and makes it very specific for Sarah, and says it so that she can hear from her place behind the tent flap. She is in the safe place, hidden from public gaze, but able to hear all that goes on.

This was the proper place for a wife of a husband, not parading herself in front of the men, so as to be a source of sexual temptation, as has happened before. Genesis 12:13-19. Both these people are now in the right relationship with each other, and waiting on God alone to move. Titus 2:1-5. It is a specific promise of sexual rebirth, and it is for both of them; their sexual function and it’s associated pleasure will return.

In **verse 12** Notice Sarah’s question. “Shall I have pleasure with my Lord?” said Sarah. She has at long last broken through to a biblical position in her relationship to her husband Abraham and is totally devoted to him and looks forward to the possibility of enjoying sexual pleasure again with him. 1 Peter 3. The Bible indicates that women are responders, and find their greatest joy in relationship when they are able to freely respond to a man who protects them, hears them, adores them, and are worthy of respect by them.

If the woman is a nag and bitter towards her man, then the Bible blames the man, and says that the husband is probably the problem; the Bible gives men no excuse in their marriage failures, for the woman has responded to them. Men have the responsibility of being worthy of respect, admiration and adoration. Sarah is not subservient to Abraham, she loves, respects and admires him at all levels; she now has the right relationship to him for blessing to flow to both. Every time she calls Isaac she will remember how she laughed and she (and us all) will remember that nothing is too hard for God.

Once again, do not see the laugh as lack of faith here, any more than it was for Abraham; Moses records both times of laughter as an indication of joy on both their parts, although the question underlies it. They find it still too good to be true, but they have faith now in the word of the Lord. Romans 4:18-25. Their faith will grow and develop strength and as their sexual relationship begins it will be built up further to the point where they realise Sarah will have a child.

Verses 13-15. The Lord asks Abraham, why did your wife laugh? Now Abraham hasn’t heard her! The answer is given before Sarah is confronted by the Lord. The Lord always gives us the principle first, then the rebuke. Sarah was fearful and so she lied to the Lord, but this lie isn’t fatal, or even punished, for the Lord knows she is dust! He knows we are all dust. He knows our weaknesses and does not expect any more than we are capable of. Our view of the Lord needs to see his compassion towards us, not have our weaknesses to the fore. God seeks our blessing not our judgment. Genesis 3:19, Psalms 29:11, 103:1, 14, Hebrews 6:11-15.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Wait upon the Lord! How often we panic and act before we are sure of the Lord’s command in a matter. God is in no hurry, and we must not be. Listen for the Lord, look for the Lord’s guidance, and then leap into action as Abraham did. Are we expecting the Lord to speak to us this day? We ought to be expecting the Lord to be interested in our daily life, for he is, and seeks to guide us today in some matter. Let us listen prayerfully through each day for the Lord’s teaching.
2. Abraham is ready to do intelligent service to the Lord. He is ready to see the needs of others and meet them thoughtfully. He thinks, and operates from all his faculties, not just emotion. Let us serve the Lord with all our hearts and minds.

3. Abraham involves his wife in the service to which he is called. He seeks her involvement and makes it easy for her to be a part of what is happening. He wants her to share the task and share the blessing. Do we seek this for our marriage partner? This is the Lord's call to us. Also he is worthy of respect and admiration now, and Sarah calls him Lord. As Christian husbands we need to be worthy of our wife's love and respect. Let us ensure we do not frustrate them, but rather set the example of service and be worthy of their loving respect in all things.

GENESIS 18:16-33

“16. And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. 17. And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; 18. Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19. 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. 20. And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; 21. 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. 22. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD. 23. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24. Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? 25. 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? 26. And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. 27. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD, which am but dust and ashes: 28. Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. 29. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. 30. And he said unto him, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. 31. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. 32. And he said, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. 33. And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.”

REFLECTION

The three visitors now stand and make ready to move onwards, and they set their faces towards the Valley of the Jordan, towards the city of Sodom. They make it clear to Abraham that this is their destination. Abraham guesses that this is about Lot, the believer there, and the next verses record the intercession of Abraham for his nephew and his family.

Verse 16. Abraham does what was expected in the ancient world, and right into New Testament times; he accompanies the angels on their journey towards Sodom. This is something that is still practiced in many places, and it is a lovely thing when on the Lord's service to be accompanied on your way by brethren. Acts 15:3, 20:38, 21:4-6, Romans 15:24, 3 John 6-8.

Verses 17-18. The Lord then speaks aloud to the two angels, so that Abraham hears his words. Should we hide what we are going to do? The answer is carried in the construction of the question; the Lord is not going to hide what he is going to do to Sodom and the cities of the plain. The reason the Lord gives is a strange one at first sight. The Lord states that Abraham will be told what is going to happen in advance because he will be the father of many nations. If this is all we read, then we could jump to the wrong conclusion, that it is his status that is the reason for his being told the mind of God over this matter, but that is not the reason.

Verse 19. Now we have the reason given; Abraham is being told these things because he is to be a great teacher of all the people who will come after him. He is told this in advance to record it and pass on to his descendants the truth of God's character and dealing with mankind. Abraham will teach the truth to all in his company and will teach and live a life that illustrates God's righteousness, justice, and judgment.

It is this faithful passing on of the truth that is the reason why Abraham will be a blessing to all peoples, and will be blessed. Blessing comes through the path of obedience to the Lord's Word. As we obey and pass on the message to others, so the people who see and follow our example are blessed. We bless others by means of the example of obedience. Psalms 78:1-8, Proverbs 6:20-23.

Verse 20. Judgment has been progressive upon the cities of the plain. They were captured by Chedorlaomer, and restored by Abraham's grace, but they have not learned from the experience, but rather returned to their evil deeds and did even more. Their evil is great and their "cry" rises up to God. There are two possible meanings of this term "cry"; the first is the loud cry of victory, of the people who commit evil deeds, and rejoice in them. The second is the cry of the abused people in the cities, who are the victims of their sexual depravity and murders. No sin remains stationary; it heads downhill to more and more abusive evils. At times it is revival or death – and that was this time!

Both depravity and abusiveness are probably involved here. Sexual depravity has two faces to it, and is always abusive, and if left unchecked will always lead to violence and finally murder. The sins of these places are described as "grievous". The word used means "heavy" in its impact upon others; their actions are a burden to others. The Lord's reason for judgment is both the nature and effect of the sin, but the heavy impact of it upon others is the main reason they have run out of time and will be eliminated from the earth within twenty four hours of this discussion.

Verses 21-22. The Lord says that he will inspect the city and see if the reports are correct, and if they are as bad as the reports indicate, then there will be total judgment upon the place and its evil people. The Lord's justice is seen here, for the guilty will not bring the innocent down unless there is total apostasy and there is no hope for redemption. 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, Ezekiel 22:29-31. The two angels leave them at this point, and head for the city down the road towards the plain, and Abraham is left with the Lord.

Verses 23-24. We are urged to draw near to the Lord, and Abraham sets us the example here of that. Hebrews 10:19-22, James 4:8-10, 1 Peter 5:6-7. Abraham is going to argue for the lives of Lot and his family, who he knows will be in the city, and who have compromised their faith, but he hopes not fatally. Abraham still believes that Lot has remained righteous and holds the truth in the midst of the city of Sodom. Sadly he is only partly right about this. Lot's compromise faith has cost him his family, and most will not join him and escape the city when they can. Romans 1:18-32.

Abraham will argue on the basis of the Holy Character of God, for he knows that God cannot and will not do anything that is unjust and unfair. This is the assurance we can have when we face things that are hard to understand. Remember, we do not have all the facts in any case, and God does have all the facts in every case, and so his actions will reflect truth most accurately. Do we apply Hebrews 11:1 in all cases where the Character of God is "at stake"? Do we know God?

Verses 25-33. Abraham works his way down to the figure that he believes will guarantee the safety of the city of Sodom. He believes that Lot and his extended family number at least ten adults, and he believes that they all will be believers and standing for righteousness. Sadly he is wrong about this. This tells us that Lot must have had at least three or four other adult children above and beyond the two unmarried girls who are with him in his house.

Abraham believes that the extended family of ten adults must be all believers and will be, like Lot, standing for righteousness. Abraham is persistent, but polite and respectful with the Lord, and he is focused on the number ten. Lot has compromised too much through the years however, and all his children have been fatally weakened by their pagan neighbours witness, rather than influenced by their father. Sadly evil will permeate all aspects of life over time unless defeated by the presence of Bible Doctrine in the heart and mind. Lot will lose nearly all he values as a result of his valuing of money and power-position within this evil city for too long.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Have you been a servant of the Lord in your service in bringing others on their way to serve the Lord? Have you put yourself out to assist the servants of the Lord? The Lord requires us to assist our brethren in the work of the Lord. Let us run to assist our brethren.
2. God is absolutely just and fair in all his dealings with those who follow evil and sin. The people of Sodom had many warnings and ignored them all. Their final warning will be in the person of the two angels and their disgusting actions will open the door to their destruction. God is fair and judges slowly, but when he finally moves, it is thorough and none escape the consequences of their free choices. Isaiah 28:21-22.
3. Abraham boldly approaches the throne of grace and pleads for Lot and his family, without asking for them by name. One cannot help wonder what might have happened had he simply prayed to the Lord in person for Lot and his family by name! Let us pray for those we know by name that they might be changed by the power of God, or at least convicted of sin and righteousness and of judgment. John 16:8-11.

Notes

GENESIS CHAPTER 19

THE CANAANITES

Why were the Canaanites destroyed? The clue is in the nature of their religious expression. Canaanite religion was, even on the scale of its day, very bad indeed; being centred in every possible sexual perversion, and all under the guise of religion. It included promiscuity, prostitution, homosexuality, bestiality, and child sacrifice. The Philistines also practiced a religion that had many elements like this, centred around their immoral and violent demonic religious lord, Beelzebub.

The authors of ancient history wrote about what happened to the children in the child sacrifices, and their descriptions are awful to read. I will not describe all these things, as images of these evils are hard to shake for the mind and voyeurism or perverse enquiry is never to be encouraged. This was Satanic religion gone to an extreme of depravity that is mind blowing, yet in our own day, in so called civilized nations, this sort of perversity has reared its head again, and paganism and "new age sexual openness" is identical to Sodom. Sexual abuse of children is rampant, and the murder of children in the process is occurring more and more frequently. This sort of practice is from the pit of hell itself, and God hates it. The people of Sodom and the surrounding area have gone into this form of sexualized religion so far that there is no alternative but to judge and destroy them all. Satan hasn't changed his evil religions – they appeal to the depraved and the sexually vulnerable.

Even the Greeks and Romans, who were perverted themselves, when they wrote about these people showed their disgust. The Canaanites would throw their children on to the preheated paws of the metal idol and as their children screamed as they were burnt to death they would use the screams to increase the sensual pleasure of their own jaded sexual appetites. The Romans so despised the child sacrifice that they eliminated every Carthaginian.

There is a warning here directly to our own day. If any people group are involved in sexual immorality they will find themselves going further and further into depravity over time, because they will not get the thrill out of even their initial forms of abnormal sex. This is one of the reasons that the Canaanites had to be destroyed, and is a reason for the destruction of people's health and lives even today. The modern homosexual movement sadly illustrates this, with its drug saturated culture, and the appetite for promiscuity with constant new partners that characterizes so many in the modern movement. We are called to look beyond any disgust we may have, and seek the salvation of the lost, hating the sin and evil, but seeing these people as those for whom Christ died. Jude 22-25. While they live we pray for them.

The liberals have a major problem with the destruction of the Canaanites, and say that the God of the Old Testament described here, was a God of wrath whereas the God of the New Testament is a God of love. They cannot get their thinking around the concept of judgment. If one understands what these people were up to, and fully comprehends what would happen if they continued on their path, seeing the evil that they had sunk to, then judgment becomes a necessary surgical removal of a dangerous cancer. Sodom and Gomorrah had got to that level of ultimate perversion, some four generations prior to the rest of the Canaanites, and therefore were destroyed by God while Abraham was in the land. Not all the Canaanites had sunk to this level in the days of Abraham.

Abraham was living with his allies, Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol, who were Canaanites, but who had been converted under Abraham's ministry, so not all the Canaanites had got to the ultimate level of degradation. This however would occur during the period that the Jews were away in slavery in Egypt. When the Jews return to the land, the Canaanites will have totally degenerated and God therefore commands Joshua to destroy not only the men but also the women, children and even animals in the Promised Land. There will be some amazing exceptions right to Jesus day. Matthew 15:21-28.

The reason for such blanket destruction can only be because of physical contamination of sexually transmitted diseases that would otherwise continue their spread, and through any physical or sexual contact, enter into the people of Israel. It was not simple moral contamination, for then the children could have been saved, and the animals. Remember, that the Bible teaches that children who die before the age of accountability are automatically transferred to heaven. 2 Samuel 12:13-23. The child born of adultery to David and Bathsheba dies, but David has confidence that he will go to see this child when he too dies. Do not be influenced by Medieval Catholicism in thinking the church needs to "baptize" infants.

Sodom and Gomorrah must be destroyed at this time for the health and safety of all others. This principle is set out in Exodus 23:20-24, where it is stated bluntly, that there are segments of the human race that have gone so low, that they are a danger to others. These people have got to a stage where they are totally rebellious against God, and totally absorbed in their Satanic religion and their population so infected with incurable evils that they must go.

God sets a limit to any people-group's rebellion even in a world that is rebellious. Even though Satan was the prince of this world, he has limits set for him by Almighty God, and the King of kings and Lord of lords is still in control, and since the Cross-Resurrection-Ascension-Session- Pentecost Satan isn't anything other than the lying "prince of evil", for the Lord has the rulership back, and sits on His throne in heaven right now, and will sit on his throne on earth one day soon. Even though there is massive rebellion God is still in control and moves to ensure that the world is not destroyed by evil before the Lord's return. The plan of God will work out, and all the malicious, murderous evil of Satanic thinking cannot destroy it before the Lord's Return. He Has defeated the enemy of mankind on the Cross and at the Empty Tomb, and HE will smash the satanic system on His Second Advent. Daniel 2:44-45, 7:7-11, 21-27, 8:23-26, 11:36-45.

LOT'S ATTITUDE

Righteous, but foolish Lot, knew everything that was going on was wrong but he stayed there in the midst of it. Lot lived with the people of that evil place, when biblically they had gone way beyond the bounds of safety. He has no witness any longer, and is despised by the people, and he is in a place of danger by staying in a place where people had fully and finally rejected the truth. As believers there are certain places you have to get out of. When you can no longer witness without compromise, you leave that area. Jesus makes that clear, tying his words back to this event. Matthew 10:14-15, Luke 9:5, 10:8-20, Acts 13:51.

Lot is still sitting daily in the gate of Sodom when the angels find him. This tells us that he is a town councillor or elder, as the gate to the city was the place where disputes were settled. What should have happened was that the believer should have been out of the city evangelizing, but being separated from the Sodomites. These people needed the gospel, not social action. The truth will save some; social work and Rogerian Counselling saves no-one!

In **chapter 18 verses 20-21** we have seen that the Lord Jesus Christ tells Abraham that He is going to test the Sodomites to see if they are ready for destruction. He was going to check out the cities to make sure that there was no good thing in them. Abraham then intercedes with the Lord and begins a bargaining program. He has a number in his mind. He knows how many children Lot has and that most of them are married except for two girls. Lot's extended family will number about 10. Only three will finally get out. This shows that the rest of the family has been perverted by the city. Lot has opted for social action, rather than separation and evangelism, and this event indicates how that compromise message and his ongoing association with evil has destroyed Lot's family.

Abraham stops his bargaining at 10, as he assumes that all ten of Lot's immediate family are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. However Lot has compromised so far that he has lost his family. Many liberals who are genuine Christians get involved in false teaching and become spiritually confused, and their families, without clear moral and spiritual example and teaching, get into gross sin. Rather than pointing the way to salvation as commanded in the Great Commission they become social workers and work away with enthusiasm trying to make the Devil's world a nicer place for unbelievers to go to hell from.

All of the things that they do, may well be worthy projects. However, because they are a part of the pagan government they cannot preach the gospel and give the only answer to the problems that people can have, which is Christianity. The genuine faith in Christ Jesus is life transforming, and is the only way you can see a violent criminal changed into a pastor of God's Word. There are many examples of this, but these things occur only when believers preach, not when they do social work. The only way to transform a society and bring it back from the brink of destruction is with the genuine Gospel, not social action.

As we will see in this chapter, Lot cannot understand why his family has fallen apart, and why they do not believe his warning and join him in fleeing the city. The members of his family have fallen to this low state because they have compromised with evil and gone away from God's Word. If a believer compromises with evil he loses everything, because they lack the mental framework to resist evil thinking and doubt generally. You cannot be in God's and Satan's camp at the same time, and any compromise erodes your ability to discern correct action in challenging situations.

In **verses 24-32** of Chapter Eighteen, Abraham bargains from fifty down to ten righteous people in Sodom and believes he has secured the safety of Lot and his family, and the safety of the whole city. The principle which Abraham applies is that of Matthew 5:13, which tells us that the believer is to be the salt of the earth.

SALT

Salt in the ancient world was a preservative. The active believer in a nation will preserve a nation; if there are enough believers in a city they will bring blessing to that city, even if the majority reject God. This is what Abraham is bargaining on in relation to the city of Sodom. If there are ten believers in that city then there is a chance. Even if there are a thousand people in the city, which is a low estimate, this gives us the principle of 1% of believers as preservative for their nation.

However the other part in Matthew 5 shows that if the salt has lost its savour, then it is of no use other than to be trodden under the feet of man. In the ancient world this represented the military domination of a nation. Lot had lost his savour as a believer; and so has ceased to function as an ambassador within the city. When an ambassador ceases to be able to operate fully, there is a state of war however, and they have sadly rejected his teaching and his Lord. We need to question whether as believers we have lost our saltiness, our commitment to truth and righteousness, our knowledge and confidence in the Plan of God, for if we have, we may lose more than our peace of mind under pressure.

OUR WITNESS

Many people could save themselves a lot of heartache by being stronger in their Christian faith. Our children should respect our faith, and our thinking patterns, words, and behaviour should be worthy of respect. The witness we have in our own home is central to the effectiveness of our role as ambassadors.

Do not blame God if you have done what Lot has done here, and you have seen your children go off the rails, look at yourself. Repent, for you are still alive and there is hope for them and yourself, and take action to re-stabilize yourself upon the truth of the Word of God. Show them that you stand on firm ground. Let them see the love you have for your Saviour. Do not be a hypocrite, for when the crisis comes, they are much more likely to stay with you if they have seen consistency in your faith beforehand.

You can be so involved in social action and become so spiritually ineffective, that people, and even you yourself, may end up not understanding the principles you have operated on. You may realize that you have done a very ineffective job with your family. As Bible believing pastors we can do our churches a lot of good by preaching about Lot and the fate of Sodom and the other cities. This is a warning against every "do-gooder" who neglects truth and righteousness and so loses their own family.

GENESIS 19:1-15

"1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; 2 And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. 3 And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. 4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: 5 And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. 6 And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, 7 And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. 8 Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. 9 And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. 10 But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. 11 And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door. 12 And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: 13 For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. 14 And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law. 15 And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city."

REFLECTION

LOT AND THE ANGELS

In Chapter 19 the two angels come into Sodom in the evening just as the gates are going to be closed. Lot sees them, and he moves very quickly, for he recognizes that these are not depraved men like his fellow citizens, and asks them to lodge with him so that they can be safely on their way early in the morning. Lot immediately sees, before even speaking to them, that these men do not belong here, and that they will be going in the morning, yet he has not made the application to himself. Why is he still in this city, when it is such a place as to be unsafe for good people! Is he not a good person? The surprise and shock to him must have been significant when the angels say, "No, we will abide on the streets all night".

Lot however, with all his persuasive ability, impressed on them the dangers of that course of action, and led them into his house. The Hebrew indicates that when Lot saw them he leapt to his feet and entreated them because he knew what the streets of Sodom were like at night. Because they were obviously not evil and Sodom was, it was obvious to Lot that they would not be around alive in the morning. He says get into my house now before you are noticed, and some homosexual gets you. He knows they will only be safe if they are behind locked doors. If a believer is in that type of place, and is not preaching any more, and the rebellion against the truth is this total, there must be something wrong with their geographical location. Lot should not be here! He is out of the geographical will of God.

A believer out of fellowship has an unpleasant household and poor domestic life. (Verses 2,3). The angels do not want to stay with him; there is trouble in this house. This is not a pleasant place to stay; there is discord and barely concealed contempt between the people in this house. A believer out of fellowship may have a sense of responsibility, but they are paralyzed by inaction and cannot act biblically upon the truth. Because of the very low level of practical responsibility for the spiritual life and sexual safety of his family, Lot has lost the respect and admiration of his family. Events will show to what low level his faith has fallen (verses 5-9) Lot is hospitable to the two angels and prepares a feast for them, and bakes unleavened bread for them as a sign of purity and holiness before the Lord, yet he is doing it in the worst place on earth.

Verse 4. Bed time for decent people in the ancient world would be around 9pm, as it still is in places where no electricity exists. People eat, talk and then head to bed, but not in Sodom. This town is filled with people who live for their

evening of sexual promiscuity and perversity, and the story has spread that Lot has two of the most beautiful creatures ever to enter the city in his house. From the account here the vast majority of the male population, from all social quarters of the city, rich and poor, all gather outside Lot's house.

This tells us that Lot must have had a prominent house facing the town square for such a crowd to surround his house. He is in the wealthy part of town and has one of the larger houses. Even after Chedorlaomer's invasion and the loss of much of his wealth, he is still a leading citizen in the wealthy area. This fact alone illustrates again the lie of the so called "Prosperity Gospel" today. Wealth is not a sign of blessing from God; it is simply a sign of wealth! This man has great wealth and a palace like home, but he has poverty in his soul and disaster at his table. Psalms 106:15.

Verse 5. It is now that the full shock of what this town is like strikes us. These men want to gang rape and then murder the two angels. They are so depraved, all they can think about is their own sexual pleasure and once they have finished with their victims they will cast them aside. Sex is no longer the joy of love making between a married couple who are committed to each other and love and adore each other, it has become a greedy taking of pleasure from another person, and having used them up, their murder for pleasure, and then casting their mutilated body away.

This great evil is always present in society, wherever Satanic viewpoints of sex have taken hold. It is not just their homosexuality that is evil here, it is everything about their sexual attitudes. People can rightly attack the sin of homosexuality, but miss the attitude that leads to all sexual perversion; the attitude of taking from another rather than giving of oneself to another in living care.

Homosexuality and all forms of abusive sexual practices are condemned by the Word of God, and God's Word makes clear, that those who habitually practice such things do NOT inherit eternal life, but it also makes clear that the early church was filled with such people, whose lives had been transformed by the Holy Spirit. There is hope for all perverted people, but only through the true Gospel, not any social action, such as Lot attempted. Romans 1:23-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:8-15, 2 Timothy 3:1-15, Jude 4-7.

Lot's Old Sin Nature area of weakness was his wealth, and Abram had also shared this weakness. It always had been, and he had not dealt with it even now. He loved his big house on the town square and his focus on the enjoyment of his life style in this city led to his spiritual powerlessness, and as we will see to his spiritual and moral weakness. It was unusual for a house to be able to be surrounded within an ancient city, for normally they were built wall against wall.

Lot must have demolished surrounding houses to create a clear space around his expanded and improved house. It may be after the return from captivity to the Elamites that he was given great wealth by Abraham, and he has used it to build more grandly using the empty houses of others, who may have perished in the siege and capture of the city earlier.

Verses 6-7. Lot apparently shows bravery in going outside, but actually it is just stupidity, for he has lost any ability to reason with these men, and his logic and arguments will show he himself is morally bankrupt in his foolishness. Notice that Lot calls the men of Sodom "brethren"; yet they cannot be as they are totally evil unbelievers. This man has a false viewpoint of the "brotherhood of mankind" that has worn down his discernment, so that even though he can call evil by its correct name, he has no ability to persuade his neighbours, nor stand for morality. They see him as a stupid old fool, simply interfering in their fun. He calls their sinful desires "wickedness", and he is right, but they are far beyond any appeal to decency.

How is it that he has not noticed just how far they have gone and how irrelevant his morality is to them? Shakespeare says, "Love doth make fools of us all". This quote answers our question. Lot has loved the wealth and the life style of Sodom, which offered all the "toys" which could be enjoyed in a city. His wife really enjoyed the convenience of city living and clearly loved all the goods she had there, as do his sons in law and his daughters. Lot has "loved this present world", rather than seeking the Lord's will, and looking forward to the joys of heaven, and so has lost all spiritual discernment. 2 Timothy 4:10. Remember the Lord's warning regarding where our heart is. Matthew 6:19-21, 24-34, 12:33-37, 13:44, 19:21-22.

Verses 8 – 9. Verse eight contains such a shocking offer to these evil men that it is unthinkable that a believer could even say such a thing and make such an offer. He has offered his own two virgin daughters to be raped, sodomized and murdered! To offer such a thing shows what a low point this man's basic logic and morality has sunk to. It is this sort of logic that has dominated his home for years and is the reason behind the daughter's logic later when they plan incest; a moral outrage that would not have been thought of had they been brought up in a moral and strongly believing home.

Notice the important Principle here: Believers imitate unbelievers when they stay out of fellowship long enough. He is thinking in a perverted manner because his morality has been affected by those amongst whom he has lived. Also he has made the mistake of thinking he has impressed these people; he has been arrogant and pride centred in his logic, and he has been wrong. He thinks he has won their respect as their judge, but they despise him, as evil men despise all moral do-gooders! Notice their open contempt for this man in verse nine. They simply tell Lot that they will sexually abuse him even worse than they plan to abuse the two angels.

Verses 10-11. As the crowd of evil sex lust driven men (demon possessed) surge forward to grab and rape Lot he is rescued by the two angels, who reach outside and drag him in. They shut the door firmly behind him again. To ensure the crowd is slowed down and is unable to follow through their evil plan, the two angels strike the men of the crowd blind. Yet even when clearly under judgment they do not stop their evil and repent, but tire themselves out still desperately

trying to find the door and break into the house (a sign of the demonic hold over them by this point). Their actions show why they must be destroyed, for nothing will stop this evil now; they have sunk to such a low and self centred point that no thing, or no power, will hinder their pursuit of sexual gratification, in fact demonic powers have always been behind these evils, for they are at the heart of pagan fertility cult religions.

Verses 12-13. The angels now give Lot the message of destruction, but also the grace offer of deliverance for all who will accept their message. Lot has a large extended family, with sons, daughters, sons in law, and their children. Now we could ask about his sons and sons in law, whether they were in the crowd? They were clearly not in the crowd that attacked the house that night, for Lot has to go to their homes to find them, but their spirit is not with Lot, and all will reject his offer of deliverance, preferring to stay in the city and take their chances there in the city they are used to.

Remember the city has fallen just a few years back to the Elamite armies and they have all been marched off to captivity, to be rescued only by Abraham. Yet they will sit and trust the walls of Sodom again, but this time against God, rather than men! These family members “think as men”, and do not discern spiritual things, and so they will die with their neighbours, whose sins they share by association. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, 2 Peter 2:4-9. Remember the clear biblical principle. No one will be in hell who has not chosen to be there. God is absolutely fair and just – do not fear for your friends and relatives, for if they have any desire to find truth the Lord will provide enough truth for them to be transformed by it. Only those who desire to reject the Lord will be under judgment; the path is open to escape judgment, and any who desire to escape are able to in the grace, mercy, and the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Verse 14. The angels have mentioned sons, but Lot can only go to his sons in law. Was that because his sons had already gone well off the path and there was no hope for them? We cannot know this, but we can know that his married daughters and their husbands believe their father to be a mad old fool and dismiss his warnings as ravings. Proverbs 29:1.

When people have hardened themselves against the truth, they will resist even the most urgent warning. Lot is at this point hesitant, and paralyzed with inaction through his inability to move those he loves to follow him out of the city. The shock of the extent of his family’s spiritual decline has shocked Lot. The sun is starting to rise and the moment when the tectonic explosion will occur is drawing near very fast. Lot must move but he hesitates and dithers about.

Verse 15 – 16. Lot is sitting down in his house again! He is not actively preparing to flee the city, but is sitting down in a depressed state. He needs to run but he cannot. The angels have to force him to his feet and order him to do the obvious thing, lead his two surviving daughters and his wife out and away from the city. He loses his opportunity to gather his goods and wealth before fleeing, and must now just grab what he can and run.

The angels have to forcibly remove him from the city leading him out by the hand. Moses makes an editorial comment, “the Lord being merciful”. This man Lot did not deserve the Lord’s mercy here; he is so weak spiritually and morally that he lacks the moral/physical power to escape, but God gets him out. This is a testimony to just how good our God is, and let us give thanks, for we do not deserve the grace and mercy we receive either. **Psalms 103:8-16.**

Let us pause here and get a quick over view of where Lot’s carnality, spiritual weakness, and poorly thought through actions have gotten him. Any believer out of fellowship has no testimony to the unbeliever. (V. 14). The believer out of fellowship is disciplined by the Lord, but not judged (v.1, 5-17, Romans 8: 1, Hebrews 12:6), for the Lord seeks their repentance. If they persist in carnality they may enter the area of the SIN UNTO DEATH. The believer out of fellowship lacks moral strength, and faints mentally due to fear and worry. (v. 18, 19). The believer out of fellowship has no resistance to any type of sin. (v.31-36). In this man’s case it was the sins of drunkenness and then incest.

If as a Christian you get side tracked from the Lord’s path, and spend your life going after the things that this world offers, and try to “live it up” in carnality, you will pay a terrible price, as is shown many times in the Bible. We are not to squander our precious life in carnality and in service to the god of this world; for such an attitude shows foolishness at best. This is discussed in Hebrews 12:4-13, which is the passage to challenge action against any form of depression.

Most of the time people come for counselling to the church, it is because they are carnal, are ignorant of the Word of God, and do not know how to deal with their sins. In other cases they are influenced by someone who is carnal, for the carnality of one family member will overflow and defile many. Titus 1:15, Hebrews 12:15. It is therefore very important that you know the Bible, and teach the Bible so people know how to recognize the dangers of distraction away from God’s path, and know how to deal with carnality.

In Genesis 12 and 13 we have seen how Abraham suffered from lack of faith that is a very serious sin as shown by the Exodus generation in Hebrews 3 and 4. Both Abraham and Lot suffer when they walk away from God’s plan and policies, but Lot’s carnality creates the most awful consequences for him and subsequent generations. No-one gets away with sin or evil, and the terrible consequences do not need to be faced if they repent. All the carnal believer needs to do is return to the Lord through confession and the filling again of the Holy Spirit. Joel 2:30-32.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Wealth and prosperity are not necessarily blessings at all. If people get side tracked by their love of wealth it will destroy them. Lot loved his life style and it cost him everything. Let us ensure we love our Lord and use all our

goods to serve the Lord. Anything else will lead to destruction and the loss of what is really and eternally of value.

2. Sex is designed by God to be the joy of married life between a right man and his right woman. Anything else is a perversion of what God intends and will lead to further sin and evil. Sex is giving pleasure to the other partner; it is other focused, not self centred. Self-centeredness in the sexual area leads to abuse, and all the evils we see here of rape, sodomy and murder itself. Anything other than God's plan leads to grief and disaster. Sexual power is wonderful when channelled down God's path but destructive anywhere else.
3. Compromise in spiritual matters leads to spiritual impotence, social contempt, and physical disaster. Lot has compromised to such an extent that he has no witness at all. Spiritual growth builds moral and even physical strength, but spiritual weakness will undermine all the strengths of a person.
4. Lot's depression is self caused (not all depression is remember); he has made the wrong choices and despairs when he sees the results of them. His only hope is spiritual revival, but he does not take that path; even as he flees this evil city he does not pray to the Lord his God! Revival alone could deliver this man from the terrible consequences of his inaction through the years, but he continues spiritual inaction, and that path leads to greater and greater evil. Refer to the EBCWA book on REVIVAL AND RENEWAL.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE "SIN UNTO DEATH"

1. There is a sin unto death (1 John 5:16, 17, 1 Corinthians 11 :31,32)
2. The sin unto death is the physical death of a believer, where ultimate discipline is administered to the Christian due to unconfessed sin of a serious nature. It does not affect their salvation, but they have become too dangerous to the Lord's Plan to be left on earth – they are no earthly use due to their persistent sin.
3. Confession of sin under the concept of I John 1:9 is the way to forgiveness, and the lifting of the "Sin Unto Death" in some situations, or at least the open door to "Dying Grace".
4. Examples of sin unto death:-
 - (a) The Corinthian Pervert - (1 Corinthians 5)
 - (b) The Corinthians who habitually came to the Lord's table unworthily. 1 Corinthians 11:27-32)
 - (c) Moses (Deuteronomy 32:48-52)
 - (d) Achan (Joshua 7:16-26)
 - (e) Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1 -1 1)
5. Whilst there is a sin unto death there is no condemnation to them in Christ Jesus - all believers (Romans 8:1). This means that they are saved – but their foolishness eliminates their ministry and witness, and prematurely ends their life on earth. At any point it can be reversed if they hunger after righteousness and repent!
6. The effect of the sin unto death is to reduce the time which a believer can spend on earth accumulating good of eternal worth, for they waste their time on dust. The gold, silver and precious stones of I Corinthians 3:11-15 are not earned by Holy Spirit filled walking, but the wood, hay and stubble of the Old Sin Nature is all they build.

GENESIS 19:16-26

"16 And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. 17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. 18 And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my LORD: 19 Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: 20 Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. 21 And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. 22 Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. 23 The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. 24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; 25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. 26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt."

REFLECTION

Verse 16. Lot is so paralyzed by the years of compromise that he lingers; he dithers and delays leaving his house. He has lost his will and has started to mentally fall apart, and is plunged into a deep depression where he is unable to make the simplest decisions. In our terms Lot had a "panic attack", and was unable to make simple decisions.

Depression debilitates us if we let it remain within us for long. When we are not clear thinking for a long time, and live a lie, the truth can overwhelm us and destroy our motivation and ability to move quickly. Our mind and will need time to rebuild their robustness. It will take months, or even years to rebuild robustness after serious depression.

The Lord however was merciful and got his wife and two daughters as well as himself out of Sodom. The angels take them all by the hands and pull them from the city. They get them out of the city limits, but then they call upon the family group to act upon their own volition and continue the walk away from the evil they have lived in till this time. God's mercy leads to their deliverance; their obedience will take them further into safety. Romans 9:14-18, Ephesians 2:1-5, Titus 3:5.

Verse 17. The angels have brought them to the place of immediate safety, and have by their actions, brought them to the place where their volition can now operate and they can go the last distance on their own. God will bring us to a certain point directly at times, but he then requires us to make that free will decision and take the next step. Only this way can we start on the path to rebuild our spiritual life by being active in that process. The Lord seeks our free will response for truth, because this is the only way that we can get back on the right path; by being obedient to a direct command of the Lord. At this point people decide and illustrate their true heart-mind state and preferences.

Notice how urgent and simple the commands of the angels are. They are to move quickly, head away from the plain, they are not to linger or look back, but run for the hills, and if they do not, they are told that they will perish in the judgment that is coming. It is very hard to get this wrong, yet Lot's wife does, and even Lot and the girls will not head for real safety to Abraham's last known campsite. What is going on with her? Hebrews 2:1-3. God's call to us is to "cut a straight furrow through life". We are to keep our eyes fixed on God's goal for us, and not be distracted to left or right by any other thing that the enemy puts in our way to side track us. Luke 9:62, Philippians 3:12-21.

Verse 18. Lot now says the sort of totally inappropriate and wrong thing that a depressed person might say. He tells the men who have just brought him to safety that he can't/won't do what they ask him to save himself. This is beyond understanding for all who have not worked with the seriously depressed and disoriented. People who have become this mentally unstable are unable to comprehend the most simple instructions, even to save themselves, for they do not see the danger they are in and seek only to rest their weary body and mind. They cannot act to save themselves for their stressed state doesn't perceive the reality of the danger – they are caught in their disoriented fantasy/stressed world.

Lot's years of poor choices have caught up with him here, and he is mentally exhausted and physically unable to advance further. Lot is beyond walking any further here due to his depression. The angels will require him to do something, but they can see he is beyond the needed energy and motivation to get all the way. Once again, in grace God allows him to live, when most people would have left him there to die in his foolishness. Let us give thanks that God is this gentle and wonderful to us all, and saves us at times when others are just rightly irritated with us.

Remember, his depression is not to be pitied, for it is the result of wrongful choices over many years, and he has had many opportunities to repent and be restored to spiritual power and witness, but he has chosen the comfort of Sodom over the truth of God. Even though this man is foolish and irritating, and is suffering because of his own stupidity and carnality, the Lord remains gracious and merciful towards him. This is a challenge to us all in the church/biblical counselling area. We are to be as gracious towards those who are miserable because of their disobedience, as the Lord is here towards Lot, even if they go back into gross sin!

Verse 19. This would be a speech that would take the prize for the most pathetic and greasy of all time! Read Lot's words again, and see that this is a disgraceful example of human weakness. He is ruled by fear and paralyzed by inaction and the inability to think clearly. Why would the angels deliver him out of Sodom and send him to the mountains where he is in danger? Are they not delivering him? God has not saved us from hell to deliver us into disaster/death!

When God gives us a direct order, can it be wrong? Would He lead us into dangers that the Lord has not a plan to deal with? While it is easy to see Lot's sin here, it is often hard to see our own, of the same variety as Lot's. Remember, whatever is not of faith is sin! Romans 14:23. The Lord calls us to follow him in obedience and trust that the one who delivered us will not deliver us from a frying pan into a fire! Praise God - He gives "more grace" as we advance down the path of life, not less grace. 2 Corinthians 4:15, 8:1-9, 9:8, Ephesians 2:5-8, 4:7, Hebrews 4:16, James 4:6.

Verse 20. Look at this pathetic man; he has lived so long in Sodom that he needs to live in a city now, yet he was safer with Abraham in a tent upon the hills. This man trusts in walls, which did not save him from Chedorlaomer, and thinks that a "little place" can't be evil like a big city! Pause and reflect upon this statement, for many think that their holiday house is safe, when their house in the city is "dangerous" – and yet evil is everywhere, and we are safe only in God's place for us. The safest place is actually Abraham's tent! Lot's depression/stress distorted thinking continues and leads him further into danger. He needs to ask the angels for strength to do what they demand, for that will give him the best God has to offer him, yet he persists in bargaining to achieve his own depressed heart's desires.

When we are depressed all our thinking and our emotion and perception is distorted, so what appears to be correct often is not. This is why suicide appears to be a solution to a seriously depressed person; they are simply not thinking straight. Lot's need is the same as all carnal believers; they must cast themselves upon the Lord and be delivered from their own self deceptive thinking, and in obedience begin to walk out of the hole they have dug for themselves.

Verses 21-22. The Lord's graciousness is seen again here. On the prayer of Lot for this little town, it alone will survive of all the dwelling places in the Vale of Sodom. This will be a place of safety for Lot, but it will not be safe for long,

and the next time we meet Lot, he is in the hill country. Lot is now told run for your life to this town, and he is promised that the destruction of the entire Valley will not begin until he is safely inside Zoar (which means "little"). Moses records the changed place name of the town, to identify it for the people of the Exodus generation who heard of it, or saw it from a distance across the Dead Sea.

Verses 23-26. As Lot enters the town of Zoar the angels let loose their judgment upon the plain and a violent eruption occurs from underneath the ground and sulphurous rocks rain down upon all the cities and the ground beneath them collapses into cracks in the earth that have opened up due to the eruption. The entire plain explodes and collapses. All the great cities and villages, and all the pleasant gardens of the place collapse into the erupting ground in seconds.

This is a terrible scene, and is the reminder that we walk this crust of earth by permission, and the crust of earth is not very deep in places. Earth's centre is fire, and it is the reminder that we are on borrowed time from God during our brief sojourn here. We are accountable to the Creator and are called upon to remember that judgment is at the door for all who forget the God who made them and wander into evil paths. Visit a tectonically active area believer and remember that the entire earth is this fragile, and one day will open up again, just as it did here, and earlier at the great flood of Noah.

Lot's wife lingers at the place where the angels give their final warning. She does not glance back. The word is not the one for glance, but to linger and stare, and so she is overwhelmed by the eruption. Lot and his two daughters do not even realize that their mother is not with them until they get into the town of Zoar. Lots' state of mind can only be guessed at now, but the next time we find him he has taken refuge in alcohol to cope. If we faced such disaster, what would our medication be? Would we seek the Lord, or find a quick fix at the local alcohol store? Escapism is always dangerous and destructive. Alcohol is a depressant and always drives people down when taken in quantity.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. God's graciousness comes through here towards Lot and his family. They are delivered with very little effort required on their part. Carnality sucks your energy away and leaves you without a working mind. It is not without cause that the Bible says "FLEE" all forms and even thoughts of sin. God delivers us, but he requires us to act strongly to reinforce our own growth back to spiritual stability. What God asks us to do, we can always do in his strength. What God requires of us will strengthen and restore us; this is why he asks it.
2. When the Lord says "GO", we are unwise to bargain; obedience keeps us safe, but dithering around leads us into greater danger. God's Word gives us the best options always, and if we seek another, we will only find disaster or a second best. Zoar was not a solution, for a little evil place is just as bad as a big evil place.
3. Positive volition must be expressed in definite action. We must actively grow away from our tendencies to sin or they will suck us back into their swamp of depression and despair. Lot has failed to build strength in his spirit, and so finds the crisis comes at a time when he has no resources to draw upon. If we do not grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord we will be unready for crises, and will be swept away by history.

GENESIS 19:27-38

"27 And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the LORD: 28 And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. 29 And 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. 30 And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters. 31 And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth: 32 Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. 33 And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. 34 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. 35 And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. 36 Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. 37 And the first born bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day. 38 And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day."

REFLECTION

GOD EVEN PROTECTS THE CARNAL BELIEVER

He was told to go to the mountains but was afraid and eventually agreed to go to the small city of Zoar, whose name as we saw means "little". He escaped with his life but nothing else. The sun had risen by the time he got into Zoar. Once he

was there fire and brimstone blew from the earth in a massive tectonic eruption, and it rained down and converted the once fertile valley, from being like the Garden Of Eden, into what Moses and we later know as the Dead/Salt Sea.

Lot's wife did not just look back, she turned around and stayed longingly gazing at the place she loved with all her heart, so that she was still on the plain when Lot reached the safety of Zoar with his daughters. Lot's wife became part of the Dead Sea. The local Arab guides point out a pillar of salt by the Dead Sea and tell you, that is known as "Lot's Wife". It isn't her but it is a good reminder of her fate; but she was swallowed up by the explosion not petrified in salt.

This disaster that befell her indicates what can happen to those who ignore God's Word and think they can get away with foolish actions one too many times. God was gracious again and again, but safety was only in the place he told them to flee to, and she didn't act to save herself. Let us be very scared of remaining in the place of foolishness; loving this present world and all it has to offer is a dangerous place to be for mind and body.

Verse 27. When Abraham rises this morning, and looked towards Sodom he saw the whole plain a mass of smoke and fire. The reason why Lot was saved was because of the grace of God in response to the prayer of Abraham. Prayer is divided into petition (what we say) and desire (what we desire that lies behind the petition). God had answered Abraham's desire behind his prayer, but rejected his petition. Sodom was destroyed but Lot was saved. God honours our prayers and they are always answered, but at times we may not see that, and Abraham gets despondent when he sees the giant pall of smoke. As a Christian you are to stay salty in terms of Matthew 5:13, but not like Lot's wife!

To be salty is to be powerful in your spiritual life and focused upon what God is doing, so that when you see things that don't add up, you don't jump to a false conclusion, but pray further and explore what God has indeed done. Walk closely with Him so that when you pray you do so effectively, and when an answer comes that you don't expect, you pause and reflect first, before the next action. If you wake up in the morning and what you have been praying for is a smoking ruin, God is working His purpose out. Try to find the heart and plan of God in what you see, for you know his character, and can relax within his plan. All things are done by God for His glory. As you grow you will find out what is God's desire in each situation, by spending time with him in prayer and his Word.

Verses 28–29. Abraham had got up and gone to his prayer altar early in the day. The way Moses records this he underlines the fact that this was his daily habit, and he was particularly focused upon the fate of the cities of the plain, and Lot's family within them. Abraham is an example of intercessory prayer. His heart is still towards his nephew; he seeks his deliverance and blessing still. He has not been awoken by the sound of an explosion, for the rising is described in terms of a normal habit, so this tells us that the explosions of the plain and the collapse of the land around the cities of the plain has been violent, but not loud enough to be heard in the hill country above them. Now Moses records immediately after the description of the cloud and furnace like appearance of the plain, that God in grace had already delivered Lot, "from the midst of the overthrow", reminding us that the Lord delivers, even out of the midst of a disaster.

Verse 30. Lot did not stay in Zoar very long. Notice again the reason for his move; he feared. This man has not dealt with his basic problem, which is his distance from fellowship with the living God. 1 John 4:16-19. He is now a traumatized man, and we can psychologically understand his state of constant fear, which today we call hyper-arousal, but he has the remedy that Abraham is practicing each morning. Lot could go out and with trembling hands build a new altar and worship the Lord, casting himself upon the mercy of God. He doesn't build an altar, he buys alcohol in Zoar and takes it daily as his tranquilizer, rather than using prayer to set himself free of fear. We face this choice daily ourselves!

Verses 31- 36. Soon the three of them go to the mountains where they commit incest in a cave. This story gets worse and worse, and Moses tells the story in flat prose, without moral anger; just the shocked record of the plans of the girls and the foolishness of their father. Moses is by writing this way clearly making the strongest of moral points, but without outrage, for it is unnecessary. As you read these verses a chill settles over the soul, as you see what carnality will lead to if left unchecked. What will it be for us; altar of prayer, or alcohol and disgrace.

As you read these terrible verses ask yourself the following questions. How is it that Lot didn't notice that he had clearly had sex with someone? Is he so drunk that he does not even know what is going on? How is it that neither he nor the two girls thought about heading for the hill country and finding Abraham? Why did they head for the mountains on the wrong side of the Dead Sea, rather than the hill country of Judea? Why did they stay in a cave, rather than seek the tents of their relative, where they were guaranteed the same welcome that they had received after being set free from the army of the Elamites?

If you compromise with evil and worldliness you will have no strength when the trouble comes, and so a really serious trauma will totally overwhelm you. These three have faced a great traumatic event, but they have been delivered by obeying angels sent to rescue them, so they can, and are responsible to ask the obvious question; where to from here?

God has delivered them for something, so they do not have to seek evil human viewpoint solutions like incest! Without daily, moment by moment fellowship with the Lord, and without a clear understanding of Bible doctrine, people in trauma can be blown away, and their minds and morals may unravel. These three are operating totally out of touch with reality, and the truth is a prayer away, but they will not build their prayer altar.

Verses 37-38. The result of their great sin is the birth of two new nations; the Moabites and the Ammonites. Both groups will cause endless problems through the centuries for Israel. Look up both groups in a Bible Encyclopaedia and see their history and their great evils against the descendents of Abraham. They have fallen from the worship of the true

God in holiness to imitating the unbelievers and doing even worse than them. In the end of the tribulation period however cursing will become blessing in this area. Isaiah 63, Daniel 11:36-45.

The religion and morality of these two peoples will be trouble for Moses and later generations, yet salvation in individual cases will change things, and one Moabite, Ruth, will become an ancestor of David and the Lord Jesus Christ! Once again we see the great grace of God, who can deliver those who seek to become his people, even out from the worst of situations.

PERSONAL AND PASTORAL APPLICATIONS

1. Traumatic events traumatize the mind and can spin people totally out of control. Only the firm grasp of the knowledge of, and faith in, God's plan, can hold us up in the midst of catastrophe. Modern psychology excuses drug and alcohol abuse in trauma and post-trauma, identifying that these are simply "coping techniques" for people who have endured too much to enable them to process the traumas they have experienced.

This may be true for those without any relationship with the living God, but for those who know and have loved Him, there is hope in his character, his plan, and his purpose for the person's life, that has been delivered out of the midst of the trauma. Even for the unbeliever, hope begins when they look up and seek the only one who can make sense of their pain. Lot gets drunk and loses his reasoning capacity, and so he opens the door to greater evils yet to befall him.

2. Compromise does not remain where it begins; the slide into worse and worse actions continues until repentance and confession occurs, and fellowship with God is restored. Moment by moment walking with the Lord is the only remedy for despair in the midst of traumatic events.
3. Abraham has questions of God as he sees the smoke rising, and we will see in the next chapter that this leads him to doubts and despair himself. We must get into the habit of taking our problems to the Lord and casting them upon the one who controls the plan and has the part we are to play clearly set out from eternity past. We are here to play our part and there is blessing only in that place; let us get back into our place in the plan of God right now if we have strayed a millimetre from it.

GENESIS CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION

What happens to Abraham at the end of this chapter is apparently due to a misinterpretation of what has happened to Lot as recorded in the last chapter. After long term carnality the minds of Lot and his daughters have, as we have seen, become distorted; they have no stability or residual doctrine to call upon, nor do they even see the importance of God's Word. They have lost their faith and confidence in the person and the Word of God, and so they lose their place in redemptive history, and their future is as enemies of the truth, rather than blessed members of God's family. Even then, as we have seen, Ruth emerges from these children of incest and is saved, and goes on to become a mother of the Messiah. Truly God brings blessing out of cursing.

In today's language, the family of Lot have become neurotic; which means to be living in your own mind, without the correction of reality. If you have to pastor neurotics, realize that these people will be self centred, and give the impression they are all powerful, yet they will not be coping, for they lack the categorical thinking that Bible doctrine provides. They cannot fit things into practical categories of thinking, and so make sense of them; all they see is their own reality. The only thing you can do is what the angels did to Lot; try to get them moving, away from their area of weakness, towards safety. True counsel and instruction as to how they are to re-set their lives into new channels must wait until they are physically safe and ready to hear the truth.

You build personal safety by the teaching of basic doctrines through verse by verse preaching of basic books like Galatians, James and Luke. If they remain in the church through this settling period, then you can, if they let you, help them find a safe way to adjust their lives to reality by further application of God's Word into their lives. Now, a serious word to pastors is required here! If you have let your entire congregation get to this place of subjectivism and neurosis, it may be because you have not been faithfully, systematically teaching the Word of God in Holy Spirit power! Be very scared, if this is your congregation, for the Lord will judge you pastor, and the only way to mitigate that is to start powering out the Word through systematic teaching this and every subsequent week the Lord gives you.

Praise God that there is hope for us all, even in the worst places. All we need to do to restore blessing is rebuild our prayer altar, open the Word, study it, and teach it systematically in Holy Spirit power. 2 Timothy 4:2, Revelation 3:20. You can reason with a neurotic; but only by the use of God's Word, and by bringing the Holy Spirit's power to bear upon them. Through the challenge of biblical truth, the reality of hope through God, and the ongoing love of God for them, there is a path back to usefulness for all who have been overwhelmed by stress.

Lot has sunk to this level, and the angels gave him the order for his safety, and have indicated the direction for him to go in; back to the mountains where Abraham dwells. This man is overwhelmed with fear and inaction. He has failed at the

first two basics in the Christian life, confession of sins and faith-rest in God's plan and purpose for him. There is hope only in his repentance, but that does not come. We leave Lot at this point and he does not return to the narrative.

This is sadly the last we hear of Lot. Unlike many of the characters in the Bible we do not even hear of his death. Why is this? From the end of chapter 19, as far as God is concerned, Lot is already dead; spiritually dead. His persistent carnality has killed his usefulness on this earth; his role in the plan of God is over and from this point onwards he is under the Sin Unto Death.

What could he have done? He could have headed for Abraham's tent and the girls would have found godly husbands, and he would have found forgiveness. His pride and paralysis led to greater evil than he had practiced to date. We should be careful to ensure that we do not drop out of the pages of redemptive history because of carnality and failing to deal with our sin. It is only a matter of time before Lot dies under maximum divine discipline. Refer back to the study of SIN UNTO DEATH.

Let us review two verses at the end of chapter nineteen, because most commentators interpret Abraham's actions in light of a note Moses makes right there, about the fate of Lot, and they may be too harsh on Abraham. In verses 27 and 28 of chapter nineteen, Abraham gets up in the morning and sees what is happening in the Vale of Sodom, and he apparently despairs. He apparently thinks that God has not answered his prayer. He looked at several hundred thousand hectares that the night before had been like the Garden of Eden, and now had been destroyed, and the poisonous smoke and fire is still going up like a furnace.

Abraham may have thought logically, that no one could have possibly survived. Lot however has escaped. Moses puts this in because, at this moment, Abraham does not know, but should have expressed faith in God's plan, even though he did not have any of the facts at this point. This is always our challenge in this life, for we never have all the facts at any point on our journey. God's Word is to be more real than our experiences, or the doubts that will emerge from our experiences at times will rob us of the certainties of God's Word. The Lord wants us to think his way, and with the Lord there is nothing impossible to fulfil his plan. Genesis 18:14, Deuteronomy 33:27-29, Jeremiah 32:17. Does Abraham fall at this point into sinful despair over the fate of Lot?

PRAYER

Let us pause and re-examine some basic points from the doctrinal study on prayer. In prayer we have two aspects to each prayer made; petition and desire. Abraham's petition was that the city be spared if there were 10 righteous people in it, with the desire that his nephew Lot and his family would be saved. The desire was answered by the Lord, but the petition was not. Three had survived totally. Lot's wife was also a believer who would have been saved, but she disobeyed right at the last minute, and delayed a few hundred metres from safety. "Near enough" is never "good enough" in the Plan of God. Right in the place God want us is the only safe place for us!

The concept of petition and desire is a very important concept to grasp especially if you have been praying earnestly and long about a subject and God says, "No" to the specific petition you have prayed, but also says "Yes" in the sense of giving you your heart's desire about the subject. When the answer comes it will be a challenge to your faith, for depending how you interpret the answer, you may feel thankfulness or despair over it.

For instance the prayer may be, to be cured from a physical illness, in order to serve God. He may not cure the illness, but you may be able to serve Him in a new way through the illness. This was the answer to prayer that I received for four long years from 1987 – 1990. Through this period I was seriously ill as a result of being gassed with smoke bombs in the Armed Forces, and the Lord left me suffering with the after effects, just as he did with Paul. 2 Corinthians 12:7-13. I learned over time that this was not punishment, although one pious Christian friend argued I had clearly sinned mightily before the Lord to be suffering so much!

I accepted the answer the Lord initially gave me; to relax, lightly exercise as able, take all doctors advice, and keep studying the Word. In the process of day by day faith rest in the Lord's plan, through suffering, not expecting to live, I learned things about the Lord and his plan that I would not have learned any other way than through suffering. As a result what became the www.abcwa.com.au Diploma of Theology Course of 520 teaching hours was written and then delivered in great suffering, and the Lord opened up a great ministry. I was finally healed, in the Lord's right time, through the local church elder's prayers in 1991. I look back and give thanks for the entire period, not just the final healing. Read the full story in Book 150, "Providence and EBCWA".

Abraham is going to learn from this traumatic experience, but first he is apparently going to make a basic series of errors, however is going to bounce back, unlike Lot. At this point both men are apparently out of full fellowship with the Lord, and both need to re-centre themselves in the Plan of God for their lives; Abraham will, Lot will not. Now I am using "apparently" a lot through this introduction, because the more I reflect on this chapter and chapter 19, the less I think Abraham sinned in his move south, but the affair of Abimelech clearly was sin. Let us see some points about this move to the south that others do not reflect enough upon

ABIMELECH

Most commentators argue that Abraham has fallen into despair himself; that he despairs that he is the only person left of his family, having lost all his living relations in the valley, as far as he is aware. They stress that he leaves his prayer

altar, the company of his believing friends at Hebron (the place of "fellowship") to go south towards the land of Egypt and into the sphere of influence of the Egyptians and Philistines/Canaanites (in the area that later would be Philistine Country – but in Abraham's day they had not yet arrived!) – I suspect in Ezra's final editing of the Hebrew Scriptures he uses the two people-group names for the people of his day to identify the area clearly, but in Moses day there are no Philistines.

The Philistines (who arrive around 1200 BC) were a proto Greek people whose worship of sex and war put them up at the top of aggressive seriously pagan peoples, but the Canaanites who were there before them also shared the later aggressive and sexualized paganism. The question I want to pose is this one; is Abraham as far out of the plan of God as some of the commentators argue? Below I will raise some practical points about volcanic explosions that I have personally observed here in New Zealand and argue that Abraham may not have been as far away from the Lord initially as most have argued.

Moses draws us a route map of Abraham's march. He went from Hebron down through the hill country to Kadesh (meaning the place of "prostitution"), and camped between there and the wilderness of Shur ("stirring up the dirt"), then on to Gerar ("soaring up and breaking away"); this was one of the southern city's of the later Philistines. From the meanings of the place names Moses may be making a spiritual point about Abraham's journey, but it may also simply be that these were the towns that the Israelites of the Exodus knew, so these are the ones Moses selected to record amongst the many that Abraham would have passed through on his escape from the tectonic activity.

The king of Gerar is Abimelech, meaning "father of the king", which is probably a title rather than a proper name. Trace the journey in a Bible map of the area, and you will see that he has journeyed far to the south, keeping on the western side of the ridges/hills separating himself from the Vale of Sodom, and he stays in the area to the south of the River of Egypt, which was fertile in his day – although desert today. Remember climate change over 3500 yrs has been massive!

This is the boundary of the land promised to him, and it is argued by most that he ought not to have gone back into Egyptian controlled territory, nor made the mistake Lot made, and entered into the cities of the pagans. Genesis 13:14. Now an error is made if we argue that he left the land, for it is only to Moses that God gives these specific boundaries; Abraham's promise at this point has been general, and he is technically still in the land, as he saw it on the day the promise was made. Let us enter this chapter with the same hesitancy and care that we have entered each before it, for the quick judgments against Abraham by some will be found to be mostly in error.

Now let us pause and examine the reasons for Abraham's journey to the South, for all conservative, modern commentators observe that he was wrong leaving the land, (although he was not technically doing that anyway), but were their practical and reasonable reasons for this journey. The smoke from the fires in the Vale of Sodom would have made it unpleasant, and even dangerous, in the hill country if the wind blew from the south east.

While there were many places within the land of promise he could have gone to avoid the smoke and sight of that valley, it would be logical to head away from the prevailing winds which blew in the toxic smoke. At certain times a year the dreaded desert easterly wind (blowing from south and east towards the north and west) blows in from Arabia, and so it may have been the smoke that drove him south west, out of the path of the choking sulphurous clouds that arose from that blasted valley.

However, we must also ask, why did he not send a party of men down to the valley to see if there were any survivors, just as he had acted after the invasion of Chedorlaomer? The survivors were there at the south end of the valley, away from the predominant winds, but still within sight and smell of the destruction. Abraham could possibly have seen that the south end of the valley was clear of smoke and could have headed there to check things out, but for "health and safety", he avoided the area and stayed in the high ground west of the top of the hills, through to Kadesh.

Things were so bad in Zoar that Lot left soon after arriving, but didn't head west into the hill country, perhaps due to the rolling clouds of poisonous smoke and ash, although he could have headed south and west as Abraham would do, and still tracked Abraham down. Maybe that was the reason why Abraham headed that way also, as it would be the logical place for survivors to head, as it was pastoral country in that day (not desert as it is today), rather than into the tough mountainous territory to the east that would become the land of Moab (also fertile in this day).

Let us consider the nature of the clouds of smoke that arose from the valley that morning. Eruptions like this occur at times in New Zealand, and have in many other places in historic times, where there is volcanic and geyser type activity. The clouds of smoke are mostly highly toxic and kill anything in their path. The slightest smell of this sort of smoke makes people violently sick immediately and kills livestock caught in it's path. To head east was to head into lethal smoke and possible fatal dangers.

It may have been that Abraham simply took the logical path away from the toxic smoke, but whatever the real reasons behind these verses, he was walking into trouble in the south. Let us use this example of biblical history to underline the need to pause before jumping to conclusions, and also the importance of remembering that the physical details of what is happening and the different climate and geography of the lands needs to be factored into our decision making, but prayerfulness is to guide us in all decision making, not just so called "practical matters".

My conclusion now, (quite different from my thoughts, foolishly following others, in the past), is that Abraham made a logical choice to head south west, and was not placing himself away from God's geographical will, but his decisions after that create an old problem for him again. However, we will see, that this is the decision that leads to explanations

regarding his decision making regarding Sarah, and learning for both of them, and is the turning point for their marriage and the establishment of their family. Given these facts we need to be hesitant to say he is "in sin" through this period.

GENESIS 20:1-18

"20:1. And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. 2. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. 3. But God came to Abimelech 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. 4. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, LORD, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? 5. 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 innocency of my hands have I done this. 6. And God said unto him 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. 7. Now therefore restore the man his 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. 8. Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. 9. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended 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. 10. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? 11. And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. 12. And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. 13. 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 shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother. 14. And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and women servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. 15. And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee. 16. And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved. 17. So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. 18. For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife."

REFLECTION

In chapter 20 Abraham fails again into the same sin as he committed in Egypt, technically he is lying to the unbeliever, and thereby undermining his ability to witness to him later. We find him here saying that Sarah is his sister in exactly the same way in which he lied to the Pharaoh of Egypt. This time however he explains himself, and Moses puts the explanation into the text to cause us to realize that Abraham is correct in his words, but wrong in his motivation. This time there is a good outcome and no break in fellowship between Abimelech and Abraham and they live close to each other for a time.

Lot was eliminated from the drama of redemption for mankind, because he did not get back into fellowship, nor learn from the events that unfolded around him; Abraham however does. Now it is true to observe that Abraham runs a parallel course to Lot in this chapter, by moving close to Gerar. Abraham had no real excuse to live with a group who were so degenerate that he had to lie to try to defend his wife's honour. He should have only been there as an evangelist well outside the town telling them that God should be worshipped and not idols.

Abimelech was degenerate in his religion, and what he wanted he apparently took, yet we will find it is not that simple, and he has a basic morality and God-consciousness that may even lead to his salvation. This chapter indicates the truth of Romans 8:28, and that even the worst of men may be close to salvation. It is not a Lot and Sodom problem here.

Abimelech had an understanding and a concern regarding God. Often you find that degenerate people are more open to the gospel than moral men because they are very aware that they are sinful. Our job is to sow the seed and not worry about the results, but we are to keep ourselves morally safe in the process, and that means not being tainted by the world's evil. There are places we do not go to evangelize, unless the Lord very specifically orders us to. Philippians 4:7, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 1 Timothy 5:22, James 1:27, Jude 22-24.

God can keep us from falling, but we have the first responsibility to keep ourselves from the very appearance of evil in our dress and behaviour. 1 Thessalonians 5:22. It is possible that Sarah was up to her old tricks here and acting in a sexually provocative manner. Once again we need to remind ourselves, that women in this day, and even today in the Middle East, do not need to be seen unless they want to be. Both she and Abraham are guilty of "game playing" and God simply does not need us to do this.

Verses 1-2. Abraham journeys south and "sojourns" (camps temporarily) in the area of what will be southern Judah. It was good, well watered pastoral area in this day, with numerous villages and cities in ancient days, where now is only the desert. He does make an error however and moves into the sphere of influence, and possibly into the outer city limits of Gerar. Once he enters the city limits, even if only to "sojourn", he must present his credentials, and formally introduce himself to the king of the city state, to assure that king that he is friendly and means him no harm. For Abraham is a "famous" man in his day; he is the man who defeated Chedorlaomer, and so is well known and any local

king will want to know that this man is “friendly”. At that introductory meeting with the king Abraham makes the error of judgment and tells a truth, which is actually a lie. He asks Sarah to lie about their sexual relationship.

The Proto-Philistine/Canaanite king, under whose protection they have come, and under whose authority they have submitted by accepting his “offer” to stay in his area, has the right to ask anything of them, in return for his protection. He identifies Sarah, introduced as Abraham’s sister, and sends for her. Remember, Abraham could have hidden Sarah away, as his wife, but if he introduces her as his unmarried sister, then he opens her to public gaze, and possible marriage “offer”. Even at ninety, this woman is attractive, and she will live another 37 years in good health, so to see her in our own day, she is like an attractive young looking fifty year old.

The word “send” used here by Moses indicates a forceful request that cannot be denied. It was common for kings to unite their interests with marriages of their relatives to one another. The word for “took” is one that indicates a “give and take” arrangement, and when you put the two words together, we have the covenant type arrangement being made here, and Abraham is going along with it. As he has lied about Sarah’s availability in the first place, it would be insulting to stop the process once Abimelech has suggested the union between himself and Sarah. What is happening here, is that the king of Gerar is taking Abraham’s sister as his wife (One of his harem), and thereby establishing a “family” alliance between Abraham and himself.

These pagans, as mentioned above, were warriors, and Abraham has at least 300-600 armed men, who are battle hardened, and who have recently beaten the greatest king of their day. The pagans would have been very impressed with this and so the actions of the king are not to be seen as simply lust dominated, but are rather an indication of his respect for Abraham and desire to establish “family ties” with him. The fact that he is not driven by lust is underlined by Moses, who notes that he hasn’t even sent for Sarah to have their first sexual experience together, when God acts to protect them all from adultery.

Verses 3-4. Moses is careful here to tell us that the king has gone to bed that first night, and he has not gone to bed with Sarah. Moses will tell us something in the last verse of this chapter that indicates the events of this chapter may play out over more than two months, so the Lord’s protection over Sarah is total and lasting. God directly acts to protect Abraham and Sarah, even though they have failed to trust him and tell the truth, yet again! God’s gracious protection is over his foolish people, and we need to praise his holy name for this fact in our own lives. Psalms 105:7-15. God seeks the salvation of the unbeliever and so rebukes Abimelech in order to lead him to the truth. Ezekiel 33:11-16, Jonah 3:4-10, 4:2-11.

Abraham has judged this man wrongly; he is at the place of God consciousness and ready for the Gospel message. Abraham has made it harder to reach him by his deception and foolishness, but through telling the truth, he will be able to preach righteousness to this king. Abimelech is a good man and a righteous and noble ruler, so when he is told in the dream that he is to die for his sin, he immediately pleads for his people, not himself! This is a true leader of a people, who does not care that he dies, if he has sinned, but pleads with the Lord to save and deliver his people from any sin he has committed. This man sets an example of selfless leadership; he is focused on blessing his people.

Verse 5. Abimelech is able to tell God the truth about what he has done, and the innocent motivation that he has had in the process. This is another verse that Moses uses to remind us, that this man, though the leader of a religious system that is corrupt, is not himself beyond saving. This is no “king of Sodom”, but a man like Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol, who have been saved from amongst the Canaanites. Moses uses his words to remind us that it is Abraham, who has made the error in his “selection of the truth to tell”, that has created this problem.

In **verses 6 to 10** God steps into the picture strongly, and backs up the warning by means of the dream with sexual dysfunction on the part of all the women of the city. Any doubts about the dream being from God are removed by the physical evidence the king sees every day as he walks around. This action of the Lord to directly affect every woman in the city state and underlines that Sarah is the cause and the dream is correct.

It may have been that Abimelech rises from his bed that night after the dream and thinks the dream may be wrong, because it is so weird and strange, and he does not, even with the first dream doubt the word of Abraham. Once the physical evidence is presented to him he knows it is God who has spoken. Abimelech is, once again, a good example of how to deal with any strange guidance phenomena; he earnestly seeks the truth from God, and desires to serve God in truth. When anything strange is ordered it is not wrong to ask for clarity from the Lord, and confirmation of the message, because you want to get your directions right; you do not immediately act on any apparently strange thing, until one “word from the Lord” is confirmed by another thing. The Lord then speaks to him in a second dream, so by three evidences he has all the truth before him.

Verses 6-7. Abimelech is confronted by the Lord with the direct orders he is to follow, and told of the consequences for disobedience. He is told that Abraham is a prophet of the Lord and that he will exercise his prophetic gifting over the king and will pray for him. He is assured by the Lord that Abraham’s prayers are powerful and that he will be delivered. When the Lord reveals his words through a dream or a prophetic word, that revelation is always direct, simple, clear, and testable. If a person tells you they have a “word from the Lord”, and what they say is anything other than these things, then you know it is not of the Lord. God’s Word is always blunt and straight, that is why he tells us to speak the same way. Let our yes be yes, and our no be no! Matthew 5:33-37.

Verses 8–9. Abimelech now tells all his elders and leaders of the truth that God has given him in the dream, and having secured their approval for his actions, and their repentance and trembling before the Lord, then he confronts Abraham with his deceit. Abimelech is not simply a libertine who looks upon women as sexual objects, he is a king who sees all wives as part of his alliances with surrounding powers. He has acted normally within the conventions of his day, and he has acted with decency and a desire to ally himself with God's man, Abraham. David and Solomon will act in the same way he does here in a later time, and with marriages they should not have entered into. 2 Chronicles 8:11, 1 Kings 11:1-13. (Read these verses in this order).

God does not approve of either David or Solomon's many wives, and judges them for this, but this king before us here is neither better nor worse than the later Israelite kings. He is a man of his time and a good one by their standards. He has a very strong concept of what is right and what is wrong. Apparently immoral people should not be written off from evangelism, for they may be more "moral" in some areas than many believers, and may be seeking the Lord's will for their lives and their people's good.

At this point of time Abimelech has far more integrity than Abraham has, which is a poor position for a believer to be in. All sin is against God. Psalms 51:1ff. God tells Abimelech that he is to restore Sarah to her husband or he will be eliminated. This gives Abraham the opportunity to give the gospel to this man. To eliminate a great evil God has intervened on Abraham's behalf, and opened up the opportunity for Abraham to explain himself, pray for Abimelech and receive good counsel from him also.

Abimelech told his leading people what had happened and they were frightened. You will meet people who have been satiated with immorality, yet they are waiting to meet someone who is spiritually real. Abimelech tells Abraham off which is very embarrassing, but it is absolutely right. Abraham shows his spiritual restoration by taking the rebuke, explaining his error of judgment, and praying powerfully for Abimelech and his people. In these things Abraham establishes a true covenant, built upon spiritual reality this time, with Abimelech. This tells us that this man and many in his kingdom may have been saved by the events of this day. When believers get back in fellowship with the Lord good things spiritually start to happen again. No mistake can stop God blessing the serious seeker, so - believers get spiritual again!

Verses 10 – 11. Abimelech asks Abraham why he did such a thing to him. Abraham replies that he believed there was no morality or true religion in this town and he feared, yet he introduced his wife..... Pause and reflect upon this observation in the light of past chapters. Moses is very clear in the way he records these details to remind us that Abraham has no right to lie to protect himself in a situation where he thinks God cannot protect him! Abraham needed to seek the Lord's will in this place and he would have found it had he sat with prayer longer, without deceit being needed. If we ever need to lie, we are probably in a place we shouldn't be, or we are doing something in a way/place that is not prayer saturated and God directed.

Abraham is meant to be in Gerar! This now is clear, is it not? All the unthinking commentator's talk about his being "out of the geographical will of the Lord" is wrong, proven by the verses in this section. Abraham is there to lead these people to the Lord, and they are, under the Holy Spirit's work, ready for the truth, but Abraham has not been as prayerful as he has needed to be to see the will of the Lord in this place. Abraham has not started well, but he recovers quickly, confesses his sin, and prays to the Lord. Abraham's faith isn't perfect every time, but it confesses and is persistent!

The Exodus generation make the same mistakes as they face situations of danger in their journey, and all too often they forget Abraham, and act on the basis of their fear, rather than seek what God is doing through prayer and faith-rest upon his Word. How often do we fall at this same spiritual test? We fear and deceive ourselves and others, rather than seeking prayerfully the path of God through the place we find doubt and fear in.

Verses 12 – 13. Doesn't Abraham's explanation sound weak and pathetic, but at least he takes personal responsibility for the deception; it is not Sarah who dreamed this up. Abraham's lie is not a complete lie, but it deceives others as to their sexual relationship, and marriage is to be honoured and announced. If a man is not proud of, or doubts his wife, and she is not ready to be known as his husband, then the two should not be joined together in holy marriage.

Abraham must have been concerned about Sarah's appearance, dress or behaviours, or he would not ask her to do this thing, and Sarah has not been respectful in her behaviours, nor really valued her marriage, or she would not allow this thing to be said through the years. They have not addressed problems within their marriage for decades, and their neglect of these matters has hindered their child bearing until it is humanly too late. It is of note that they will be able to have children, only when this charade and falsehood at the heart of their marriage is dismissed forever by them both. We should also note here, that at this time the incest prohibition regarding half sisters and half brothers was not in place; it is spelt out by Moses later from the Lord, after Sinai.

ABRAHAM DEALS WITH HIS SIN

Verses 14 – 17. Abraham deals with his sin and confesses. We need to realize that our sin will find you out. In verse 13 Abraham takes personal responsibility for his sins. Abimelech responds with goods and returns Sarah to him. This exchange of "goods" is a covenant between them, and a testimony, like that of Melchisedec before him, that God's hand is upon Abraham, and he is God's man for this generation. He then says to Sarah words that emphasize her failings as a wife through the years. This man has seen her attitude as wrong towards her husband, and puts his finger on her behaviours as the indicator of these things. Abraham is to be a covering to her eyes. Why does he say that?

Because even at her advanced age Sarah is a flirt. Her eyes are everywhere in the room except on her husband. Abimelech had no clue from her behaviour that she was anything other than sexually available. Matthew 5:27-32.

She was reproved by Abimelech because she herself had sinned in her mental attitudes. She now starts seeing Abraham as her lord and has eyes only for him. It is a reminder that couples can have great sex lives together, but still not have eyes only for each other, and so be able to be split up by others, or become bitter towards each other. It is the "one woman man" and the "One man woman" that is God's plan for a happy marriage. In conjunction with this passage read 1 Peter 3:1-9. Out of cursing has come great blessing. Abraham deals with his sin of fear and inattention to Sarah, and Sarah with her sin of flirting, and she starts to truly respect him, and both of them resolve problems in their marriage that have been ignored there for decades.

In Genesis 21:1 she has Isaac after they had both dealt with their sin. Abimelech is touched by both the Word of God and the prayers of Abraham. In matters of great principle we must not compromise, lest our witness is affected, but even if we have messed up badly, the Lord remains gracious and will restore us if we confess and get ourselves right before him. Do not allow anything to get between you and the Lord, and if you sin, get back into fellowship quickly. God restores us, but we must walk close to Him to be useful on this earth. Only the path of God for us has any lasting blessing in it on this earth.

Notice Abimelech's sense of humour in verse sixteen. He reminds them both of their deception, and his words indicate that Sarah may have enjoyed the "game" they played. Abimelech records the gift he has given Abraham as the "fine" for taking Sarah, and underlines the serious cost of their deception. In our terms he has given several million dollars! Sarah gets the message, and in case you think I am too hard on Sarah, Moses notes that she is rebuked and corrected, and received the rebuke graciously, and takes on board the full meaning of the correction. 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Abraham will now pray for the women of Gerar, all of whom who have been affected by his deception, and all of whom have been made unable to conceive children through this period. This is a clue that the events of this chapter may have been played out over several months, as the only way the people would have known that they could not conceive, is that they would go through at least one menstrual cycle without any eggs being fertilized!

For all the women to be aware of this would mean possibly that all women's periods stopped for at least one or more months! This tells us that Abraham was made to really sweat it out with worry about Sarah's sexual fate for quite a long period, and she also has been made to think and reflect. The Lord was really rubbing this lesson in strongly. If we do not get the truth the first time from the Lord, then the next message from him will be harder on us! Hebrews 12:5-14.

PERSONAL AND PASTORAL APPLICATION

1. Lot leaves the pages of redemptive history due to his persistence in carnality. Moses makes the contrast to Abraham who falls into carnality, but recovers, confesses, prays for others and himself, and so remains central in redemptive history. The message to us all is to keep short accounts with God regarding any sin or foolishness on our part, and so be a part of God's redemptive plan.
2. The commentators who abuse Abraham for anything other than his lie to Abimelech err themselves, and have not listened to Moses. This is another chapter where the importance of hearing what Moses says is underlined. Let us let the Word of God speak to us; let us stop telling it what it says before we hear it fully and carefully.
3. Fear is always a sign that carnality is creeping at the door to come in and destroy the fellowship of the believer with his Lord. If we fear, we are away from the sure ground of faith-rest in the Word of God. Let us see fear as a sign of sin, and so act quickly to eliminate it from our thinking, and replace it by believing prayer and clear biblical doctrinal principles applied into the situation. Let us also remember the principle, that if we think about lying, it is because we have already made an error of judgment and need to re-assess our path, for it is a wrong one!
4. We must be wary of quick assessments regarding the morality or spirituality of others. A quick glance may not tell us what is going on, and if the Lord has led us somewhere, we must be particularly prayerful, as the Lord may be working powerfully within the apparently "worst" person we meet. Let us be ready to share the Gospel in all places we go through this life, and be sure we "go" where the Lord wants, for then every person met can be viewed as an "opportunity".
5. God protects his people from their own foolishness. We do not want to press this too far, as Abraham had a lot longer to sweat with worry about Sarah this time than with Pharaoh earlier. God waits to teach Abraham and Sarah truths they need to learn, and God waits for us also! Let us give thanks for God's amazingly patient grace!
6. Dreams may still be used to guide, but they are not to be taken in isolation. Abimelech is careful about interpreting dreams, and we need to be also, especially where they require action. He seeks to get the will of the Lord right, and this must be our focus also. We must ensure that we do things the Lord's way, and that means having words confirmed. Let us beware of those who are always having dreams to guide them, for the greatest people in scripture have few of them, and so if a person who is not doing great work for the Lord is having lots of "guidance" they would be wise to seek confirmation of that guidance, for it is probably not of the

Lord! Also remember that when the Lord speaks the words are very specific and testable/falsifiable. Anything not in this category is also NOT a word from the Lord.

7. Marriage is honourable and to be honoured by both the husband and the wife. Each is to have eyes for his wife, her husband alone. It is sin when we wander the room with our eyes! Jesus made it clear that lustful looks are adulterous and are to be stopped in the mind, before they lead to adultery in the body. We are to guard our marriages from the threat of adultery by looking to our partners alone for sexual satisfaction, and we are not to dress or act in any way that will attract or entice the sexuality of others.

We are to be modest and well turned out in our dress, always appropriate to the situation, and never to inflame lust by our dress. 1 Timothy 2:9-10, 1 Peter 3:3-9. If believers look and act like pagans they cannot blame pagans for considering them sexually available. Abimelech is honourable, but also normal, and he sees Sarah's sexual availability and takes advantage of it. None of us, male or female, are to act or dress in such a way as for this to be possible to happen.

GENESIS CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION

TWO SONS – TWO DESTINIES

At this stage Abraham is an hundred years old whilst Sarah is ninety. However God does not forget a promise. God visited Sarah and did as he said He would; the delay has been caused solely because of the need for Abraham and Sarah to act fully as a devoted husband and wife. They call the name of their child Isaac as the reminder of God's grace, and their response to his promise.

Moses is underlining here that once God says something He means it and will do it. If there is a promise in the Word, then God will use it, applying it's blessing into your life, when you require it. It also says that these things occurred at the set time, or better, exactly in God's time. God's timing is absolutely perfect and both people here have required learning to occur before this event.

Here we have two, sexually regenerated, geriatrics, and it is not going to be a temporary thing. They are going to enjoy their sexual relationship until the death of Sarah thirty seven years later. Abraham is also going to have a large number of children by his second wife Keturah, after the death of Sarah. When God heals he heals perfectly and completely. This is one of the signs of God's work, as against the fake healings of the "faith healers"; for when God heals it is complete, and his provision is always perfectly tailored to the need of his people.

In Genesis 21:4 Abraham circumcised Isaac at the age of 8 days, exactly as God had commanded. In this he is in complete obedience to the Word of God. This was the covenant sign for Israel that is similar today to the dedication of children. The modern Christian family dedicate themselves to bring the child up in the knowledge of the Lord. Abraham is dedicating himself to bring up Isaac as a son of promise, and setting apart Isaac from the pagans around him and declaring him a "Son of the Covenant".

As parents we must be responsible for encouraging our children in genuine Christianity by our personal example, but ultimately it is the individual who has to decide for or against the Lord. We should be role models for our children and see that our family is our first mission field. Things look good for Abraham as we begin, but an old self centred pattern of behaviour, this time from his son Ishmael emerges, and as with Lot, it creates problems for him and his family. Abraham has had to separate from carnal Lot, and now he faces an even harder separation for spiritual impact, he must separate from his own son, who has refused to behave properly and with spiritual dignity.

GENESIS 21:1-21

21:1 And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. 2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. 6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. 7 And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age. 8 And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. 9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. 10 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. 11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. 12 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. 13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation,

because he is thy seed. 14 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. 15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. 16 And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow shot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. 19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. 20 And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. 21 And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.”

REFLECTION

LAW VERSUS GRACE

Now my title for this section is provocative, and of course is taken from Paul's assessment of these events in his letter to the Galatians and the Romans. Paul uses this story as an illustration, an allegory, of the truth about standing in the liberty where by Christ has set us free. Galatians 4:21 – 5:1, Romans 9:6-9. Paul sees the attitude of Ishmael illustrating his legalistic and carnal mind set, and the attitude of God in this matter being the one to give us guidance about our correct approach to legalism and all carnality associated with it.

We are not used to thinking of Legalism in terms of carnality, but legalistic thinking is simply carnality in a super spiritual guise; it is simply worldliness operating from the Old Sin Nature area of strength, rather than from the sinful area of weakness. Legalism has at it's heart a lust based thinking pattern. Pause and reflect upon this and we will come back to this point later.

Verses 1 – 6. The point Moses makes here is strongly made; God keeps his words to us, and we are blessed by all God does for us. Sarah remembers her laughter when she was told about the coming sexual experience, and the resultant birth, and she rejoices in her son, and laughs with all who hear her news. She knows that a birth at this stage of life is unusual, even in this day when old age was common, and so all will laugh with her when they hear her news.

There is joy with the birth of Isaac, and all understand his name's meaning, and thank God through their chuckles. Abraham is obedient and circumcises the boy on the eighth day in accordance with the Lord's command. Moses faced this issue himself during the Exodus and the circumcision of his sons led to his wife leaving him, so I suspect he felt very strongly the impact of these verses. Exodus 4:25-26.

In verse 6 Sarah said that, "God has made me to laugh". This was an open laugh rather than a hidden laugh. The baby she is bouncing on her knee is purely one of grace, and he is a joy to her and to all who hear of the birth, except to Hagar and Ishmael. This birth will be the cause of jealousy and vindictive behaviours, and will lead to the Lord's discipline for them both. For each person there is learning, and Moses is led to record the challenges that each pair have to believe, trust and rest in the Lord. For Sarah the birth is an answer to prayer and a vindication of her own faith. Hebrews 11:11.

We can be hard on Sarah and doubt her faith through this time after the affair of Abimelech, but the writer to the Hebrews does not, and we are best corrected by scripture in our attitudes towards her. No-one would have ever thought it possible that she would have a child, but the Lord has proved them wrong, and vindicated her faith and Abraham's. She now is a woman of faith, a woman who loves and is pre-occupied with her own husband, and in her attitude towards Hagar and Ishmael's attitudes/behaviours she is spiritually discerning, and she is right!

Verses 7 - 8. Sarah rejoices over her breast feeding and there is great joy for the months that this occurs through. Breast feeding was normally about two to four years in the ancient world, and so the events of these verses probably take place through that sort of period.

Ishmael is a late teenage young man when he behaves as he does as described in the next verses, so we are not to treat him as if he is a "poor little boy". He is old enough, and should be secure enough in his father's love to relax and enjoy this younger brother, without feeling threatened by him; he ought to be mentor, not tormenter. As often happens with "blended families" today, there is strife not far away. Fornication always has a sting in its tail, and Abraham pays dearly for whatever pleasure he took with Hagar due to Sarah and his foolishness at that time. Blended families always have serious issues, it is just that the parents are so determined for things to work that they are in denial at times, and it can be fatal denial if there is hatred towards a younger sibling.

Verses 8-9. Evil is always there and it always attempts to sour joy. Remember Jesus words, "By their fruits you shall know them". Matthew 7:16-20. The test for Abraham and Sarah comes in the form of Hagar's son Ishmael, and it comes on the weaning day, when a feast was traditionally held as the child had now reached the stage of being on solid food. Even at this time of joy Abraham's sin has come back to haunt him. Ishmael who is now an older teenager, mocks the young toddler. Keep remembering the ages here; Ishmael is over sixteen and Isaac is between two and four!

To rejoice with others in their joy is a sign of spiritual maturity, and to rejoice with children and their growth stages is the mark of a loving and kind person. Ishmael proves he is neither spiritual, nor kind, as he mocks the toddler and insults the

joy of his father in the birth of this next son. Proverbs 20:11. Ishmael will not hate his brother, and later will save his life when he could have killed him, but let us see this action here as sinful jealousy, and it is dangerous if it grew.

Rejoicing in others joy without drawing attention to yourself is a sign of a spirit filled person, but pouting and drawing attention to yourself is a sign of sin and at times a sign of an evil heart. We are to be people who rejoice in the Lord, and in the joys of our neighbours and spiritual brethren. Romans 12:15, Philippians 2:17, 3:1-3, 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:16. As rejoicing with others in their joy is a sign of the Holy Spirit, just so, mockery is a sign of at best Old Sin Nature selfishness, or at worst, satanic involvement in that individual's life. Nehemiah 4:1-5, Psalms 22:6, 42:10-11, 44:13-14.

Verses 10 - 11. Sarah tells Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael as she does not want Ishmael to grow up with Isaac as she sees, from his attitude, that he will be a possibly fatal threat to Isaac as the true heir. Abraham is sad because he loves Ishmael, but Sarah is correct in her assessment, for Ishmael's attitude shows that over time he may even be capable of murder to secure the elimination of Isaac as the heir and his replacement with himself.

God said to Abraham to listen to Sarah and not to worry as the son of promise is Isaac. Sarah is right in this. Ishmael shows his evil here, as young vandals show their evil today; he is old enough to know what is wrong and right. Sadly he is a danger to the very life of Isaac, and betrays that hatred of the two year old boy that could lead to his murder by an "accident" later. There is real danger here, and parents ignore such behaviours at the peril of the younger children, and in my own counselling practise I have seen children injured/killed by a fake "accident" by a jealous step parent/sibling.

Abraham must see past his love for the young man, who until this point has done no evil, to the possibility of evil occurring now. He must see spiritually and open his eyes to the evidence of Ishmael's actions. Many parents fail their children by lack of correction and by failure to confront evil and name it as such. Ishmael's actions here indicate he is far beyond correction, and is a real and present danger to Isaac and the family itself. From Sarah's reference to Hagar, it is clear that she is involved. Hagar has not forgiven Sarah for her harsh treatment of her sixteen years before. Hagar resents this new child and desires her son's pre-eminence. It is a classic clash of mothers to advance their sons, and it leads to "accidents" in the home, and straight murders throughout royal-family's history!

It is a time of differentiating on a spiritual plain between the son of slavery and the son of freedom, not by their birth, but by their behaviours. Ishmael's birth was the result of Sarah's unbelief and the lust of Abraham, and as such he is the result of worldliness and human works. Isaac is a picture of grace and God's answers to prayer.

Ishmael and Isaac are a picture of the contrast between law and grace. We must be careful and not push this too far, and say that it is all predetermined, for that is not where Paul went with this, and neither did Moses. It is Ishmael's acts that prove he has not become a free and noble young man by his beliefs and behaviours. Even as the son of a slave, he could have been free by the nobility of his actions. This was an age when a slave could rise to be king by his strength of character and the nobility or bravery of his actions. Sadly Ishmael does not have the character, and Hagar does not have the spiritual discernment to see what God is doing and go with the plan. She keeps on playing politics and she loses.

Paul, in Galatians 4:21-29, says that even today Hagar and Ishmael speak of all forms of legalism (political game playing to win God's favour) whilst Sarah and Isaac represent grace. Here Paul also shows that we are related spiritually as believers to Abraham and Isaac as spiritual heirs to the promises and our behaviours are to show discernment and commitment to the plan of God, rather than follow after the lusts of our Old Sin Natures, as Hagar and Ishmael did.

Paul is asking the question as to whether the Galatians are surprised that these legalistic, religious, Jewish unbelievers are persecuting them. You should not be surprised, he argues, because it is exactly the same as Ishmael persecuting Isaac. People who game play for religious power always hate those who depend upon the grace of God.

Paul urges the Galatians and ourselves, "Stand fast in the liberty which sets us free, but expect the slave to hate you and your liberty". Paul uses this situation to show that the free person will not have any safe relationship with the slave. Do not expect respect, love, admiration or integrity from legalists, for they will hate you if you stand for grace in action, just as Ishmael resented young Isaac. Over time this resentment could have become hatred and murder.

Abraham did not want to cast them out, but practically and spiritually he sees that there must be separation now that Ishmael has shown the depth of his resentment for Isaac. There can be no cohabitation between legalism and grace; legalism will always try to kill grace, just as Ishmael, left unsupervised may have killed little Isaac in an "accident". God's standard must be followed and we cannot compromise, as only the son of promise must be the heir, and any compromise spells danger and disaster for the person who compromises. If you compromise truth you are dealing with lies, and such an action is always going to lead to a predictable disaster. Standing for truth and opposing what is false will not be pleasant at times, and may be very hard, and require separation from people you have loved.

Verses 12-13. God answers the prayer of Abraham and that of Hagar here, and says that He is going to make Ishmael a great nation, and he is going to be blessed by association with Abraham. This principle of blessing by association applies today as Jesus said that believers are the salt of the earth in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:13-16. Salt preserves, gives flavour and spices up food. People will be blessed by association with us if they are working in close proximity or association with us, even if they hate us. Ishmael will possibly die as a carnal believer but because of blessing by association with Abraham, he is going to have blessing in this life.

If as a believer you mature, your friends, workmates and family will receive blessing. I have seen this work out in many situations through my life, where unbelievers were blessed by their associations with believers in their business and family life. Hagar and Ishmael will be blessed and the Lord will especially look out for them in their own lives, and even into the next generation they will be blessed. By succeeding away from Isaac Ishmael will lose all bitterness towards him also over time, and so their next meeting will end pleasantly and they will bury their father together.

Verses 14 - 15. Abraham now provides for Hagar and she and Ishmael go and commence their wandering in the wilderness to Beersheba on the way back to Egypt. Now given that Abraham was a multi millionaire the provision he makes for them both appears a bit on the stingy side! This is to think in terms of modern days rather than the world of their day.

Hagar had been given to him as a slave and the price for setting her free would have been significant. To place the water pot on her head and bread in her hands, Abraham was setting her free. A slave that had been set free was known by these two signs and would be able to seek work in any pastoral community, but a slave wandering around with any money or valuable goods in her possession, was either a target for robbery, or was a thief from her master and would have been either killed or returned to Abraham. Only by setting her free and leaving her and Ishmael to make their own living from now on, would Abraham guarantee their security and their future without suspicion that they had stolen from him.

He also recognizes that they must work for their living now as free people, not be provided for. In our welfare day we can expect to be "looked after", where God's order is that we work hard daily for our bread and Ishmael is expected to work hard to keep his mother! They both could have found their place in the household of Abraham and stayed permanently, but they have a root of bitterness and arrogance, and it will be their undoing. They were together in their despising of Isaac and they will share their fate and work together also, but in that they will lose their bitterness. Genesis 3:19, 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 5:6-8, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13.

It should be noted that while there is provision and blessing by association, we cannot say that God loves the unbeliever or carnal believer. He has provided salvation but unbelievers are still enemies of the Cross, and enemies of God until they come to him to be saved. God does not save by His love he saves by His grace through faith. While God will still continue to bless Ishmael, Ishmael will still continue to reject God's way of life, although he does stay in touch with Abraham and Isaac.

It is not clear that he hated God at all, and it is certainly not true that Hagar did, for she is a believer, just a carnal one. The Lord will speak directly with her in love, not as he spoke to Cain. Genesis 4:9-14. My suspicion is that Ishmael is a believer, like his mother, and he is a carnal one like her, but he does love the Lord, and he does still love and respect his father; he does not hate him for his actions this day, and can even join with Isaac, without hatred and they will bury their father together and pass his genealogy on to Isaac, for Moses to write up later. Genesis 25:1-10.

When Paul reflects upon this incident he ties Ishmael's actions in with Esau's later, although Ishmael is not recorded as being "hated", and we must separate him from discussions of Esau. Read through Romans 9:13, and note that it goes back to Malachi and beyond and is blunt in recording God's attitude to those who persist in their hatred of the godly line. "Esau have I hated but Jacob have I loved". God provides potential for all people to be saved through His love but if the person does not respond to that love they remain under God's condemnation and the Lord hates sin and finally, if the sinner does not repent, they are hated by God for the great evil they work, and their destiny is the Lake of Fire. It is Esau's hatred of Jacob that leads to God's hatred of him. Genesis 27:41, Revelation 20:11-15.

So let us pause and reflect again on this issue. Abraham is a millionaire several times over at this stage. What does he give the person who has borne him a son? He gives her a loaf of bread and a jar of water, but before you are outraged at this, hear again what this meant in that day. Abraham does this for good reason in his own day. What he gave was just sufficient to get them to the first waterhole or well. This is the cultural tradition of the time, and is the badge of their freedom, but also teaches a vital spiritual principle to the two of them.

Where a concubine and a child were sent out from a house as free people, they were given just sufficient sustenance to get to the next waterhole. At that point they had to confront the fact that they needed to work to live, and had to start fending for themselves, or they died there. They are being confronted with the reality of their rejection of God's plan, and the natural consequences of their jealousy and resentment of Sarah and Isaac.

Many people with wealth think that if they give their children a lot of money that they will live good and healthy and happy lives. It doesn't work because they have forgotten the Old Sin Nature of man. Money is a curse to those who have no character, and no determined desire to work hard through their entire lives. Abraham has the correct concept, and acts rightly; he sees that it is up to this couple, who have been given a promise from God to trust God. Abraham also sees that Ishmael is at best a carnal believer, and if he is given nothing, the stress that it will put him under may cause him to consider the Lord and the promise and believe. Abraham has set them free and given them the challenge to live as free people and work for their daily bread in honesty and with integrity.

In verses 15 and 16 we find that when they reached the first waterhole with the loaf of bread and pitcher of water they would have been accepted according to the traditions of that day and allowed to work as they would be seen as free refugees from another area, not as escapees or thieves. They have been walking hard and the day is very hot, and they

are both exhausted. They are likely in despair and distress, as they face the full consequences of their plans against Isaac, and their spiteful actions.

After walking away for some distance Ishmael collapses through fatigue, his mother drags him under a bush into the shade, and she goes a little further as she does not want to see her child die and there she laments. She is crying “poor me” and she is responsible for this plight they are both in, for she has brought her son up with the mental attitude that is spiteful. It is simply a fact of life that at times you can do one foolish thing too many and so lose the fellowship of an important person. They have gone too far with Abraham and Sarah and they both know it.

Verses 17-19. For the second time the Angel of the Lord appears to Hagar, and she is told to lift Ishmael up and bring him to a well that is close by. She is told that life is not over for either of them, because her son is going to become the father of a great nation. The Lord opened her eyes and she saw a well of water not too far away. They were going to die within 50 meters of the well. So often people die in the sight of the thing that could save them. A good example of this is an unbeliever dying outside Christ with the whole of creation testifying to the existence and love/grace of God. The Lord delights in opening the eyes of the spiritually blind, and helping the carnal open themselves to the reality of his provision for them. **Ephesians 2:1-6.**

All too many believers make a complete mess of their lives even though the promises and doctrines of God, which could so easily assist them, are within easy reach. They do not read the Bible, they do not believe it or apply it, nor do they go to the places where it is taught. Do not think that if a person sees a mighty work or miracle, that they will believe and get active in the Lord’s work and grow in knowledge of his name. The well being there for Hagar was a miracle of deliverance but Ishmael died as a carnal believer, never achieving all that God intended for his life. Let us not be critical of him, but examine ourselves, for all of us run this danger when we give way to resentment or jealousy, and get our eyes off our called path in the plan of God. Proverbs 17:3, 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Many people see the deliverance of the Lord in their life and work, yet they walk away from godly paths and make money rather than seek to know the Lord’s love and find their place of service for him. Ishmael and Hagar seek their own place of prominence and they will find it, but they will lose their chance to play a great part in the drama of redemption. Yet even they will have many descendents in heaven through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many of the Arab peoples through the years have welcomed the Lord, and many will welcome him on his return. There are many prophetic words in the scriptures about the blessings that will come to the saved amongst the Arab peoples descended from Ishmael and the sons of Keturah who will be born later to Abraham. God is the Lord of grace and he brings blessing out of cursing through faith.

As you think upon this couple, reflect also upon the account of the rich man and the beggar named Lazarus, recorded in **Luke 16:18-31**. In the story the Lord tells, Abraham says to the rich man in hell that even if a person came back from the dead his brothers would not believe if they would not believe the Word of God. Let us witness always to the truth, and not seek for miracles where none would make any difference. The Holy Spirit is able to convince and convict all of truth, with or without any miraculous events. If a sick unbeliever asks you to pray for their recovery, then you should say that you will pray for their deliverance from not only sickness but all the results of man’s sin, so that their future life might truly reflect the glory of God.

Verses 20 –21. Ishmael becomes a hunter and a mighty man. Hagar takes him down to Egypt where he marries an unbeliever and so brings up a mixed family of believers and unbelievers. Some of the sons of Ishmael have troubled Israel even to this day, yet some are believers and are the allies of the truth and God’s people. They are the families of the Jordanian Arabs. Notice, before you accuse Ishmael of being an unbeliever, as I used to do, the word of Moses in verse twenty; “God was with the lad”. This is not said of Cain, or any unbeliever. It is not said of Esau! It must make us conclude that he is a carnal believer, just as “righteous Lot” was.

Lot drops out of the record and is not mentioned again, whereas Moses will mention Ishmael again and tell his story in Genesis 25:12-18. It reminds us that he could have been truly great before the Lord, but his compromises lead to a path further and further away from the Lord. It also tells us that we will meet him in heaven, and he and Isaac will have been getting on well for millennia, and so will all their saved descendents. Salvation unites people, and where the Lord is, there is forgiveness and family bonds of love that cross all racial and cultural divisions that man makes.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. God blesses Ishmael and Hagar even though they will wander further and further away from active fellowship with him. God is not vindictive, nor is he cruel, but always gracious and good to those who love him, even though imperfectly.
2. God does not forget his promises; he keeps his Word. Sarah remembers and laughs daily at the grace and love of God towards her. In the midst of our troubles let us praise God for the answers to prayer yet to come and so prove ourselves true sons and daughters of Abraham and Sarah.
3. We are never too old to change and turn around our spiritual life and destiny. Sarah comes of age at ninety and we can move back into effective ministry at any age; all we need is faith in action. God seeks our obedience to his word and that means we hear it, believe it, and are active in application into the fabric of our daily lives.

4. We are called to rejoice with those who rejoice. A true fruit of the Spirit is being able to share others joy. Resentment and vindictiveness are signs of the Old Sin Nature or worse! We are called to be fruitful in goodness.
5. We are expected to work in this life, and not feel hard done by when we are still working hard in older age. Work is the call for mankind, and as believers we should not expect to be "looked after", but always be ready to work hard, "as unto the Lord", at all times in all ways that will honour Him.

GENESIS 21:22-34

"21:22 And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: 23 Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. 24 And Abraham said, I will swear. 25 And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. 26 And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing; neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day. 27 And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant. 28 And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. 29 And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? 30 And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well. 31 Wherefore he called that place Beersheba; because there they sware both of them. 32 Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines. 33 And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God. 34 And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days."

INTRODUCTION

ABIMELECH AND THE WELL

In the next section Abraham is seen arguing with Abimelech about a well. They have been living together for a while now and Abimelech has seen that Abraham has been with God in all that he does. Abimelech saw Abraham as a strongman and wished to enjoy the blessing associated with him and not be subject to any military pressure from him, but be his ally. We as Christians should be, like Abraham, known for our stand for the truth, our strength before God, and not for being wimps.

People should say to you that although they may not believe what you do, they admire your stand on these matters. The Lord Jesus Christ was never a weak character and did not compromise. When they went to arrest him they took a large detachment of the army numbering over 600. How strongly are we rated by the enemy? Do people respect and admire, even though they may feel convicted by us and hate what we stand for?

Abraham was militarily strong, morally strong and physically strong. He has by this time, turned his back on his sin and walked with God consistently for several years now. In Hebrews 4:1-8, the writer reflects upon Abraham's faith and that of the Exodus generation, just as Moses is as he writes the words before us in Genesis.

We all need to see the need of believing God's Word and mixing it with faith into our daily life. The problem that has emerged is that one of the wells that Abraham has dug has been denied him by force of arms by Abimelech's troops. Abraham says that one of the wells has been taken out of his control, and he speaks directly to Abimelech, who says that he will sort it out. The well is called Beersheba by the days of Moses.

As a memorial of the renewed covenant of peace, and as Abraham's testimony to his belief in the future permanence of settlement there by his descendents, a grove of trees will be planted in verses 33-34 and Abraham lived for many years in the country later known by the Philistines. Remember, these people are referred to as "Philistines" by Moses, yet the group that is finally called by this name and settled in the coastal plain of Israel is several hundred years away from this date as far as we know. We say this from the findings of modern archaeology and their identification with the "Sea Peoples" who invade and trouble Egypt.

We will come back to this point, for the name for the people of Abimelech may have been changed by Moses to reflect the peoples of his day, and then could have been changed again by Ezra who edits this passage to reflect the world he knew existed in the days of the kings of Judah and Israel. Abimelech may have belonged to an earlier group that inhabited what would later be the Philistine area. He has a Semitic name/title and so most likely may have been of Canaanite origin.

The fact that Abraham stayed in this area for a long time is another reminder that those who argue that he was wrong heading south are themselves wrong! Remember the tectonic activity in the Dead Sea area may continue for a number of years and the high hills may remain unsafe with noxious fumes for many years. Abraham is in the will of the Lord firmly here and he is blessed by the Lord and is able to witness to these wild people. Why is Abraham great? He is great

because he is walking with the Lord and in the light of the realities of the promises and commands of God's Word, and he is expressing these things in and through his fellowship with the Lord on a daily basis in prayer and sacrifice.

REFLECTION

Verses 22-24. The group that visits Abraham is an important one, with the King and his Army chief of staff. They have come for an unspecified reason, but perhaps related to the problem with the well that Abraham will later raise with them. There has been a dispute and some trouble at this well, and the Philistine King is concerned that it does not mean war or the threat of it between him and Abraham, yet he probably knows more about the dispute than he lets on.

He values this man Abraham as a godly and strong ally, but he is devious and cannot be trusted. He knows he is God's prophetic voice for him, and may even have been invited to the weaning party for Isaac, so knows that things are moving on well for Abraham in accordance with the plan of God. This man does not want to get out of step with Abraham, for he knows that this is to be out of step with God. Having said this, there is something going on in the background here, and the discussion between the three men is very Middle Eastern, in that a lot is going on under the polite words.

The promise he asks Abraham to make with him is a multi generational promise that will be binding to the third generation. This is a serious request and acknowledges the importance of the family of Abraham to this man. This man has been told by Abraham of God's promises to him, understands the Abrahamic promise of generational blessing, believes it, and seeks blessing by association for his own sons and grandsons.

Yet he is not totally willing to follow through on his side of the bargain, and seeks opportunities to push back Abraham's power when he can, and he, or his son, will do the same to Isaac. Jacob will actually move north away from him and his descendents, possibly to escape from his deviousness. We are left wondering how honest this man is, and how strongly life change has happened in response to his meeting with God in his dream. This may be another example of a person who is touched by the Lord, yet has resisted thorough life change. Moses leaves us thinking, and not fully clear.

He asks for dealings with himself, in accordance to his own dealings with Abraham. This is honest at least, for he seeks no more nor less than he gives out. He asks that there be no false dealing or deception between them, but rather kindness. He is asking for a managerial arrangement of "Win – Win" in all their dealings, and for them to be characterized by kindness and warmth, yet is it really true....?

He sees the blessing of God and possibly the protection of God over him as the benefits to himself, and possibly any trade in animal products will flow through the market at Gerar to the benefit of his economy. For Abraham there is the right to live in the surrounding countryside and pasture his flocks and herds there. For Abraham there is free grazing, but to enjoy this he needs to upkeep the wells and likely give Abimelech early warning of any threat to the city state of Gerar.

The meeting occurs twenty five miles from Gerar in what will be known as Beersheba in Moses day. It indicates that the sphere of influence is extensive around Gerar, and also it indicates that this king and his chief of staff take Abraham seriously as an ally who they visit, rather than as a vassal, who they would call to attend their court in the city. It may also be that this is an inspection tour of frontier wells and outposts by the king, his head of Army and attendant troops.

Moses does not give us the information; perhaps Abraham did not note it on the tablets, as he is trying to tell the story to give Abimelech the benefit of the doubt in this event. Once again we see the mature spirit of Abraham; he is prepared to deal honestly, patiently and with grace, even if the person he deals with may not be totally honest. He is our mentor.

Verses 25 – 26. There has been a seriously violent seizure of the well in question by Abimelech's troops, possibly supporting a group of his herdsmen, or maybe it was just a random patrol. The words used indicate people were killed in this process, so we are at the high point in seriousness. Abraham with dignity and calmness, "reproves" the king.

Once again it is an interesting choice of words for Abraham to use here. It is the same as used for Sarah in Genesis 20:16. It has the meaning of direct statement of fact to convict the person of wrong doing. It is used in such a way that indicates that there was a significant argument on Abraham's part required to convince the king that his men had done wrong. He claims no knowledge of the event at all, blames Abraham for not telling him sooner, or he possibly has an alternative story from his troops who were involved. A serious discussion goes on here, and finally Abraham wins the point.

Once again we are to be reflective of Abraham's mental attitude, lack of pride and arrogance, and quiet temper. People have died, there is a serious breach of trust, and this man has come to him to get him to promise to be trustworthy, when his troops have not been, and revenge killing may occur. This is cause for war, yet Abraham shows patience and diplomacy. He is leaving his destiny and the ownership of the well in the Lord's hands, and seeks a solution without loss of more life. Abraham is morally right, but he doesn't let his "rightness" make him weak or arrogant, belligerent, nor make him unable to compromise to get the best long term solution. Abraham takes the "long view", and it is for this man's salvation, and the eternal significance of what they discuss, not just the injustice done, and revenge/justice now.

Verses 27 – 28. Abraham takes the initiative spiritually to establish a new covenant with the king and to thereby saturate the entire issue in prayer. This is our challenge as believers. Not to end a dispute with an agreement alone, but with prayer for blessing upon our otherwise "enemies". Matthew 5:44. Keep remembering that this king has

taken a well and his men have killed men of Abraham's – blood has been shed, but Abraham ensures no more is added to that already shed.

The first step was the exchange of gifts, but in this case it will not be wealthy, but sacrificial animals that Abraham has. Abraham has been wronged here, but he will give gifts to Abimelech to show good faith and not force the king to lose face. Once again this is the mark of a mature believer. He is prepared to lose face himself, rather than offend the unbeliever who he seeks to win for the Lord. How far are we ready to go? Would we stand with Abraham in this? They make a covenant and Abimelech accepts Abraham's gift. He still has not granted Abraham the right of use, or ownership of the well, nor has he admitted wrong doing.

Verse 28 - 30. Having made the general covenant together of peace and respect, then Abraham sets aside an additional seven ewe lambs. This is strange and Abimelech notices this and asks why he has set them aside as a special gift or offering. I suspect each of these lambs stands for a man who was killed in this incident. Abraham is now ready to secure Abimelech's acceptance of his right to the well, and his acknowledgement that Abraham actually dug the well. In accepting the gift the king acknowledges Abraham's right to the well.

Verses 31 – 34. Abimelech has been outplayed by Abraham and no more blood has been shed. It is a victory for sanity and sanctity over revenge and desire for justice; for spiritual diplomacy over power projection. The king and his chief of staff rise and take their leave and head back to their home. We are left with the picture of great statesmanship in Abraham. He has focused himself on goals and acted in such a way as to ensure he was likely to reach them. He has stayed quiet, calm and prayerful throughout, and so he wins this man's acceptance of his ownership of the well, but even more, he wins his respect as a statesman who has outplayed him, and settled a dispute without further bloodshed.

The name given to the well is Beersheba – meaning, the well of the oath, or the well of the seven. I suspect the latter, as it reflects the memorial nature of the well as the place where the seven men died defending Abraham's right to use what he had ordered dug. To consolidate the well's water supply and make the oasis as pleasant for animals and men as possible, Abraham plants a significant number of trees there. This is the start of a permanent settlement in the area, and indicates that Abraham is a man who thinks ahead for future generations, for when you plant a tree you are thinking of twenty years at least before it is mature. For an old man to plant a tree that will only be great after his death shows that this man is thinking ahead; even of his great grand-children.

We are to be people who see what the Lord is doing with us and think ahead, and so we do things that reflect where the plan of God is going rather than where we are today. This is a faith planting. These trees are still there in Moses day, and the people can touch them and remember that their ancestor dug this well and planted these trees to consolidate the fact that his descendants would live there permanently one day.

He stays in the area many years, and he makes it a centre of worship to the Almighty One True God, as a reminder that it is the Lord's will and his plan that is to be followed, not the plans of men. The message of Beersheba is clear - disputes are to be settled in prayer where ever possible, and that we are to see what God is going to do, as if it has already been done. Faith and Grace are always to dominate, not Justice. Beersheba is a place that reminds us of faith thinking; of claiming the future as if it is present, and living in faith-rest in the promises and protection of the Lord.

Hebrews 11:1-3. *"1. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
2. For by it the elders obtained a good report.
3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."*

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Abraham is strong, but gentle and diplomatic. He is not quick to shed blood over a wrong committed. Many believers need anger management, but this man does not now. He is calm and focused on the end goal, which is that the plan of God is paramount in his life, and it's fruition is what he seeks, and that alone. Let us focus upon the plan of God alone in our own lives and not be distracted by any personal agendas or trying to right any personal insults. We are ambassadors and that means all insults are "as unto the Lord" – matters for prayer only, never any personal revenge.
2. Prayer saturated decision making is required from us in all things. Abraham places himself in God's hands and allows the king to feel he is superior throughout the debate they have. He allows the king to believe he has won a new treaty and avoided the ownership issue of the well, thereby securing his claim to it. Abraham waits until the last moment to nail the truth and he does it with spiritual precision. Let us be thoughtful, prayerful and careful in our debates with men, and seek the Lord's path through any dispute, especially those where we feel wronged personally. Remember, we are the Lord's ambassadors and an ambassador takes nothing seriously personally, for any insult is against his king, not himself.
3. Abraham plants the trees as a testimony to the future. He sees with eyes of faith that his descendents will live in this place and he plants trees for the next generations to enjoy the well he dug. He sees the future as if it is the present. This is our challenge also. Let us see as God sees history and our place in it, and so do the things the Lord requires of us in Holy Spirit power and focus.

REFLECTION UPON THE LAWS OF LIBERTY AND RESPONSIBILITY

1. THE LAW WHICH WE ARE NOT UNDER - THE MOSAIC LAW

Christ fulfilled the requirements of the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5:17). If the Holy Spirit has control over us we automatically fulfil the righteousness of the Law.

2. THE LAW OF LIBERTY

This law is directed towards oneself. Biblically speaking you have the right to do certain things that will not cause you personally to fail the Lord in any way. (1 Corinthians 8:8)

3. THE LAW OF LOVE

This law takes other believers into consideration. In effect this law says that because of your love for the weaker brethren and in order not to offend or upset them you refrain from doing certain things which you have the liberty to do.

You refrain not because they are wrong in themselves but rather you wish to help other believers rather than hinder them. (1 Corinthians 8:9)

4. THE LAW OF EXPEDIENCY

This law concerns the unbeliever. It is expedient that your life tells the world of Christ. The unbeliever has set up standards of conduct for the Christian.

Therefore you refrain from or do certain legitimate things - not because they are wrong but because they may offend an unbeliever and prevent him from seeing the real issue that Christ Died For His Sins (1 Corinthians 9, 20-23)

5. THE LAW OF SUPREME SACRIFICE

This law is directed towards God. It involves the believer forsaking a completely legitimate function in life in order to more perfectly serve the Lord. Missionaries often function under this law when they live in primitive conditions on the mission field. This law can also operate under Australian conditions. (Matthew 3:1-6)

6. PRINCIPLE:

As Christians we have liberty, but total freedom for ourselves may enslave others. We have to use our liberty in such a responsible manner that it does not infringe on the liberty of others. As Christians we must act responsibly. (Ephesians 5:15)

NOTES

GENESIS CHAPTER 22**INTRODUCTION**

The New Testament passages that relate to this passage are Hebrews 11:17-19 and James 2. As we enter this section of the story of Abraham pause and reflect on the fact, that for you, just like Abraham, God has a plan for every believer. He will work his plan out to our benefit, and for His glory, but only as we are in fellowship with him. We rob ourselves of blessing every moment we are out of living fellowship with the Lord.

Abraham is a great example of how to take courage, recover from troublesome times of foolishness, and get back and stay in fellowship longer and longer through our life. We are urged to keep short accounts with God; to deal with sins that separate us from the Lord quickly and so restore ourselves to vital and active fellowship as quickly as we can. Abraham has learnt to stay close to God. Let us also learn this lesson as we go through the account of his life. The stories are here for examples to us. Moses wrote this all up to be a living example to the Exodus generation, and his words stand through the centuries to encourage us to follow good mentors in spiritual things. 1 Corinthians 10:11, Philippians 3:17.

If you are having testing situations in your life presently, God will use them for your spiritual growth, so that you can progress in the Christian life. He does this by encouraging us to apply his truth into the fabric of the situation and so transform it from a challenge into a cause of rejoicing. Psalm 62:5 – “My soul, wait only upon the Lord, for my expectation is only of Him.”

We should not get discouraged, for in anything we face we can have the confidence of knowing that the Lord has woven this into our life experience in eternity past, and it is here to bring us to glory at a higher and more celebratory level. Testing is an opportunity for the Christian who is walking in faith; it is a nuisance to those who persist in carnality. We must get used to walking in faith, and practice rejoicing through our troubles.

In this chapter we have the great, and unique test for Abraham; that of the offering of Isaac, with its many pictures of the Cross. This is a prophetic picture of the offering of Christ. It is a great test and it is unique, as no-one else has, or ever will be, asked to do this, for it was a once only illustration of the love of God for the Lord Jesus, and having had one illustration of this, it is enough. The picture here became terrible reality on the cross. As we go through this chapter, remember that the event played out on this mountain is a shadow of things to come in that place.

GENESIS 22:1-10

“22:1 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. 2 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. 3 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. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. 5 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 to you. 6 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. 7 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? 8 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. 9 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. 10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.”

REFLECTION

In **verses 1-2** God does not tempt, as stated in the KJV, but is testing Abraham to see what he is made of. Testing - the word Peirazo in the Greek, Nasah in the Hebrew. The word means, to try or prove the reality of something, or to demonstrate the true nature of the thing tested. A good example is the touch mark on the top quality ceremonial sword where a sword is bent double to touch the touch mark and returns to its original shape without fracture. The sword is tested to prove it is best quality, and just so Abraham is tested to prove his worth, not break him under the strain of it.

God tests our metal in a test, to ensure we are seen by all to be the pure steel, as he has made us through the Holy Spirit; only persistent sin weakens us. Abraham has failed a number of times, but each time he has been restored and he is ready for the test. When we fall we do not lose permanent strength in the Spirit, but when restored we have all the power in the Holy Spirit we had before. God does not restore us with only 80% if we failed, he restores us 100%, ready for service again. By walking in the Holy Spirit's power we have the ability, in Him, to serve in all things we are required to do.

God does not test us so that we will break, 1 Corinthians 10:13. Here we have an opportunity for Abraham to celebrate his spiritual life; a test for his faith is designed to build strength and develop witness. Growth in the Spirit only comes through meeting tests like this in the power of the Spirit. Notice that the test centres around the relationship that Abraham

has with Isaac; it is the relationship of an only son, and his only beloved son, the son of promise. Matthew 3:17, 17:3, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22, 9:35, 20:13ff.

We are all accepted in the beloved one, because of his sacrifice for us upon the Cross. We become beloved of God ourselves in Christ Jesus through his work for us. 1 Corinthians 4:14, Ephesians 1:6, Philippians 4:1, Colossians 3:12, 1 John 3:2. All this is pictured in Abraham's quiet confidence as he walks with Isaac towards their date with destiny; two men, beloved to each other, and beloved of God.

Abraham's test here was extreme, but we will all be regularly tested as we advance in the spiritual life. Everything you learn as you go through the scriptures will be tested by the Lord through the situations you will "find yourself in" through the weeks after learning something from the Word. Be looking for tests in your life, and see them as opportunities for application of what you have learned. 2 Timothy 2:15 states, "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed; rightly dividing the Word of Truth", and we could add, and applying it into the fabric of our daily lives. Hebrews 4:2. We should always mix the Word of God with our faith application. Each test is always in God's perfect time, even though we may be exhausted at the time, and surprised often by its power or subtlety. Let us be alert this day and every day for the challenge.

Abraham is to go to the area called Moriah, and he will be shown a mountain, and on that mountain he will offer his son as a sacrifice. Moriah means "to cause to be seen by the Lord". It has been widely accepted as a tradition, that this is Golgotha, the place of the skull, although its exact location may not have been known, even in Moses day. Abraham did not know the symbolic nature of his actions, but as an example, 2,000 years before the Cross, he is going to take his only son to Golgotha as a sacrifice. This is of course a parallel to God sending His only Son to die on the Cross for the sins of the world.

Verses 3-5. This is where we see what walking in faith does to a man's life over time. Here we see a much more mature believer than we met leaving Ur, or even after defeating Chedorlaomer. It takes three days to get to the Mount and during this time he is not upset, nor anxious, even though he is going in obedience to God, ready to kill his son. The calmness of the man is seen in the fact that he saddles his ass, and prepares for the journey, and cuts the wood, and is ready to do exactly what the Lord has told him to do. It is important that if you have a call of the Lord, that you prepare for the task thoroughly, carefully and prayerfully. The Lord's next piece of guidance is always given once the first has been fully completed!

Even after this current course of study, if you have been called by the Lord to the ministry, or to teach, you will need to plan, and follow through, on a continuing course of action and study, to be able to fulfil the Lord's requirements. Abraham shows that he is not worried, that God will provide, and that he and Isaac will come back again together, and alive. He walks in faith, is active, and moves forward to his date with destiny. This is the mental attitude that is demanded of us; to be ready to leave our homes and head out to be obedient to the Lord in what he has asked of us. We can never lose out in the Lord's work, for he promises more and more blessing as we advance. Mark 10:23-31, Hebrews 11:13-19, 12:1-3.

He is going to the top of the hill prepared to cut his teenage son's throat on an altar. When they climb up the hill Isaac will carry the wood. Abraham's faith is so strong that he is convinced that even if this goes right through God will raise Isaac from the dead. He has no doubts at all, for all the promises of God centre in Isaac, and they cannot be fulfilled if Isaac is dead, and so he quietly follows the instructions through to the last minute.

Now **I repeat**, no-one nowadays will ever be commanded to do this. It happened once only to demonstrate a point of doctrine. If any person believes they are meant to do this as their test of faith, then that person is mentally ill and needs professional assistance. The Holy Spirit will **never ever** lead any person to do this again, for it only needed to happen once. Make sure pastor, if you are teaching this to a group that you mention this fact, for occasionally a mentally ill person will hear this story and their delusional mind may fixate upon it and be led astray. Eliminate that possibility by strong teaching on this point.

There are a number of illustrations in the Old Testament that portray different aspects of the Lord's person and work. In a similar way to the above, we have in the account of the ministry of Jonah the fact that he was three days and nights in the belly of the large fish, portraying the death and resurrection of our Lord. Jonah 1:17 – 2:10.

Verses 6 – 7. Abraham now takes the fire and the knife, and he puts the wood on Isaac, just as the wooden cross will be placed across the shoulders of the Lord 2000 years later, and they proceed up the hill [verses 6-10]. Isaac notices that there is no lamb, and rightly raises the question, and Abraham assures him that God will provide a lamb.

God did provide His own lamb, one on the top of this hill caught in a bush of thorns, just as he would provide the thorn crowned Saviour-Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep in mind that Isaac is not a toddler here; he is at least sixteen years of age and well able to resist his father in any way. His faith is tested with his father's faith.

There are two tests on this hill; the test of a father's love, and the test of a son's obedience. Ishmael had been badly brought up by Abraham, and was sarcastic and abusive, but Abraham has used every year that has passed and been the correct example to his son Isaac, and has brought him up in godliness, and so his son trusts him implicitly in this matter, for he knows his father's spiritual status. This is the highest praise we can give our parents, and our children give to us; that they recognize our spiritual maturity and trust our advice and life path.

Verses 8-10. Abraham has left behind the servants that accompanied them, for this is a special moment and only the two of them are to be there before the Lord; it is about these two men who carry the promise of God, not about a cloud of witnesses, for the angels are their witness on this mountain. **Hebrews 12:1-3.**

Abraham builds an altar and binds Isaac, with his co-operation, for as a young man he was well able to resist had he doubted his father's love, sanity, or divine guidance. Abraham then places Isaac on the wood and raises his knife in preparation to killing his only son. Abraham is a hundred and ten years old whilst Isaac is a vigorous older teenage young man who could have resisted his father if he wanted to. He however submitted to his father because he trusted in him, but more, he trusted that God was doing something to teach them both a vital lesson about their unique role in life through this unique event, and help them both understand the tasks that would be theirs in the years to come. **Isaiah 53:6-12, James 2:21-26.**

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Both Abraham and Isaac have had things to learn over the last sixteen plus years, and the test comes only when they are ready to face the truth behind the event, as to what is the faith-rest life for them both. Does their love and trust in the Lord reach as high as it needs to for them to be the men they must be in the years to come? Such a test will not come to any of us, but a similar level of trust is required of us by our Lord, and in the work-life challenges, and the financial crises we face, we are asked by the Lord, "Do you love me?" Peter was challenged this same way. Read John 21:15-24.

2. Abraham was thoughtful about what was needed for the trip the Lord asked him to take. He got everything ready in advance (except the lamb) and headed away with all he would need for the journey out and the return journey. He was ready and prepared and did not expect others to support him or get the special things ready. Too many believers think they can head into the Lord's work unprepared and without total devotion to the task personally.

An unprepared person is an inadequately trained and unready person, and the Lord will **NOT** use them, and while their call may be genuine, their lack of thought proves they are unready to serve in major tasks. Faith is always practical; practical preparedness is a fruit of spiritual maturity. If you meet an unprepared Christian asking for support, advise them to read this passage, and come back to you in a few years, for they are not worthy of the Lord's money before they spend their own time and effort in preparedness for service.

3. God does not test to break us down, but to build us up. There is no negative thought or feeling within the Lord towards us. We are under his greater grace, not the objects of his derision or despair, even when we fail. Remember the words of 2 Timothy 2:11-13. We are his in Christ Jesus, and he cannot deny himself!

4. Love and trust go together. Jesus did not trust people who did not love Him, for he knew what evil was within those who are indifferent about God! John 2:24-25. Read these verses and quote them often to yourself, especially any time you are tempted to trust people whose love you do not know really well. We are not called to trust people; only fools trust people whose character they do not know! Stick with the Lord and trust no-one, until they prove they can be trusted by their consistent and stable love for you! Isaac trusts his father Abraham because he has watched his witness for over sixteen years now and he knows that what his father says, he means, and it is true. Let this be our witness to our children, our spouses, and our friends.

5. Abraham has failed before, and he will fail again, but each time he is restored by confronting his error, dealing with them, and setting his life back on the track the Lord has called him to. When God restores us he does so 100%, never at a reduced percentage each time we sin. Men think in terms of punishment, God thinks in terms of discipline for greater service and power. When we confess we return to the place of power 100%; our challenge is to stay there longer this time and enjoy God's grace, rather than plod through his discipline. Hebrews 12:11-15.

REFLECTIONS UPON CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

1. True Christian character is Christ likeness. Ephesians 4:13.
2. True Christian character is produced by dealing with sin regularly. 1 John 1:5-10.
3. True Christian character is produced by feeding on God's Word and applying it in life in the power and filling of the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 4:1-16.
4. It is being in tune moment by moment through prayer with the will of God for our life, by being responsive to the Holy Spirit in all the daily details of life. Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19.
5. Character is formed by the power of God working on/in every detail of an obedient, yielded life. Romans 12:1-2.
6. Character radiates God's power and presence through the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23, Colossians 1:11.

Reflections upon the daily CHRISTIAN LIFE

1. God is pleased with believers
 - a) By asking for the right things. (1 Kings 3:9, 10)
 - b) By living a separated life. (2 Timothy 2:4)
 - c) By doing his will. (Hebrews 13:20, 21)
 - d) Walking in fellowship with him. (Hebrews 11:5, Genesis 5:24)
 - e) By praising God. (Psalm 69:30, 31)
 - f) By resting by faith in God's provision. (Hebrews 11:6)

 2. The Christian life involves walking.
 - a) in the Truth (2 John 4)
 - b) by means of faith in wisdom. (2 Corinthians 5:7, Colossians 4:5)
 - c) in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25)
 - d) in Love. (Ephesians 5:2)
 - e) in newness of Life. (Romans 6:4)
 - f) worthy of our vocation. (Ephesians 4:1)
 - g) worthy of the Lord. (Colossians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:12)
 - h) honestly as in the day. (Romans 13:13)
 - i) in good works. (Ephesians 2:10)
 - j) in light. (Ephesians 5:8, 1 John 1:7)
 - k) in Christ Jesus. (Colossians 2:6)
 - l) circumspectly. (Ephesians 5:15,16)
 - m) as ye ought. (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

 3. The Christian life demands honourable conduct:
 - a) Believers have freedom in Christ (Galatians 5:1), but our conduct must not
 - i) harm the weak. (1 Corinthians 8:9);
 - ii) be hypocritical (1 Peter 2:16);
 - iii) does not edify (1 Corinthians 10:23);
 - iv) lead to habits which enslave (1 Corinthians 6:12);
 - v) lead to self-indulgence (Galatians 5:13);
 - vi) offend personal conscience (Romans 14:5).
 - b) Our conduct towards God.
 - i) Done in His Name. (1 Timothy 6:1)
 - ii) As unto Him. (Colossians 3:23)
 - iii) For His glory. (1 Corinthians 10:31)
 - iv) To be worthy of Him. (1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5)
 - c) Our conduct towards others.
 - i) Be a good example. (Romans 14:7; 1 Timothy 4:12)
 - ii) Worthy of our calling. (Ephesians 4:1)
 - iii) Honest. (2 Corinthians 8:21)
 - iv) Free from the appearance of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:22)
 - v) Helpful to a neighbour. (Romans 12:18; 15:2)
 - vi) Not a cause of stumbling. (Romans 14:13)
 - vii) Honouring one's parents. (Colossians 3:20)
 - viii) Honouring to the government. (Titus 3:1)
 - ix) Must not entail unequal yoking. (2 Corinthians 6:14)
 - x) Not to judge others (Romans 14:10-13)
 - xi) Not to cause others to stumble by our actions (Romans 14:15, 21-23)
 - d) Our conduct towards self.
 - i) Pure and not lustful. (1 Timothy 5:22; 1 Peter 2:11)
 - ii) Must not defile. (1 Corinthians 3:17; Titus 1:15)
 - iii) Must not condemn. (Romans 14:22)
 - iv) Must do good works. (Titus 3:8)

 - e) This conduct is only obtainable under the filling of the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18; 1 John 1:9).
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4. The Christian life demands diligence:
 - a) Love towards others. (Galatians 2:10, 2 Corinthians 8:8). We should be eager to help those who are less fortunate than ourselves especially by giving them the gospel.
 - b) We should be keen to take care of the saints (other believers) (Hebrews 6:11, 2 Corinthians 7:12, 2 Corinthians 8:16,17, 2 Timothy 1:17)
 - c) We should be eager to rest in the promises and principles of God. Happiness comes from this. An example of not resting in the promises is the Exodus generation.(Hebrews 4:11)

- d) Confirmation of our calling (2 Peter 1:5, 2 Peter 1:10) We should witness for Christ eagerly, zealously.
- e) Unity of the body. (Ephesians 4:3) We should be zealous in maintaining the unity of the body.
- f) For the commendation of God. (2 Timothy 2:15). Be eager to show yourself approved by God.
- g) To have a life without spot or blemish. (2 Peter 3:14) We should walk close to the Lord and not expose ourselves to unnecessary areas of temptation.

GENESIS 22:11-24

“11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. 12 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. 13 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. 14 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. 15 And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, 16 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: 17 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; 18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice. 19 So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba. 20 And it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children unto thy brother Nahor; 21 Huz his firstborn, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram, 22 And Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and Bethuel. 23 And Bethuel begat Rebekah: these eight Milcah did bear to Nahor, Abraham's brother. 24 And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, she bare also Tebah, and Gaham, and Thahash, and Maachah.”

REFLECTION

Verses 11 - 12. Abraham has his knife poised. He is at prayer as he readies himself to plunge the knife into his son's throat. The Angel of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ in pre-incarnate form, speaks to him by name and Abraham replies that he is ready to receive new orders. The phrase “Here I am”, is the equivalent of the military, “reporting for orders Sir!” The Lord tells him not to kill his son. Abraham had demonstrated very graphically that he trusted God implicitly. Now remember, this was a unique event.

No-one else **has ever been, nor will anyone else ever be, asked to do what Abraham did here.** I keep repeating this, for we have many mentally ill people wandering into church service these days and they need to be warned about this, so that the enemy does not create a tragedy out of a delusion. It was an event that uniquely looked forward to the Cross, and so it is never duplicated, nor ever should be, but each of us is to take lessons from it.

The person who is speaking to Abraham is the one who 2000 years later will go to the Cross. At that point he will die for the sins of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and for you and I. Our salvation was provided by the perfect son, the only Son of God, through his perfect obedience to the plan of God.

The Lord now explains why he tested Abraham's faith; it was to see that he would hold nothing back in her service to fulfill the Lord's plan for his life. Abraham has had a problem holding back and valuing his wealth, and he has learned that through the incident with Melchisedec and the king of Sodom, but now he has proven to all that he has defeated all ego centered thinking, for he is ready to give up his own son to the Lord.

Pause here and reflect upon this yourself. Do you want your children to be professionally and financially successful? It is not wrong to answer, “Yes I do”. But let me push you one step further. Do you want your children to follow the Lord in all things, where ever that means they go? Would you offer up your children to missions with joy, knowing they would never make lots of money, and knowing that all their degree work would be judged by some to have been “in vain”?

Are we ready to put our children on the altar of the Lord's service? This is the demand of the Lord to all of us who are parents. The Lord has made sure that I have had to face this test before writing this chapter, and that is why this study is so much better than the original twenty years ago! On my trip into Africa in 2006 I took my second daughter, then aged 20 years. My prayer as we flew into the mission situation was that the Lord would enliven her heart for missions if that was his purpose for her. She embraced the mission and the Lord moved upon her to convict her of her need to prepare for work in teaching teachers in the needy places of this world. She was a surgically qualified Vet Nurse, and this skill is still used, and she set her path to gain an additional degree in teaching, and post-grad in educational psychology.

She was in 2014, already well on her way towards what the Lord has for her, with her degree in education and advancing into her senior teaching, gaining experience. She has gone on to become an Assistant Principal in a poor school assisting students, 2020, who would otherwise become casualties of the system. I rejoice that I am still ready “to lose her to Africa or anywhere”, for that is the Lord's call to me as her parent. They are responsible for their choices, but I am responsible for my commitment of them to the Lord and for encouraging them in any way I can. All my girls are a gift from God to us, and we pass them back to the Lord that they might win eternal reward in the service of the one who gave himself for us all. I want them all to play their part in the great unfolding drama of redemption. I do not want them to be

anywhere else in this life, but in God's place for them. I do not wish wealth, power, or fame for them, but significance and eternal rewards. This is the application for us all from this account of events on Mt Moriah four thousand years ago. **Romans 5:1-11, 8:31-39.**

Verses 13 – 14. The perfect provision of the Lord is now given in the form of a ram in a thicket. The ram is taken and offered in the place of his son. In the place of Isaac the ram died, in the place of all of us Christ died. Abraham has already been taught about the Ram as a sin offering. Genesis 15:9-11. The ram simply stands for the perfect sacrifice for sin that will occur in that future day, but in making it Abraham and Isaac express their faith in God's plan, their gratitude to God for his provision, and their on-going commitment to God's path for them both through this life. **Psalms 40:1-11, Isaiah 30:18-21.**

Man deserves to die but God provides a substitute sacrifice to die for man. Abraham sees many things from this provision. He sees that God's provision never fails, that He provides cleansing from sin and a Saviour to take away sins forever. The hill on which this happened is renamed to reflect Abraham's learning. It is now called Jehovah-Jireh, meaning, "God will provide". This is a wonderful name to give the hill of Golgotha because on this hill 2000 years later God provided the solution to all of man's problems.

In **Hebrew 11:17-19** we have the doctrinal background to this episode. This shows that Abraham was confident that God would be able to perform what he had promised and even raise Isaac from the dead. This is where your faith will take you, where God's Word will be more real to you than the challenge of the test, and that irrespective of how difficult your situation is, you will still claim God's Word rather than panic. You leave it in the Lord's hand. As he walked up the hill Abraham was in God's hands, as he lifted the knife he was in God's hands, when he heard the Lord and turned around he was still in God's hands.

We must always see things through God's Word, looking at things through divine viewpoint. Abraham praised the Lord for His provision, and Isaac also had a graphic experience regarding the doctrine of substitution. The message of Paul in **2 Corinthians 1:9-11**, is the message here; that we do not trust ourselves, but in the God who raises the dead to life. The centrality of the doctrine of resurrection is underlined here.

We must build up the habit of trusting God in the small things of life so that when the big things come we will automatically have confidence in trusting God. REMEMBER THE VERY CONCEPTS OF "BIG" AND "SMALL" ARE IRRELEVANT TO THE LORD. An old teacher-preacher, Dr De Hann once said, "When God is doing something wonderful he begins with difficulty, but when he is about to do something spectacular he begins with impossibility".

In our life, nothing is big to God; all things relating to our lives are small to the Lord. The very creation itself is "finger work" to God. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Genesis 18:14, Psalms 8:3. It is trusting God moment by moment, meditating on his Word day by day that is of great importance in our Christian life 1 Timothy 4:15, James 1:19. We are in God's hands in all things, and underneath us at all times are the everlasting arms of the power that made the universe. Deuteronomy 33:27-29, John 10:28-29.

Let us summarize the lessons from this passage:-

- [a] - When you are growing in the Lord you will be tested to produce more strength in your growth.
- [b] - The Lord must be first in your life for then all else flows in it's right order.
- [c] - No believer can know the blessing of God without resting in the Lord's love.
- [d] - The Word of God must be more real to you than anything else.
- [e] - God remains faithful no matter how unstable we are.
- [f] - God has a substitute for us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [g] - You never lose by offering your best to God. God doesn't use casual or flippant, but he always uses passion.

In **James 2:17 – 21**, James shows faith and works together. The dynamic combination of faith and works will be seen in the life of every believer, if we are walking in fellowship. Here we see the results of many years of Abraham walking with God. He did not just say, "Amen I believe that God can do it", he obeyed God and travelled to the mountain and was ready to obey to the end.

Your actions should show all men that you are justified. Faith which is true faith will not stand alone but will work out in the life in acts which demonstrate the faith. Faith without works is dead, empty of power, or unproductive. If you will apply the Word into the daily fabric of your life then you will have the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 15 – 17. The Lord speaks a second time to Abraham after his sin/thanksgiving offering. Once again the point is made, that the Lord deals with us as we are obedient to the commands we have received from him. Abraham has prayed, worshipped, and offered up the offering in Isaac's place, and so the Lord tells them both that through Isaac

there will be abundant blessing and lasting impact upon history itself. God swears by himself, as there is no higher name to claim. Hebrews 6:13-20.

The promise is, that with God's great blessing, he will be blessed! It is the certainty of blessing that is underlined, just as Abraham's certainty that God would answer his prayer was the basis of his personal confidence as he and Isaac travelled to, and then walked up the hill. God is the God of certainty; we can depend upon his character and grace, and so we can rest in his promises, and can be confident of receiving his blessings in time and eternity. Obedience to the Lord opens the door for lasting blessing. Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

Verses 18 – 19. Notice that the blessing comes to all the nations of the earth through Abraham's obedience. The point Moses makes strongly here, is that which is recorded in the tablets, but which he realizes as he writes this is the message for the Exodus generation, as it is for all peoples in all ages. What Abraham recorded over five hundred years before is relevant to the Exodus Generation and Moses sees the Holy Spirit's power of it for them as he edits the records to produce our book of Genesis. He is encouraged and challenged and so are we.

We are called to trust and obey the Lord; without these things we cannot please God. We must be hungry for his Word and quick to believe and apply it, or we cannot serve as we are meant to. Abraham returns to Beersheba and dwells there many days on the outskirts of the country of Abimelech. God blesses him there, and this is another testimony to the fact that his journey to the south west was of God. Also remember that the smoke from the area of the Dead Sea is probably rising for a decade or more and the area slowly would settle down as a polluter, only as the Jordan River's waters slowly filled the basin and created the lake we see today. The south west was the best place to be until the end of Abraham's life, as the most sheltered from the tectonic pollution still probably flowing from the Dead Sea area.

Verses 20 – 24. The family of Abraham's brother Nahor is now mentioned. This is likely another tablet, with family genealogy and history upon it, but Moses selects out only the material that is relevant to where the story is going, not where these inconsequential people end up. These people are mono-theists, but the spirituality of their men folk is suspect, and other than providing important spiritual wives for the men of Abraham's line they will drift off the page of redemptive history. Remember the words of James on this, James 2:19-20. Monotheism is also the devil's belief and he knows it is true and trembles at the thought. If our "faith" does not produce more than devilish trembling at the truth then our faith is no better than Satan's and hid doesn't save or transform him! True faith transforms every detail of life.

Once again, as you read these names, remember each was a person with a family, yet they played no active part in what God was going to do, for they were not devoted to the plan of God as Abraham was. The challenge for each of us is to be like Abraham, and so be people who make a difference, not like the family of Nahor, who just blend into the background of their pagan neighbours. Faith that is not powerfully real is not worthy of the name! **James 2:19-26.**

It has been decades since Abraham has heard of the affairs of his extended family in Haran. A caravan brings news of Haran and he hears from the traders that his brother has had children by means of his wife Michah, and by means of his second wife (concubine – de-facto wife) Reumah. He has had twelve children, like Jacob will have, but they will all evaporate, except those who enter Abraham's line and live in accordance with genuine faith.

One will enter the line of Isaac in the next generation, and that is a great niece by the name of Rebekah. It will be of the family of only one of Nahor's sons, Bethuel, whose daughter Rebekah, and son Laban, will produce the next generation in the redemptive family of God. They are believers and Rebekah desires godliness, whereas the people amongst whom Abraham, Isaac and Jacob live are ungodly and make a habit of walking away from the Lord. Genesis 27:46 – 28:5.

PERSONAL AND PASTORAL APPLICATION

1. God is the Lord of all, and so his words to man are certain and sure. We rest upon the holy and perfect character of the One who made the universe and has provided salvation for us all. What God says he will do, and our challenge is to rest upon his Word, trusting God's Plan, Power, and Purposes working out.
2. The family in Haran will produce three key women who will be the mothers of the nation of Israel. One godly son of Nahor, Bethuel, is the crucial lynch pin in the plan of God. He is not called to do anything other than be a good father and grandfather, so that these three girls grow up in the knowledge and faith of the true God. He does that and bows off the page of history. Let us not seek for any part in the divine drama of redemption, other than the one the Lord has called us to. Let us play our part by walking in faith and love of our Saviour God, and by being obedient to the commands of the Lord.
3. Let us offer our children on the altar of the Lord's service, being ready for our children to do anything that brings glory to God through their fulfilment of the plan of God for their earthly lives. Let us not seek worldly fame, wealth or power for them, but the things that God has for them as obedient servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave his all for us, so let us give all our family to Him for his glory now and in eternity.
4. Nothing in our life is "big" to God. No problem we face presents any problem to the one who made the universe. Let us relax in the care, love and provision of the Lord for us. He knows our needs and will meet all our requirements. Let us cast all our cares upon him, for he cares for us and has met all our needs in eternity past as a part of his eternal plan. 1 Peter 5:7. Let us with confidence approach the throne of glory in our prayers, for we approach the one who has already given us all we can ever need to live lives worthy of his grace.

GENESIS CHAPTERS 23**THE DEATH OF SARAH AND A WIFE FOR ISAAC****INTRODUCTION**

Chapter twenty three opens, and about another fifteen years have passed since the events on Mt Moriah. Sarah dies at the age of 127 years. Don't let anyone tell you these ages here are "myth". The oldest woman of the last century died at 122 years of age, and she lived in an age of great atmospheric pollution and impure food supplies. Her name was Jeanne Calment of France; she lived from 1875 – 1997.

In the story of Sarah and Abraham we are dealing with history and Moses is very careful about recording dating details from the original clay tablets. Abraham now thinks of the son of promise and the finding of a bride for Isaac. Here Abraham is seen to be well advanced in age, at least 137 by the opening of the chapter. Isaac is at least thirty years of age, probably older, for he will be forty years old when he marries Rebekah. Genesis 25:20. Abraham is blessed of God and enjoying spiritual blessings as a mature believer and the previous fifteen or so years have been quiet ones, with family and farming life running their yearly cycles.

He is going to ask his chief servant to place his hand under his thigh, which is a way of making an oath in the ancient world, and he is going to ask him to swear to follow through on the most vital task he has ever been given. The reason for the oath was to ensure the servant did not find a Canaanite woman for his son as a wife. He did not want the son of promise to be married to a woman who did not share their faith in God and their expectation of the Lord's action in history. **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**. The future of the family and the line of the redeemer depended on this. Our marriages today are also to be holy and to form the foundation of our advance down God's path for us, in our service of the Lord. If a believer is deceived by a partner and marries the wrong person, they are spiritually side tracked for life. The right person as a life partner is vital for future ministry.

This man is an unnamed servant, who is known only by the service that he has done to the line of the Messiah. There are many who serve the Lord in various ways and are unknown by most, yet all are known to God and receive eternal reward, and in heaven we will see the unsung heroes of the faith and rejoice with them for all eternity. We all should be known by what we do for our Lord. It is the Lord's, "Well done, good and faithful servant", we ought to desire above all.

Abraham is too old to undertake the journey, and must stay behind to manage affairs, but this man is a believer in whom Abraham can place his future. Oh that we all might be worthy of such trust, and that as we age we might be like Abraham, and focus upon the right things, the most important things in God's plan for us!

FINDING A BRIDE FOR ISAAC – THE PRINCIPLES TO BE APPLIED

This man is the chief steward. Into this man's custody Abraham has passed Isaac's education and the task of finding a bride for him. This passage is also quoted in Exodus 29, Isaiah 52, Jeremiah 31, so we must take particular note of the principles here for the repetition in these places tells us that this is a principle that we must understand and apply ourselves into our own families. It carries universal truths.

No believer should ever, in any circumstance ever marry an unbeliever. If we do, our spiritual life is compromised right from the start of our marriage. The effect of this type of marriage is demonstrated in history many times, and is nearly always disastrous. As the father of the line of promise, through whom the Messiah for all must come, the wife must also be of the line of Shem, not any other line. Not only is she to be a believer in the one true God, she is also to be of the line of promise, not the family that is outside it, the Canaanites. Genesis 9:24-27. A Canaanite, like all other gentiles must enter the tents of Shem (be saved and transformed) to enter into God's people and become people of promise.

The sons of Ham are to be the servants of the sons of Shem and Japheth **forever**, and the sons of Japheth will find their spiritual blessing in the "tents of Shem". The blessing of Shem flows through the line of Abraham, and it is from his tent that blessing to all other men flows. The fountain of blessing must be kept pure, with **believers only** involved in the central family. Matthew 1:1-2, Luke 3:34-36. The only Canaanites entering with blessing will be saved first!

The servant is told to go to kinsmen of Abraham for his search, as she has to be Semitic and not of the Hamites, as the spiritual promises are through Shem. The passage in Genesis 9:23-27 deals with the curse on Canaan. Here Noah, who was drunk, was abused homosexually by Canaan while Ham looked on. Shem and Japheth however covered their father. The Canaanites were known for their laxness in morality and their practice of homosexuality and religious prostitution and with very few exceptions followed their evil ancestor in sexual perversions, with some saved exceptions.

Note that it was the white son of Ham, Canaan, who was cursed, while the black sons were not. Biblical truth corrects the racism of some on this point. All Hamites will, as a people however, serve the other sons of Noah through history. The Canaanites as a power were destroyed, although their genes migrated into the surrounding Arabic peoples, and at times into the Israelites by forbidden mixed marriages. They had a strong Old Sin Nature trend towards homosexuality and the great majority were removed by God in the explosion of the Dead Sea area, and later by Joshua and the Judges. There will however be some exceptions, and these women will be amazing indications that salvation transforms everything!

In describing the act of Canaan, Moses, in Genesis 9 uses words which draw a veil across the scene as it is so disgusting. It is a warning to us, that when referring to evils and sins we are not to be too descriptive lest we entice some weak person, and lest we place images in the minds of others that they may find difficult to shake.

The danger in condemning pornography and immorality too graphically, is that you can actually entice and encourage it. Let us learn from Moses, who edited the account here received, and simply notes that these things are condemned without too much detail. The implication from Moses words however was that it was homosexual activity which caused Noah to put a great curse on Canaan.

Even many years later, Abraham says that Isaac shall not have a wife from among the Canaanites, even though some of them have been saved in the past, and some will be in the future. Genesis 14:13-16, Joshua 2:1-3, 6:17-25, Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25. These events, with his Canaanite allies are now at least fifty years past. Compare Abraham's age several years after the defeat of Chedorlaomer with the events of this chapter. Genesis 16:16, 17:17, 23:1.

He has been away from the area he lived with Aner, Mamre and Eshcol, and living in the south for over fifty years now. Even though he will buy land at Hebron, close to Mamre's land, he and the others are no longer mentioned. It may be that his old allies had no saved children who were strong in the Lord, had died, or that they have lost regular contact with each other due to their return to their old pagan ways. We cannot know, but all of us who have lived long have old friends who once walked with us in spiritual things and have gone away, or their children have gone into riotous living.

The Canaanites around him are not to be brides for the sons of promise by direct order of God. Genesis 24:7. We will find that within the line of the Messiah three saved women will be named personally because their faith transformed the curse into blessing. Three were certainly Canaanites; Shuah, Tamar, (Genesis 38 below) and Rahab (Joshua 2, 6, Hebrews 11, James 2). God can turn the curse into blessing through salvation alone and He does. Three women named in the genealogy of the Lord are Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth the Moabitess. Matthew 1:3-6. This is a testimony of grace through faith transforming cursing into blessing.

Even though there are these exceptions, where the curse upon Canaan is overcome by salvation, these are exceptions, and Abraham does not base his decision making upon later exceptions. This is the danger that believers can often fall into. It is a fault that is self centred, or Narcissistic, to believe that you are an exception! We are given instruction, and we are to follow it exactly; only the Lord's direct intervention must make us prayerfully consider whether the case before us is an exception. Jesus himself meets another exceptional Canaanite in Matthew 15:22, and one of the disciples is referred to as "Simon the Canaanite". Mark 3:18. Salvation changes things for every people group for individuals who express saving faith.

In all the history of the Canaanites there are few exceptions, and each woman or man mentioned became a dynamic and powerful believer. There are NO EXCEPTIONS about the rule for believers to NEVER marry an unbeliever! Abraham was right in his logical processes. Here we have an example of Abraham using doctrine that he had learnt from the time of Noah and combining it with the promise that had been given to him and coming to conclusions based on that combination. Some of the principles went back even to the Garden of Eden.

This is a good example of what a believer should do when she/he is facing decisions. We should make our decisions in alignment with revealed doctrines from God's Word. If there is anything commanded in the Word in relation to the decision, make sure you are in conformity with each command or there will be great grief for you in the future. In this regard the clear command recorded in **2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1**, is an example of a clear command for all believers through all time; no exceptions are allowed without disaster following. Our choice of course....

GENESIS 23 1-20

23:1 And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah. 2 And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. 3 And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, 4 I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. 5 And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, 6 Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead. 7 And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth. 8 And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight; hear me, and intreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar, 9 That he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a buryingplace amongst you. 10 And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, 11 Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead. 12 And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land. 13 And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there. 14 And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, 15 My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead. 16 And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in

the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant. 17 And the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure 18 Unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city. 19 And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. 20 And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying place by the sons of Heth.”

REFLECTION

Sarah is the only woman in the entire scripture whose age, and place of death and burial are all mentioned. She is an important woman for all others to look to for learning about marriage and appropriate and inappropriate behaviours.

1 Peter 3:1-5. Moses will record the details of the burial so as to make the memorial of her burial significant for the people of his own day. He wants them bound to Hebron, as the first piece of land owned by the Patriarchs, and as the first fruits of the land of promise.

It is interesting that the later feast of first fruits is a feast that speaks of resurrection, and the first fruit of the land is a burial cave, where for three generations the family is buried, speaking of their belief in resurrection. They are buried together, not to “sleep with their fathers”, for their fore-fathers are buried in Ur, rather they are buried together because they want to see one another when raised from the dead. They are selecting their company for the resurrection.

Also, just a point about the concept of “sleep” as an analogy to death; the body sleeps, the soul does not. The Lord made it clear in his story in Luke 16:19ff, that Abraham is not “asleep”, but with all the saved dead, is conscious and in the Paradise section of Hades, awaiting the Lord’s resurrection, and his subsequent transfer into heaven.

Verses 1-3. Abraham is away when Sarah dies. Her death was apparently unexpected, or she would have gathered her family around her. It would not be uncommon for pastoralists to be away from their main camp for many days at a time checking on herds. Abraham had many servants looking after his flocks and herds and so was likely on an inspection tour of them.

News is brought of Sarah’s death and he returns to mourn for her. Mourning is a normal human thing and weeping for the loss of a loved one is not a sign of lack of faith in resurrection or heaven, rather it is a simple human testimony to our love and sorrow that this life and it’s joys is over for that person. The Lord wept over the very fact of death, and the sadness that loss brings because of it; the human condition is sad because of the impact of sin that entered the world. John 11:23ff. In the Lord we will still weep over the loss of our loved ones, we may even weep more at times, for we feel the sadness of the results of Adam’s sin keenly, but we do not weep and wail as those with no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Abraham has no ownership of any land to this point. He has grazing rights, negotiated with a number of city states and moves around with his herds and flocks, and trades with each of the cities in return. The agricultural economies of the Canaanite city states meant that there were security, trade and commodity benefits to them and Abraham in their mutual relationship. He has not thought about the burial issue, and Sarah’s death comes as a shock, and he realizes that he needs to do something special here, as a testimony to the unbelievers around him about the difference of his expectation to theirs, and as a testimony to his own household about their place in the land. A burial plot cannot be “temporary”; it must become a permanent testimony to faith for future generations also of the faith of their fathers in the certainty of God’s promise of the land.

Verses 4-6. Abraham hears the offer of the Canaanite peoples amongst whom he dwells. They are well meaning, and they have great respect for Abraham, but that is the deceptive thing; for they will gain status by having his wife buried amongst them, and they will win a spiritual victory, by being able to say, “see they bury their dead just like us and share our destiny in the after life”.

This is the very thing Abraham will not let them say, for the burial of Sarah must be quite different to their burials, and the message from this tomb must be visibly different to the tombs of the Canaanites. We are to be totally separate, and visibly different in life and in death to the unbelievers amongst whom we live. This is a passage that reminds us that our witness goes beyond our death, and those left behind ought to have clear instructions about the manner of our burial, so that in all things we are testifying to the truth of what we believe.

Verse 7-9. Abraham has a plot in mind. It is more than a simple plot of land, but a large area surrounding a cave in a hill side. Abraham has clearly had his eye on this and now moves to request it formally at the city gate of the Canaanite city. All the elders of the place are gathered, Canaanite and Hittite. The Hittites were a powerful people of this time, ruling a vast empire stretching from their homeland in central Turkey down into the Middle East.

This man, who owns the cave and surrounding land may be a Hittite ruler of the people, (“his city”, verse 10), an ambassador of the Hittite Empire, or simply a wealthy settler amongst them. He has power and Abraham needs the other elders to entreat him. The discussion we now see unfolding is very Middle Eastern in it’s stylized bows and words. Ephron is a ruler, and is going to suggest a price that relates to the waiving of the feudal obligations associated with the ownership of the land under Hittite Law.

He probably expects Abraham to bargain and try to lower the price by debate, but such a process after a death is a disgusting thing, and Abraham will remain polite to this man, and simply agree to the price, because the higher price will likely excuse him from the feudal obligations to taxation and provision of men for the Hittite army of occupation. Abraham will remain very polite throughout the process, acknowledging the Hittite rulership over the area but striving to maintain his political and spiritual independence. 1 Peter 2:13-17. Abimelech has prepared him for this interchange.

Notice that the dead were to be buried, "away from our sight". This does not mean they are forgotten, but that they are placed away from daily life and were not visited by the patriarchs, as the pagans visited their dead for on going rituals and celebrations through the New Moon seasons after the death. Death was the end of this life, and those left alive returned to a full life until their time came to be buried there with their loved ones. Focus was heaven, not the grave.

Death was simply the gateway to eternity, and the graveyard was not to be avoided, nor visited often. Nothing was to distract the living from their obligation to fulfil the plan of God for their life. They were not to live in the graveyard, but as ambassadors on the streets of life in their service of the Lord. To live close by the grave will create problems with witness, just as Lot's decision to move into Sodom did for him. Separation is to be maintained for spiritual reasons.

Verses 10-11. Ephron is the ruler of this city and wants to look good in front of his people, but also wants to maintain Hittite Law and not set any legal precedent regarding the waiving of obligations of land owners. He is a Hittite (son of Heth) and they lived in and ruled over parts of this area for another six hundred years until the collapse of their Empire around 1200BC with the Philistine ("Sea Peoples") invasions.

Archaeologists have studied these people and identify many traits of their laws in this interchange with Abraham. By offering Abraham the land as a gift this man passes ownership and all feudal obligations relating to the land over to Abraham. This would mean that Abraham is obliged to pay taxes and provide men for the occupation army. Abraham wants to avoid this. By selling just the burial cave to Abraham, Ephron would possibly avoid the issue of feudal obligation, but he wants this gift or sale process to bind Abraham under Hittite feudal law if he can be. This is an opportunity to tie a great pastoralist into their system, and Ephron is a politician and representative of their Empire.

Abraham knows the plan here and avoids it with politeness and statesmanlike dignity, by paying a sum far above the value of the land, and by doing that he "buys off" the feudal obligation, which Ephron must now fulfil himself. Abraham has paid for the land, and paid for Ephron to fulfil his obligation as a landowner for the rest of his lifetime. Abraham has recognized the principle of government, and it's legitimate support here, but has not compromised his integrity and freedom to remain a pastoralist. He will not become a permanent settler in Kiryath Arba / Hebron and the arable land around the cave itself may be leased to a Hittite, possibly Ephron, to ensure the on-going feudal obligations are met.

Verses 12-13. Abraham bows low to the people in the gate, and this bow recognizes they are the rulers of this place at this time. Abraham has been promised the entire land as his possession, but he recognizes the temporary tenure of the Hittites without any arrogance relating to God's promise to him. There is no super spiritual claiming of his own rights here, but a humble recognition that he is in God's hands and the fulfilment of the promise will be in God's time. Abraham says he will pay for it. While the word money is used here it is not to be taken with our meaning, for there was no money as we know it at this time, simply set weights of gold, silver and bronze. Abraham will agree to the payment of 600 shekels weight of silver; a considerable amount of money, and well beyond the simple value of the land as a straight purchase.

Verses 14-16. Ephron mentions the full amount to buy the land and remove any feudal obligation from it. This is the top price and meant to be prohibitive, but Abraham will accept the offer immediately and purchase the land so that it is free of all political obligations. The other elders must have been surprised at the speed with which Abraham accepts the offer, but all would have known what it meant. This tells me that Abraham is known as a tough wheeler and dealer and they thought that he would bargain and the result would be he was recognizing their sovereignty and accepting their rulership. His quick acceptance in this public place means they cannot now alter the deal and so Abraham is still independent. Abraham weighs out the silver immediately and the deal is settled.

Verses 17-18. A deed of title is drawn up describing the land, the cave, and the trees which form the boundary. Title deeds have been found from Hittite times and this document is clearly a Hittite property deed. Behind the words here is a thorough re-survey of the land and a full description is made and the land is formally made over to Abraham that very day in the presence of the elders of the city.

Verses 19-20. Only when the ownership is made certain does Abraham bury his dead wife in the cave. The cave now belongs to Abraham; the only place in the land that is his, is his place of burial. It will be the place for burial for himself, for Isaac, Rebecca, Leah, and Jacob. Genesis 25:9, 49:31, 50:13. It will not be the burying place of Rachel, Genesis 35:16-20, nor of Joseph. Joshua 24:32. We will examine these exceptions as we come to them in our study of these books.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Abraham sees that in death there is still witness to be made to the unbelievers looking on. The burial of Sarah is to be a testimony to his on going belief in their future in the land, and to their belief in resurrection from the dead. He will not bury according to the customs of the people amongst whom he sojourns, but will be visibly different. Let us maintain this visible difference.

2. Arguing any course of action from the basis of an exceptional situation is highly dangerous. The Lord has given us clear doctrinal principles to follow in all matters, and our task is to know the scriptures and apply them into daily life with precision and without self centeredness. When God says "NO!" we are to hear his counsel, for it will keep us safe if we heed it.
3. Sarah dies at a good old age. She dies exactly when she is meant to, and she dies peacefully. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. **Psalms 68:20, 116:15**. When we die, no matter how many people gather around our bed, we die alone with the Lord, and as believers we die at exactly the right time. Death removes all the allure of this life, and is the severing of all ties with this world. Let us practice good biblical and doctrinally sound burial rituals and mourning rituals, so that in our grieving processes we might be a continued witness to those who are without hope, without Christ, and without eternal life.
4. Let us bury our dead in full confidence of resurrection, and then let us throw ourselves back into life until we too go to join them in heaven. We are not to live at the cemetery, but in the market place of this world as the Lord's ambassadors. Even our burial place is only temporary, for our destiny is eternal, in a new heavens and a new earth. Our place of burial is only a temporary waiting place until the resurrection. Let us not venerate cemeteries and act in the pagan manner, as if the dead "live" there!

Many foolish things are spoken of the dead and the grave; for instance, as if the view from the grave site is important! The only biblical consideration is amongst whom are we buried. We get the opportunity to choose who we see at the point of resurrection and in whose company we stand on that day. Let us select our company well.

5. Abraham remains a sojourner upon the earth, and does not tie himself into the politics of the day, nor the social obligations that will tie him into pagan practices and rituals. He remains free to serve the Lord and pays his dues to the authorities of the government without compromise to his faith. Let us not compromise our faith, and let us respectfully pay our dues to our earthly State.

Notes

CHAPTER 24**GENESIS 24:1-10**

24:1 And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: 3 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: 4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. 5 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? 6 And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. 7 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. 8 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. 9 And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter. 10 And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor."

REFLECTION

Abraham is well advanced in years now. It is amusing to reflect upon this, for by this point we would say he is very, very old, and has been very well advanced in years for over fifty years now! Moses reminds us that this great age is a blessing of the Lord, and that he has lived well through these last years. Abraham is at least 137 years old at this point, and he will live another 35 years, but he won't be taking long journeys in this period. **Genesis 25:1-7**. The oldest man in English history, Thomas Parr, who died at 152 years, was blind for the last decades of his life, as Isaac will be, but Abraham is fit and healthy throughout, but he is slowing down, and is not up to undertaking a long journey at this point, and so will require others to go up to Haran to find a wife for his son.

Verses 1-2. Abraham is old but blessed in his great age, and is blessed in all aspects of his life, from the spiritual through to the material; and that is the right order to be blessed in. **Psalms 112:1-3, Proverbs 10:22, Isaiah 51:1-3**. Abraham calls for his oldest servant, who is in charge of all the affairs of the household.

In days when Chief Executive Officers of major firms are often young men or women it is interesting to note that Abraham waited until men were over sixty until they were given charge of the running of households. It is interesting to reflect upon the scandals of management over recent years and wonder whether the reasons for some of them is that people are promoted too young, without the life experience to keep them from arrogance, and without the testing that years bring to refine character, and build godly reputation amongst those who observe them.

It is for these sound reasons that pastors are to be older men/women, often having brought up a family and learned all that children teach their mother/father, and that only mature believers who are tested by life experience over a long period of years are to be appointment into ministry leadership. **1 Timothy 3:2-7**. Paul did not have a family or wife but he was tested by life's situations and found faithful. Look at the Lord's testing of Paul in **2 Corinthians 11:23-33**. Abraham has such a tested man who he can trust, well proven by years of faithfulness, and he asks him to swear a solemn oath that he will fully follow through to a successful end, the most important task he has ever been given.

Verses 3-4. Moses will read these instructions on the clay tablets and faithfully write them out, and then see why the Lord repeats this same warning to him for the Israelites of his own day. **Deuteronomy 7:1-11**. Marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is forbidden, for it destroys witness and service to the Lord over time. If a person is going to be saved they will be saved before the wedding day, and if not, the marriage should not occur.

Abraham is worried about the fate of Isaac and perhaps he is convicted about the delay in finding him a wife, for he will be forty by the time he marries, however, the Lord's hand is upon the delay, for there is one woman for Isaac, and he will find her at the right time. No-one is "over the hill" at forty, for if the Lord has the right person for us, then that time is the right time for us to find that person.

Verses 5-6. This servant is a man who quickly thinks about the task, identifies any problems in the plan and immediately seeks guidance as to the preferred course of action. He seeks his master's will alone in this matter. This is a man who can think for himself, but he wants all the guidance he can get from Abraham so that it is Abraham's will, not his own that is being followed.

Abraham is old and it maybe is feeling his age for the first time, and is seated, or reclining as this promise is made. He may fear that he will not even be alive when this man returns. The question the servant asks is a good one; what if the girl will not come with me, do I need to take Isaac there to entreat her to join him? This is a good question because the girl is going to be asked to come to a wild frontier land, leave a city and live in a tent, and marry a man she hasn't seen, who sends an old servant to do his deals for him! Only God is going to be able to do this!

This is the best place to be in any move forward we make; let the Lord alone achieve the result or let it not be done! Abraham is absolutely clear that Isaac is not to go to Haran; he is to stay in the land of promise, avoid the temptations of the cities of Mesopotamia, and be absolutely assured that the right woman, under the Lord's guidance, will join him there. **Galatians 5:1, Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16.**

Verses 7-8. Notice the deep theological basis for Abraham's faith in these matters. Abraham reminds the servant of the stability of the character and plan of God, he recalls that from the very beginning they have been part of the plan of God, and that the mighty God who began the good work will complete it now. **Philippians 1:6, 2 Timothy 4:18, Jude 24-25.** Whenever we face a challenge it is good to start by reminding ourselves of the character and work of God, for then we stabilize the discussion in certainties, and God's on-going grace is a certainty for us.

God has clearly told him **not** to take a wife for Isaac from amongst the people of the land, he has recently heard of Nahor's children, and so he has two sure reasons to go back to his relatives in Haran to seek amongst them for one who loves and follows the Lord God. Genesis 22:22-24. Abraham has another promise, not recorded earlier in Genesis, but clearly in the tablets, that God would send his angel before the servant into Mesopotamia and clear the way ahead for him so that the will of God would be done. If the woman he thinks is the one will not come, then she is not the one; but Isaac does not go after her. God is going to do this; Isaac is not! **Proverbs 3:3-8, Isaiah 63:7-9.**

Verses 9-10. The man, having understood the task, the theology behind the task, and the fact that Isaac was not ever going to the place that he had to go, now swears the oath. We need to be sure of what we commit to and believe fully in all we affirm. This man is careful. Note his camel train; he is ready to go on this journey so that he will need nothing from others on the way. He will have all the clothes, food and gifts they need with him and his men. He is self contained and ready to reach the destination, and has enough men with him to deal with minor brigands, and can trust the Lord for any major threats. He will be just like any other Middle Eastern trader of his day and will not make people see him as unusual, a threat, or a target; he will blend into the background so he can quietly go about the Lord's work without drawing attention to himself.

This is the best approach to any mission. If we stand out as wealthy, powerful, or "unusual" in any place then we have not researched our destination clearly enough. Believers should blend into local situations, drawing attention to ourselves only by our Holy Spirit anointed results, not our strangeness or glorious appearance. He is ready to search for the Lord's choice for Isaac, and he heads away to the north with his men. It may be weeks or months later that they will return.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Careful service is what the Lord seeks from us. This servant of Abraham's is clear thinking, thoughtful about the task, and ready for eventualities. He blends into his local situation, so that he will be able to focus only upon the task, not explaining himself to everyone he meets. If we are unable to swim like fish in the sea in a mission situation, then we should not be there!
2. Blessing is the Lord's plan for us, but it will be spiritual before it is anything else, because only spiritual blessing opens the door to enjoyment of the other aspects of life. Let us seek the blessing of the Lord in all things by our spiritual growth on a daily basis.
3. Marriage is holy and needs the protection of shared spiritual objectives in this life and for eternity. Believers are not to marry unbelievers. The Lord warns us for good reasons to avoid this at all costs. Let us be faithful to scripture and warn all young believers of this great danger to their happiness and usefulness to the Lord. We are responsible to the Lord for our warning here; let us blow the trumpet clearly as the Lord's heralds. Believers must only marry believers!
4. Angels guide our way as we walk in the Lord's path. Let us praise the Lord for his provisions for us, for the Holy Spirit is within us, the angels are beside us, the Lord Jesus fellowships with us, and the father looks over us. Can we be separated from the victory that the plan has at it's core? Never! We are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us draw upon the strength we have and walk triumphantly in joy at the Lord's hands underneath us every step through this life.

GENESIS 24:11-27

"11. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. 12 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. 13 Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: 14 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. 15 And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. 16 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. 17 And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. 18 And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. 19 And when she had done giving him

drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. 20 And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. 21 And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not. 22 And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; 23 And said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? 24 And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. 25 She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in. 26 And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD. 27 And he said, 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."

REFLECTION

As we have already seen in **Genesis 24: 5-6** the servant asks Abraham what happens if the woman is not willing to come with me? Shall I bring the son to meet her there? Abraham has told the servant that he is not to take his son out of the land into which he has been called, nor is he to expect a girl to follow him into the land, unless she has been called by the Lord herself. Abraham wants a God called woman to meet the needs of his God anointed son. If the girl is reluctant she is not the right girl. God's hand is in this and God's angels guide this process, just as they guide and protect you and I daily.

Read through verses 7-14 again, and notice how the servant really has got everything together in his mind; he is stabilized upon the Lord and his plan. He has complete faith in God, he is grace oriented all the way. Notice his mental attitude in his prayer, "Do not do it for me Lord, do it for my master". This is a perfect picture of a believer who wants his master to get the glory, and whose will is in absolute compliance with the Lord's will.

Verses 11-14. It was customary for any stranger to ask a woman of the local area to draw water that he might drink, as shown by our Lord's asking of the Samaritan woman at the town of Sychar. John 4:7. Village wells were local property, and in the Middle East through to modern times, it was the death penalty for any stranger to take water if it was not freely offered to them after their polite request.

The servant had a respect for the position of the woman as the local person carrying the authority of her people, and the representative of the local people and their rights to the water here. His request was not a master slave type interaction, nor does it mean that the woman was inferior in any way in the relationship. We must be careful of not reading into this western values and customs. The woman could refuse such a request, was not obliged at all to water his camels, and when asked by a stranger was taught that she was representing her people, and could always call the elders to verify any request.

The servant had asked the Lord to show him who was the right woman for Isaac, and he asks for an extra-ordinary display from the right woman of service, energy, and grace. Watering ten camels was a hard job, probably involving the drawing of 500 litres of water from the well. The stranger was not allowed, under Eastern protocol to assist at all, as only the owners of the well could draw water; others were to keep their distance, on pain of death.

For the woman, to even offer to do this, was to be ready to work for several hours for a stranger; possibly for no reward at all. This is a woman who is concerned for others and who is prepared to persevere and get very hot and dirty in her service if required. It is a perfect test to see what type of character she has. This man has a "sorting list" in mind to help him identify the type of woman he will approach. He is not just looking at her beauty alone, nor at her culture, nor her wealth, nor her deportment; he is looking at all these things, but also beyond these things, at her character. The Lord threw in the charm, culture, education and beauty as a bonus.

As a counsellor for many years facing people with marital problems, I see many believers who have entered into a marriage relationship without spending even a fraction of the time this man has spent in thought and prayer about the character of the person they plan to marry, nor have they tested the character of the person in a way that gives them a good indication as to what to expect in the future. Those who have trouble later in marriage have not looked hard at character in the early stages of their courtship. We must be sure that any future partner is "pulling the same weight" spiritually (the biblical concept of being "equally yoked" – willing and able to pull the plough in God's field of service).

Well before one gets into a relationship you should talk closely with many people about the character of the person you think you love, to assess their character, and to ensure they are what they appear to be to you in your great love/lust for them. This will protect you from making a bad mistake. The greatest danger in marriage is from any form of personality disorder or instability in the character of the woman or man involved. Such people can hide their problems for a time, but if you foolishly marry them, they will destroy any ministry you could have had due to their self centeredness.

Often this is only spotted by testing and observations over time, and from the observations of others in addition to your own. This is why one of the crucial tests for a pastor is that he must be "well spoken of in the world". His reputation amongst unbelievers must be of a good, stable and consistent character. A person who others factually warn you of is unfit for pastoral ministry, and I would argue, for marriage also! **1 Timothy 3:1-7.**

THE FUTURE BRIDE

Verses 15-16. Rebekah now approaches the well. It is the time of day when all the local women came out to draw water for their family's needs over night before the city gate was closed for the night. The servant must wait outside the gate and at a distance from the well. Under the protocols of the Middle East, he may approach a person of the city and request water, or he may sit and wait to be asked by a local elder as to his business and his needs.

He has prayed for a response from a woman he approaches, and so he is looking at the women as they come out and excluding all the women who are clearly married, (he will be able to tell this by their dress), and will approach only the unmarried women who proclaim by their dress, behaviour and deportment, that they are young women of character and morality. He has not prayed for a woman to approach him, for many might approach a wealthy merchant with ten camels, but they will not be of the moral sort, or they may also be the elders' wives who will approach him officially, but they are all unsuited as candidates for Isaac's wife.

This man has been careful as to the nature of his prayer request, and has desired the answer that will be clear to him, by the actions of the woman he approaches. As he sees Rebekah approach he spots her as a candidate, and watches her draw her water. By her actions and deportment with a stranger watching her, he can tell she is moral. He can also see from her dress that she is unmarried, of a wealthy and successful family, and has healthy pride in her appearance, takes care with her appearance, and that she is very beautiful. He now realizes he has the best candidate before him. He moves quickly through the crowd to speak with her.

Verses 17-18. He runs to her. This in itself could have caused alarm if it was just the two of them, but this is to forget where he has gone to find this woman for Isaac. Remember the time of day, and the fact that this is a major well of a significant city-state. The city of Haran had many wells, and a population of up to fifty thousand people at this time and grew later even larger. There are very many hundreds of women around, and possibly a very large crowd.

Why does the man run, or move very quickly to speak with Rebekah? The most logical reason is that he does not want to lose her in the crowd. With a crowd around, his moving quickly would also not create a sense of threat to Rebekah or others, for he would simply be seen as moving quickly through the crowd to speak with a chosen person, which is something merchants would do normally. His request was however a very personal one. He asks for water from the pitcher she has drawn water in for her own family.

Pause and reflect on the guidance of the Lord and his guardian angel here. There were many gates to this city, and many wells, yet he has gone to the one most likely to find the descendants of the family of Nahor. It may be that Abraham has told him to go to a particular gate, knowing that this was the section of the city that he had left Nahor living in many years before. Remember, Abraham left Haran at age 75. He has Isaac at 100, Sarah being 90, and Isaac is nearly forty. Abraham has not seen Haran for nearly 65 years! Even with information received a few years earlier, Genesis 22:22-24, there are few street names and no street numbers, nor clear addresses in ancient cities, so only God's power and direction could bring this meeting about! Rebekah will be the comfort for Isaac after the death of his mother at age 127 years. Genesis 12:4, 17:17, 21:1-5, 23:1-2, 24:67.

She is being asked to share her family's water and potentially being "hit on" by an old merchant who may be asking her to marry him. To give a man drink in this day was a serious matter, and potentially an acceptance of the obligation of hospitality, or even more. To immediately put down her pitcher and pour the water out into the man's hands was a sign that this is a woman who will meet the legitimate needs of others with joy and gladness to help, but it is also much more. It tells us that she also sees in this older man, a man who walks with God; one quite different than those amongst whom she lives in this city. Matthew 25:31-46, 1 Peter 3:8-17, 4:8-9. This is a young woman of spiritual discernment and energy, but also one who feels empowered to make life changing decisions for her future.

Verses 19-20. Rebekah now gave the servant water and also watered his camels with the servant looking on in appreciation. Why didn't he help? Cultural tradition meant he had to sit, as he had no right to draw from another person's well; to do so could mean execution. There will be guards on the gate watching all these events, their hands on their weapons all the time. This is not a quiet village well; this is a very public event in a major well garrisoned city. If you had no claim to a well, or were a stranger, you had to be served there; you did not dare lift a finger to serve yourself or your animals, you waited and sought the grace of those who had dug the well and guarded it with their armed forces.

The servant will be watching a considerable time as she draws the amount of water to deal with ten camels. It is time to see if she flags in her energy and commitment, or if she has any resentment over her task. Many people will offer to do simple work around the church, but will complain all the way, or start to mutter when others leave and they have to do additional things. Their heart is not in their service, nor are they doing their task, "as unto the Lord". **Romans 12:11, 14:6-9, Colossians 3:16-24.** Let us be challenged by this amazing woman; for we are all called to be amazing!

Verses 21-22. The servant has been watching Rebekah as she works tirelessly in this major job of watering his camel train. She draws the water from the well, carries it across the square and then pours the water into the trough for the animals to drink. She may have to do this journey fifty times! She does not do it slowly, but with vigour and speed. She enthusiastically serves the needs of this man. She knows there is something about this request that is different; she is a prepared person ready to serve the Lord at an instant. The servant does not jump to the conclusion that this is the one immediately, but as he watches her he marvels that the Lord has been so gracious to lead him to such a beautiful woman in spirit and body. He still prays to the Lord for certainty before he moves. He is careful and prayerful. Once the camels are finished drinking he moves.

Notice the timing here. It is easy to give a little to people and feel good about it, but to offer to water animals is a good test, for you are placing yourself at the mercy of the capacity of the animals involved, and you are having to watch them, to be sure they are finished. It would be easy to stop short here and say, "I've done enough". Rebekah does not stop until the camels tell her, by their observable behaviours, that they are finished and refreshed.

The servant has learned that she has wealth, beauty, grace, poise, charm, a spirit of service, physical energy, enthusiasm, spiritual discernment, and she knows her animals! Now he moves and gives her a gift that signifies a marriage proposal, or at least a great honour, and an offer of rulership over a household. To accept gifts was the normal protocol in the East, but then the bargaining would begin as to what they might mean for the future, and the woman was protected by her men folk who were able to reject any offer, while the girl got to keep the jewellery.

In **verses 22-28** the servant gives her a number of presents worth many thousands of dollars of jewellery and then asks whose daughter she is. He also asks if there is room enough in your father's house to lodge? He asked this because the inns were little more than brothels in the ancient world and therefore respectable travellers gave them a wide berth. Having accepted the presents, Rebekah has accepted some liability and responsibility to provide hospitality, although this can be overturned by the men of her household if the man is found to be untrustworthy. The presents are however non-returnable, so the servant is taking a risk here, but it is a prayer saturated calculated risk. Look up in a Bible dictionary for the weight of gold in the various "shekel" measures. You will then be able to see just how much was given in your own currency and realize that this gift is significant. Gods grace has been seen in his safe arrival itself!

She identifies herself by family and agrees that he can stay with her family, and that they will provide food for the animals and his serving men also. She takes responsibility for the family decision showing she has a place of responsibility and respect in the family, although still young. She is pure and mature, being very stable as a person. He now bows his head and worships the Lord to acknowledge from where this answer to prayer has come. His prayerfulness is testimony before Rebekah as to his character and faith, and she will be able to report to her family a great deal about this man, for she has been observing him just as he has been observing her. The man must wait at the gate to be brought to Rebekah's house by one of the men of the household.

Once again custom/culture protected the women from being hit on by a man and not being able to escape him. The guards at the gate would have stopped any man following a woman home from the well; only respected male members of the city could bring in strangers to lodge within the walls. Rebekah now goes into the city, to her house and tells her family what has happened, and seek the men's confirmation of her actions, and their action to bring this man and his camels and servants in to their large house. They will be able to put up possibly ten men and ten camels and feed them all without any trouble. This is a prosperous household. The Lord's blessing has been upon Nahor's family in all ways just as he has been with Abraham. If people are serving the Lord they will always have all they need for daily life and their service of the Lord. Wealth is not a sign of God's blessing in all cases, but the Lord will always provide enough for us to meet our part in his plan. It is God's Plan – it cannot fail – the servant cannot set it up without resources ready at the right time, but God can and always does – it is His Plan from Eternity – it cannot fail.....

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. There are no risks in the service of the Lord if every decision is prayer saturated. This servant of Abraham is a man who walks by prayerful faith, and so must we be if we would please our Lord. He has all the things he needs to give appropriate gifts to the family of Nahor that will be correct in accordance with protocol of the day for a bride gift.

How careful are we in our ministry to ensure we act in accordance with local customs and do not needlessly offend? Do we have appropriate gifts where they are required? Do we have a spirit of giving in all we do in the Lord's service, holding nothing back, and being prepared to receive nothing in return, except the Lord's "well done".

2. Rebekah has the authority of her parents to make deals and invite visitors home. How trustworthy are our adult children? Well brought up believers ought to have spiritual discernment and be able to be trusted in these matters. Let us challenge ourselves with the behaviour of Rebekah here. She acted and was mature even though young in years.
3. The servant acts upon the information he has from Abraham. They have heard of Nahor's family and know the names of the children he has had. They probably have the area of the city they dwell in, which may explain why he gets to the right well, but they have no photographs! There are no street directories, nor any addresses as such in ancient cities. They will depend upon the Lord's leading to get them to the right place, and they trust in the Lord and move out in faith that they will be led to the right person. Let us walk out each day into our cities with prayerful concentration that we might meet the people the Lord wants us to meet this day.
4. How much energy do you have for the Lord's work? Could you do what Rebekah does here? Now if you are over sixty you are excused this question, for younger people should do the work now for you, but if you are under sixty, ask yourself, are you fit for service?

We have no excuse to be unfit in the Lord's work. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and we should be in as a good a condition as we can be so that the Lord can ask us to do anything and we don't need to take a pharmacy and a nurse or wheel chair with us! Let us get as fit as we can and stay that way so that the Lord can use us in all things he delights in for us to do.

GENESIS 24:28-48

28 And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother's house these things. **29** And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. **30** 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. **31** 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. **32** And the man came into the house: and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him. **33** And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on. **34** And he said, I am Abraham's servant. **35** And the LORD hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses. **36** And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath. **37** And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell: **38** But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son. **39** And I said unto my master, Peradventure the woman will not follow me. **40** And he said unto me, The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house: **41** Then shalt thou be clear from this my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give not thee one, thou shalt be clear from my oath. **42** And I came this day unto the well, and said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go: **43** Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; **44** And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: let the same be the woman whom the LORD hath appointed out for my master's son. **45** And before I had done speaking in mine heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the well, and drew water: and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. **46** And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also. **47** And I asked her, and said, Whose daughter art thou? And she said, the daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the earring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands. **48** And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son."

REFLECTION

Verses 28-32. Laban her brother is a believer, but as we will see as the story unfolds, he is not a very nice person and he has all the weaknesses of Lot regarding wealth. He goes out to check out the person who has approached his sister, and it is Laban who offers the formal family invitation. He recognized that the servant had been led by the Lord and his greeting is a formal recognition of that, and there is a joy in it, for he sees the man as blessed of the Lord, but the way Moses emphasizes that it is the jewellery that he sees on his sisters wrists, we are left with the impression that possibly it is the wealth of the jewellery that impresses him even more than spiritual things – they are the bonus, rather than the other way around. Refer to BTB for topic of WEALTH on page 117

This is, as we will see over time, a superficial man, and he loves his wealth and desires more. He is impressed by this servant of Abraham's due to the incredible wealth that is spoken of by the jewellery given to his sister. He does the culturally right thing however and formally asks him to join them inside the city, and personally leads them through the streets to their house, where all is provided, for the animals and the comfort and refreshment of the men. The foot washing was an important cleansing after many days in the saddle, and speaks of a bath and time to change clothes for each. They are then led into the family dining/entertaining room where a feast is prepared.

Verses 33-34. He is offered food but says that he will not eat before he has told of his mission. He got his priorities right, do we? Many get lost in social life and the details of eating and drinking. Make sure your time is used appropriately. Have spiritual food first before fellowship and physical food. Can we control our physical appetites? The early disciples practiced the Jewish fast twice a week to ensure that they remained in control of their appetites. This involved eating nothing between the hours of 6am and 6pm twice a week, and taking only water for sustenance. It was a twice weekly exercise in self control and is a good practice for us all to follow.

This man is self controlled and is keen to share his Lord's message and the deliverance of the Lord God in the errand he has now brought to it's final stage. He first is known by his relationship to his master Abraham. He is proud to announce that he is "Abraham's servant". We are to be known by our master, and to be proud of our service and servant-hood towards him. **Matthew 6:24, Philippians 1:1.**

Verses 35-48. The servant now goes through the story so far in detail, thus allowing his listeners to have the full story on which to base their decisions. In our walk of faith through this life we should make sure that we have all available facts so that we can then bring spiritual discernment upon them in their totality, and so can make the correct

decisions. When a great matter is before us, it is good to sit and write out, or speak in a group, about what the Lord has done so far, and then pray for discernment about the next move to make, so that it is in accordance with what is clear, as we look back and around us. This is at the heart of, "Providence and EBCWA", Book 150.

Now let us re-read the story, as the servant tells it, for Moses has repeated this to emphasize this man's understanding of the task for a reason. Paper was expensive and the book of Genesis is getting to the maximum length an ancient book can be. If Moses wrote this repetition into the story, then let us pause and reflect upon it, for there will be points to note here that Moses wanted remembered and seen clearly.

The first point, **verse 35**, that the servant makes, is that the source of the wealth he has given them a taste of through the present of jewellery, is from the Lord himself. Abraham is wealthy in all the material goods of this world, but he is so, due to the blessing of the Lord God who leads him alone. The servant emphasizes the spiritual walk of Abraham rather than the wealth as the thing to focus upon.

It is the point the Lord speaks of in the Sermon on the Mount. The unbelievers seek after all the things that we can lust after, but if the believer seeks the rulership of the Kingdom of God over their heart first, then all the wealth they will need to serve in the kingdom will be given to them by the King of kings. **Matthew 6:31-34**. This is also the theme of the Old Testament saints. 1 Kings 3:10-14, Psalms 18:35, 34:8-11, 37:23-27, 84:10-12, 112:1-3, Proverbs 10:22, 22:4. Notice as you read these verses that the false "prosperity gospel" message is not taught by them; the Lord blesses those who seek righteousness, and he blesses them exactly as they require to fulfil righteousness in their day and place in the plan.

Verse 36. The second point he makes, is that the Lord has brought about the birth of a special boy to Sarah in her old age, and that this boy is the heir of all Abraham has. His point is two fold; firstly Isaac is the inheritor of all the wealth of Abraham, but secondly, and more importantly, he is the son of promise, and the one in whom the Lord rests his plan for the future. To accept this man is not just to accept the great wealth, but the great responsibility of fulfilling the plan of God who gave the wealth, for that is why he has given it. This is the classic choice for all believers at all times in history – will we see the Plan of God (the Godliness road), or the things of men (the worldliness road). **Matthew 7:13-23**.

Abraham's wealth will last for three generations, and they will all be blessed through the inheritance of Abraham's great wealth, but it is there to bring them through to the fulfilment of the plan of God. Laban will keep his eyes firmly fixed on the physical wealth and will not ever really understand the plan, so while his two daughters will be part of it, he will not personally share in the great eternal blessing that he could have, because he seeks the blessings of material wealth in time as his main priority. It is this lesson that the Exodus generation also needed to learn. They sought the foods of Egypt rather than accept the toughness of the first stage of the plan of God for them, and so they lost it all and would die in the desert, never seeing where the plan would have led them. **Numbers 11:4-10, Hebrews 3:7 – 4:8**.

Verses 37-38. He now makes it clear that he is looking for a wife for his master's son. This will now settle the minds of the hearers, for they now see the meaning of the earrings and the bracelets; they are indeed a marriage proposal in accordance with the custom of the day. Once again the servant has emphasized the spiritual aspects of the quest here. Rebekah is not being asked to become a wealthy man's sole heir's wife, but to play a part in the destiny of mankind through bearing the children of promise for mankind's salvation.

Abraham has rejected the possibility of marriage for Isaac with any of the local girls, for they are unbelievers. He has requested that a wife be found from amongst the family of promise in Haran, from amongst those who love the Lord in spirit and in truth. The emphasis here is upon the faith of the family and the girl chosen. Rebekah will be challenged to express her faith in the process that has led this man to her, and will be asked to affirm that she seeks the Lord's hand in it, and feels ready to go into the unknown, because in the things that have happened she knows God is there.

Verses 39-40. The faith of Abraham is now recounted. God will do this through his angels going before you, he says to the servant. By telling the story this way, he challenges Rebekah to see the Lord's hand upon the whole process and see that she is a part of the Divine plan, and affirm her readiness to follow the Lord in faith that this indeed is her path through life. **Psalms 1:3, 16:8, 91:11, Hebrews 1:14**. Truly God has given his angels charge over the process and they are seated here in the presence of his angels. Unless Rebekah sees this and believes this is God's work, she is not to accompany the servant.

Verses 41-42. The servant makes it clear that just being there that day he has fulfilled his oath to Abraham before the Lord God. He has done his part and he is doing it in telling them the full story, the challenge will now be theirs; will they respond to the plan or will they not? Notice his prayer as he came to the well. He seeks the Lord's will and direction. He seeks the Lord's prospering of his path, and seeks only the Lord's path, he wants no distraction to come in. This is the model prayer for us all to pray each and every day we walk upon the earth.

Verses 43-44. This man is focused only upon the virgins who come to the well, amongst all the married women and immoral women who will also be there. Amongst the crowd of hundreds of women he seeks the Lord's inner voice to guide him to ask the right one, and for her response to be strongly indicative of her heart towards God. Women's dress in this day gave a guidance as to their married and moral status, and in some ways still does, even in our modern cultures. We are to ensure, male and female, that our dress gives the right message about our faith and our heart's desire in this life. **1 Timothy 2:8-10**. Refer to my commentary on this passage and study it carefully, as the points Moses makes quietly here, Paul makes very loudly for all believers to hear.

1 Timothy 2:8-10 *“8. I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.
9. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest (appropriate and decent) apparel, with shamefacedness (humility not sexual alluring) and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;
10. But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.”*

Verses 45-46. The answer to prayer came immediately he looked up after opening his eyes from his prayer. He was ready to move and he immediately felt the Lord's inner arresting agitation; he saw Rebekah and he made his move. The speed and enthusiasm of her response is again underlined by the way he tells the story; she was willing and she was quick with her response. His viewpoint is that she was herself seeking the will of the Lord in the events that were unfolding around her.

Verses 47-48. Rebekah's identification of herself as of the family of promise settles the issue for this man. He was sent to find the right woman for his master's son, and she was to be of the family of Nahor, and this woman is of that family. He acted immediately to place the gold upon her ears and her wrists as the token of his embassy to her family. The servant's first reaction once he hears the news is to acknowledge the Lord's guidance which has brought him to this place of glory, where he sees God's hand leading him directly to Abraham's great niece. Worship completes the discussion, as is always appropriate and right.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Laban moves quickly to welcome the man who has given his sister such wealth. He does the right thing, but with mixed motives. His carnality will not delay or alter the course of history, for the Lord is powerful and his plan will work out. Laban will miss blessing over time, but the plan will work out. Let us be focused upon eternal objectives and reap the blessings that God has. Let us be focused as the servant of Abraham was, rather than torn between two realms as was Laban. Laban was the free man, yet he was slave to his lust for things, whereas the servant of Abraham was, like Paul, the free bond servant of the Lord of glory, was the only truly free man.
2. Abraham's servant knows his place, and he knows clearly that his destiny revolves around fulfilling his destiny freely and completely. We too live and move and have our eternal being only in the plan of God for our lives; let us walk in the Lord this day and forever.
3. Angels have guided the way of this man, and they guide our way through our twenty first century lives also. Let us praise the Lord for his gracious protection over us as we advance in the Plan of God for our lives.
4. Let us not be distracted by the so called "prosperity gospel" of carnal, lust filled men today. We need no other things in this life than what the Lord in grace provides for us to fulfil his plan for our lives. Let us be content in the Lord's provision, and claim it for our daily lives. God seeks our focus on heavenly reward, and our praise for his provision now. Let us not mock or insult the Lord of glory by claiming that he has made us short of any thing we need to fulfil his plan for our brief time here upon the earth.

Let us claim his greater grace and advance with all he provides without complaint or embarrassment, if men claim we are poor. The life of "Sister Poverty" as St Francis referred to it, is the call of some, but in their poverty they will lack no thing they need to serve the Lord. Let us focus upon walking our path and not be distracted by things, whether we have great amounts of wealth, or very little. None who serve the Lord and walk with him will lack any thing they need to do their assigned work in the plan.

GENESIS 24:49-67

49 And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left. **50** Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the LORD: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. **51** Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the LORD hath spoken. **52** And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth. **53** And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things. **54** And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. **55** And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. **56** And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. **57** And they said, We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. **58** And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go. **59** And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men. **60** And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them. **61** And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. **62** And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahairoi; for he dwelt in the south country. **63** And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold, the camels were coming. **64** And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. **65** For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a veil, and covered herself. **66** And the servant told Isaac

all things that he had done. 67 And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

REFLECTION

In these verses the servant asks for an answer, he says he wants to take Rebekah back to Isaac as the future bride and do so within the next day, and he makes it clear to them that if they say no, then he will depart immediately. In verse 49 he is stating that there will be no negotiating; they will either accept the Lord's will and Rebekah goes, or they reject the Lord's will and he will go. It is clear to the family that the Lord's hand is in this so they say nothing apart from agreeing to it. They cannot stand in the way, for they know to oppose this is to oppose the clear plan of God.

If you oppose God's will you will get disciplined, and they know enough about the hand of God to be aware of that, but they try to delay things. In this passage Laban's true character starts to come out. They feast and presents are given in the evening, but in the morning Laban said, let Rebekah stay for a few days. The servant however says he is to go as soon as possible, so they call Rebekah, who says she will go and go without unnecessary delay. Why do they play for delay? Is it to say goodbye, or is there a more wealth based issue here? My suspicion is that Laban is hoping for more gifts for the family from the wealth of Abraham. As we go on in the life of Jacob we will see that this suspicion of mine may have evidence behind it as we consider his dealings later with Jacob. This family is reluctant to do God's will!

Verses 49-50. It is at this point that we discover that Bethuel is still alive, and both he and Laban speak in reply to the servant's words. This is the tradition of the Middle East, even to today, where the uncles, fathers and brothers will all speak on behalf of the daughter/niece/sister. Now Josephus in his history states that this Bethuel is the son of the father of the same name. Genesis 22:20-24. This may be correct, we cannot be absolutely sure, but if true, the father's name would normally be given to the oldest son, and so we still have this Bethuel playing second place to Laban, who is the stronger, and later in the narrative Bethuel is not mentioned at all.

They both culturally affirm that the Lord's hands are to be seen in all the dealings here. Their reply however is not that of committed and enthusiastic believers in the Lord. Why do they say, "We cannot speak good or bad"? Why is their response not more indicative of enthusiasm for the plan of God being worked out here? Their response is a traditional one, meaning, "We cannot add to this, nor alter it, for God is in it", but they are not enthusiastic servants of the Lord.

The phrase that Laban and Bethuel use is a phrase used in two other places in scripture. Look at Numbers 24:13 to the words of Balaam, and to Absalom's words in 2 Samuel 13:22. Now in both these parallel passages the men speaking prove to be evil later; they certainly do not indicate by this culturally normal phrase anything other than inability to openly disagree. So when we put the three scriptures together we see that the words of these two men here in Genesis indicate at best their inability to argue, at worst, their resentment at being out played by the Lord's servant, and having no bargaining power over a bride price for Rebekah.

Like Lot, these men betray a carnality that will lead to further conflict later, but Rebekah is a different case, for she will prove a love for the Lord and a deep desire to fulfil his plan. Laban will certainly try to "get even" later as he forces Jacob to pay dearly for his wives. Genesis 29.

Verses 51-52. The two family members bluntly tell the servant to take Rebekah and make her Isaac's wife. Their words are not as polite, nor as spiritual as we would like to see, and Moses tells it bluntly to make this point. There is resentment here, not joy on their part. However the attitude of the servant of Abraham is another matter altogether; he immediately prostrates himself on the ground and worships the Lord God with joy. This man fulfils the command of Paul fully.

Philippians 4:4-8. *"4. Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.
5. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.
6. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.
7. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
8. 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."*

Verses 53-54. We now discover that Bethuel is not in charge of the household, nor does he have anything other than a weak form of traditional authority, for it is Laban and Rebekah's mother who receive the presents. This is unusual and indicates that Laban is the dominant male here, and is already superior either to his own father, or brother (depending on who this Bethuel is). He will prove to be a tough wheeler and dealer later with Jacob.

The bride is bedecked with precious jewellery, as remains the custom in the Middle East. Often such jewellery is borrowed for the occasion now, but in this day it was the "bride price", not a negotiated amount in this case, but a gift of the prospective husband to his bride and hers to keep. Her mother and brother as the senior representatives of the family receive the other presents, and they are of considerable wealth. They then celebrate the feast that is in effect the formal contract of marriage. Remember, there are not formal wedding services as such in this day. The deal is made between the parties and then ratified by the exchange of gifts, and a shared feast.

Verses 55-58. We now have the delay tactics that Laban will use over twenty years later with Jacob and to great effect then. He will delay Jacob by years, whereas here he tries to delay Rebekah by ten days. Why ten days? I am suspicious of this man's motives as I carefully read the account Moses gives us. I suspect Laban wants more gifts and is trying to exert more influence over proceedings by influencing Rebekah through this time. She is however onto his scheming and assists the servant of Abraham by her witness. The servant sees the tactic, but is powerless under their traditions to fully oppose such things, unless Rebekah speaks up.

The servant of Abraham uses a strong word for "hinder" indicating that he too suspects the delay is for other motives than simply Rebekah saying fond farewells. It would be in order to delay for a few days to say goodbyes to all the large extended family and friends, but when Rebekah is asked about a delay of ten days (or a shorter time that she might nominate) she immediately answers that she will go immediately that day. Once again, reading between the lines, I suspect she knows her brother's nature and seeks the fastest escape from his manipulative schemes as she can action.

This is a woman of real faith, as she quickly gathers her clothing and personal items, loads them onto a camel and rides off with this man, whom she has known only since evening the night before, towards a place she has never seen, and knowing that she will never see her family again. She is happy to escape this household, although she knows they do love and worship the Lord, but their weaknesses mean she is happy to leave at this point. She has no "fond farewells" to say to her pagan extended family, or to her neighbours. I suspect she has felt spiritually lonely for years in this place – Isaac is her ticket out of there into God's path for her life. She is an enthusiastic believer.

Verses 59-60. Rebekah is sent away and given a traditional Arab blessing in verse 60 and she leaves with her own servants riding on the camels. Possibly the camel train has been extended from the original ten. Pause and reflect upon the shortness and coldness of the blessing over Rebekah and then compare other blessings given in Genesis by great believers.

Moses is aware of the contrast and is making a point here to reinforce the impression he has taken from Laban's behaviours throughout; this man is not a great believer at all; he is purely a nominal man of faith. He is as carnal as Lot, and as dangerous as Ishmael. The blessing given here is that she might be the mother of a great nation, and that her children might be militarily powerful and defeat all their enemies. This is not a spiritual blessing at all, but is wealth and power centred and betrays this man's logic and values. What do we pray for? Our prayer agenda betrays our values!

Verses 61-63. Rebekah gathers her servants around her and they ride off with the servant of Abraham towards the south country heading for the area where the servant believes Isaac will be at that time of year. Isaac is staying close to the place called La Hai Roi. This is the place where the Angel of the Lord spoke with Hagar. Genesis 16:13-14. It is a good place for Isaac to remember that the Lord hears him just as he heard Hagar. He is likely there looking after flocks and herds, but it may also be a favourite place, even his permanent abode, given the Lord appeared there. He wants to be in the place of spiritual power and the presence of the Lord. His habit is the good one of evening prayer, and he heads into the fields to meditate and pray in the evening that the camel train draws near, and he saw Rebekah as she rides in, and it was to be love at first sight for them both.

Verses 64-67. Rebekah quickly drops off the camel to pay her respects to Isaac, who she can tell even from a distance, by his dress, is a wealthy and influential person. This was the norm in the Middle East, and remains so to this day. As a stranger approaches a well or influential person, they immediately show deference to the local sheik and honour him as the owner or controller of the place. Her speed once again reminds us that this woman is good with animals and very adept at riding and controlling camels. 2 Kings 5:21.

She does not know it is Isaac at this point, and as she bows to honour this great man, she asks his name of the servant. This is the clue that this area is well known to him, and is their destination, and the home of his master, or else her question to him would be pointless. This is the place of Isaac's camp and she knows that the servant will recognize all the important people around here and be able to make introductions.

As soon as she is told it is Isaac, she immediately brings up her veil over her face, as was the custom of a bride meeting her husband for the first time in that day. They were meant for each other, and very quickly she is taken into his mother's original tent there by the well, in which Isaac sets her up now, as his wife.

If the Lord has a person for you it is up to you to prayerfully wait for them. If you are not meant to marry be relaxed about it and keep meditating upon the Word of God and serving him. The right person will be found in your area of service, and through your fellowship with the Lord. The right person spiritually will not be found in places of play but in places of spiritual fellowship or service.

In the church, pastor, you should spend a lot of time teaching the Lord's people the basics of relationship and marriage from the Lord's perspective. As a believer we can be relaxed about meeting the right person for us, for the Lord will bring us together in his perfect timing. Your commitment is to the Lord's plan, for then you will be led in the path that you are to go, and if the Lord has a person for you, it will be the right one to walk the path with you.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Faith-rest is the principle for all who await the Lord's will relating to their marriage. If we do not get the right person our future ministry is compromised. The Lord brings the right people together in his right time for them.

Our task before the Lord is to wait upon him and quietly go about our business in a prayerful manner as Isaac does here.

2. Carnal believers are compromisers with the truth and delayers in the plan of God. They are best fled from as soon as decently escape can be actioned without more danger to the spiritual believer – that is prayerfully you seek the open door to flee and run when through it. Rebekah knows her brother and rightly decides to give him no opportunity to frustrate the will of God over the next days. She is focused upon the will of the Lord for her and will not give anyone power to frustrate the plan. We are wise to follow Rebekah and flee all who will slow us down. **2 Timothy 1:7, 2:2-7.**
3. By people's prayers and blessing they are known. The spiritual status of the family of Nahor is seen by their traditional blessing over Rebekah. If ever you want to check out a believer as to their heart for the Lord, always ask them to pray for you. Formal and flowery traditional prayers are a sign of shallow faith and superficial spirituality. The ancients would say, "Speak friend, so I can know you". It is in our prayer life that we draw near to the Lord and so we are transformed by his presence. Isaac is found by Rebekah as a man of prayer. What a great start to their marriage.

CHAPTER 25

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we are introduced to a concept that we could call "Dying Grace", which is taught all through the scriptures. Dying Grace is the term used to describe the fact that the grace of God carries the believer right through life to our death, and through death to our eternal life.

If we are walking with the Lord Jesus Christ through this life, we will leave this life in an honouring way to the Lord and even our death will be our witness. Psalms 68:20, 116:15, 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Hebrews 11:13-16.

Abraham now dies having seen the promise to himself and to Isaac kept. God's promises are secure because the promises of God are based upon the Character of God. He had done what He said he would do. Abraham was given almost another 40 years of life after the death of Sarah. At her death he is 137 years old, and he dies at 175 years of age. Remember the oldest man, with birth year date recorded and proven in English history is buried in Westminster Abbey. He was born in 1483, and died at age 152 years and nine months on 15 November 1635. His name was Thomas Parr and you can visit his grave there. An autopsy was done upon him by Dr William Harvey the discoverer of the nature of the circulation of the blood and is written up in the archives of the Royal Society.

Abraham is blessed by God in a wonderful way, the Lord providing another woman, Keturah - "the smoke of incense". Her name shows that her life was a beautiful aroma. She was one of those people, like Paul's supporters while he is under arrest in Rome, who provided an improvement to his life just by being there. Colossians 4:7-14, 2 Timothy 1:16.

THE NOAHIC COVENANT AND THE WIVES OF ABRAHAM

Abraham has a full sexual relationship with this woman and many sons from her in the last decades of his life. In this he fulfils the concept of being the father of many nations as he has had sons by three key women, Hagar the Hamite, Sarah the Shemite, and Keturah, who is believed by many to be a Japhethite (although her children become founders of many of the Arab tribes, like the sons of Ishmael); thus each of his wives may be descended from each of the three sons of Noah.

In Genesis 9:9-17, 25-27, we have the Noahic Covenant recorded, which has a type fulfilment in the wives of Abraham with the Hamitic Hagar being the servant of Sarah the Shemite, and the Japhetic Keturah being blessed in the tents of Shem, and being enlarged with many sons in contrast with the offspring by Abraham of Ham and Shem. One of the possible descendants of this union of Abraham and Keturah, the Queen of Sheba, will come to visit Solomon 1000 years later.

The true spiritual blessing however comes through Shem in the form of Isaac and his descendent, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is also of interest that the great nations of Western history (of the sons of Japheth) have been the great nations of faith, as they enter the "tents of Shem" and worship the God of Israel. The West is currently in moral decline because biblical faith is currently in decline, but it will remain the power broker until the end. Remember, the powers that form the Anti-Christ's power base are the Western Nations, and they are the inheritors of the Babylonians and others who Daniel saw as opponents of God's people Israel. Daniel 2:31-45, 7:1-10.

The Western nations that were spiritually great while they served the God of Abraham, we now see entering into evil moral paths and spiritual apostasy under the enemy of God, and we will see them begin to persecute the sons of Abraham. We must keep our eyes on God's viewpoint of history and not be flag wavers, for our western world is steadily walking into the path of evil that will lead to the Anti-Christ emerging from amongst them. Read Daniel again!

In verse 5 Abraham recognizes that it is in Isaac that the blessing will flow and so he gave all he had to Isaac. He however made provision for the sons of Keturah, and sent them away to prosper by their own hard work, but they were not looked after as the son of promise. Keturah's arrival on the scene raises the issue of remarriage for believers.

REMARRIAGE AND CHARITY

The question of remarriage is addressed in 1 Timothy 5:11-16. Paul addresses the subject there as to who should receive charity in the church? The widow over 60 who has been the faithful wife of one man, and the faithful servant of the Lord is to receive support from the church, but only as she continues in prayer for the work of the church daily. If she had not been a good witness she would not be worthy of assistance. Those who were not following the Lord were told to go and seek assistance from the group they had been following. The younger widows do not receive anything under Paul's instructions, as it is expected that they would remarry, as the Lord provides a new life partner for them.

A widow who was supported by the church was to be involved in extensive daily prayer for the church and in regular good works under the deacons. If she was not willing to do this she did not receive support. If any person received food, clothing, home, or money from the Lord, the early church was clear, that they had the responsibility to put all their time into service to the Lord's people.

Paul wishes the young widows to remarry, verse 14. What Paul is saying is that if your partner dies and God has another partner for you in His plan He will provide that partner. While the psychologists and counsellors would urge bereaved people to take at least a year or so as a minimum time to mourn and grieve before remarrying, this may not be required in the Lord's plan, and each person must be in prayer about their future. All of us who face this issue are to use the time without a partner to grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus Christ and wait on His provision and His timing for that provision. 2 Peter 3:18.

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM AND OLD AGE

Genesis 25:7 says that Abraham was 175 when he died at a "good old age" and went to be with his ancestors who had also died in faith. Old age is often today anything but "good". My 89 year old mother said many times, "this old age is no good", as she struggled to cope with tablets keeping her going, and often forgetting to take them. She rejoiced in the Lord but felt the weaknesses of her aging body.

Abraham did not need his heart tablets; he had been restored to full health and that meant he was active until the end, although he had physically slowed down by the time of the marriage of Isaac and wasn't taking long journeys any more. Old age does not allow you to hide anything, for your real character will come out as physical attractiveness drops away. When you are young you are able to do a lot of things, and hide a lot of things about yourself by your physical activity, but when you are old you have only got what is inside you, and this is why it can be a burden to those around some old people. Old age will either be a time of reaping good harvests from a life of service and love of the Lord, or it will be the harvest of the works of the Old Sin Nature.

By old age, if you have not dealt with patterns of sin, any root of bitterness will have gone very deep, and will then cause you a lot of trouble. Remember as you read these words, that you may become old and reliant on others someday. You need to address your own inner life now to prepare for old age. We are warned by all modern media to "prepare for old age", but what they mean is retirement funding and health plans; God's Word challenges us differently.

The example of Abraham reminds us that the most important preparation for old age is our spiritual life, and enhancing that as we age, so that by the time we get beyond the grind of ten hour days at work, we are walking with the Lord closely indeed and death is simply seen as a closer walk. With old people, many treat them as a nuisance or an embarrassment, as they themselves cannot cope with the idea of aging themselves; others who can, treat the elderly with respect, and that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Our challenge is to be worthy of respect as we age, and then we can leave our old age and our death firmly in the Lord's hands, just as we have lived our daily life, dependant on his power and plan. What we reap; that is what we have sown for many years! Let us sow wisely now by continuing our Bible study and application into daily life. Study the following verses in your home study group on the biblical doctrine of reaping and sowing. Job 4:7-11, Proverbs 22:8, Hosea 8:7, 10:12-13, 1 Corinthians 9:11, 2 Corinthians 9:6, Galatians 6:7-9, 5:15-26. Now read the Galatians passages in the reverse order, as then you will see the "sow-reap" principle of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, that Paul intends.

If you are going to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in honesty and truth you have to think of your old age and how you want to leave this earth. As young people we often do not give this a thought, but this passage challenges us all to set our hearts and minds clear on this matter, before we advance in our spiritual service in our twenties or thirties!

Abraham did not let problems, or the results of his inaction or inattention pile up in his life. He addressed the problems he had through application of God's Word to life and by confessing his sin. Remember the Word of the Lord. "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me". Psalms 66:18. Remember, you are advised to use confession of sin for your sinful thoughts as well as your deed; that way you win the battle for the mind, which is where our Old Sin Nature fights best. In the end with old people it is their thoughts, deep regrets, and the hidden sins of their past, which destroy their peace and life quality.

One further word on this matter before we move on here. The Lord allowed my wife and I, early in our marriage, to live in an Old Folks home, in the manager's flat, for over two years. We watched and learned many things through that time, as we saw the blessing of believers who had walked closely to the Lord, and also the pathetic state of those who had not. We also saw some come to the Lord in great old age and even in early dementia. It is possible for some, that having rejected the Lord as a child and then as an adult, that early dementia is the last chance for conversion, for it is almost like a second childhood. It is important to remember that the old are facing the immediate prospect of eternity, either with the Lord, or in the Lake of Fire.

There is a big ministry that one can have towards the elderly. As a minister of a church you should adopt an old people's home, or the local elderly gathering place, for church services to be run, and for special evangelism. It is important to talk to these people straight rather than in small talk, or to adopt almost "child evangelism" techniques with those whose minds are going, but are not gone. Only one thing, do not neglect them, as their days are numbered and they know it, and from the Lord's Word we know that we are not upon the earth one day too long. If they are alive and do not know HIM, then they can still meet their Saviour; let us pray about this ministry area.

Abraham has been walking with the Lord through his life, and the Lord's blessing is on him in his death. The believer who is walking with the Lord is always "full in years" when they die; at whatever age the Lord calls us home, we are called to our eternal home and it is at the right time. Paul says that he had fought the good fight and finished the course and prepared himself for eternity. **2 Timothy 4:1-8**.

The New Testament view of Abraham's death is given in Hebrews 11:13-16, where in v 16 it is seen that the mature believers of all ages desired a new country. Abraham, even while he was on earth, he saw the eternal reality and concentrated on it throughout his life, rather than be distracted by the wealth he gathered, which was going to be passed on to others.

If we look at life from an eternal viewpoint we will find our life choices and priorities will fall into their correct place. When we know where we are going eternally we have great confidence and the correct perspective on life. We can then truly do our job as unto the Lord. We can sing with Paul if we live with his mental attitude; a close walk in the Holy Spirit daily means we, just like Paul will be able to rejoice in all things, right through until the end of our life.

You cannot talk yourself into this but it is something that the Holy Spirit can lead you into as you feed upon and apply the Word of Life daily. In life we are laying the groundwork for our death. Even Socrates said, "Call no man happy until he has died", reflecting Greek philosophical wisdom that recognized that it is only in old age that you see the true consequences of the choices of each man, and it is only as you watch him die that you know that man had no regrets about his choices. In old age our true self will reveal itself for all to see and in our death all who watch us will know we are happy with our choices.

We should consider each day as a day of grace, and review our life in the light of the fact that our time on earth is finite. Life is too short for sins or distracting activities of no eternal significance. There are far too many believers living for what people think of them; they are more interested in the New Years Honours list where the government rewards it's friends, than the Judgment Seat of Christ. Let us buy up the time we have for the Lord's service.

Death is seen as a positive event by the mature believer as a thing to look forward to because they know where they are going. **2 Corinthians 5:1-10**. Christian maturity has no fear of death, because perfect love casts out fear. 1 John 4:18. Refer to my studies of this passage in the commentary on 2 Corinthians Chapter 5, and 1 John Chapter 4.

We obtain that love and confidence by drawing close to Christ. If you were to be told tomorrow by your doctor that you have three years to live, would you change significant things in your life? Once you are dead you do not rest in peace, you are either with the Lord or in hell awaiting the lake of fire. **Revelation 20:11-15**. What would change about your present plans, if you knew truly they were very time limited. Of course our whole life is "time limited", it is just that we often deceive ourselves about how much time we have.

Many picture death as the coming into harbour of the ship of the person's life, but the Bible has the opposite viewpoint. Life is the provisioning of a ship that is cast off onto the sea of eternity at death. Paul's ship for instance was full of doctrine and the fruit of it's application into life through the years of toil and trouble the Lord allowed him to work through. The storms of life are but a few rain showers with the boat still tied up to the jetty. Sadly there are few well provisioned Christian "ships" ready for eternity. There are very few Christians who study God's Word, even fewer who believe it, and fewer still who let the Word loose within them to transform their daily lives, and apply it into the fabric of their lives. When you look on each day as your last you have the right perspective, and only then will you be living as God intended us to live here. John 10:10, 6:63.

Abraham is to be buried with Sarah, and they will therefore be standing together in the resurrection. Isaac is living at La Hai roi seeking the Lord daily, whilst Ishmael is still a wild ass of a man. However at the end of the chapter this next generation will face a challenge to apply doctrine into life, for Isaac's wife Rebecca has no children, but we will see that she leaves this in the Lord's hands using the principle behind Peter's words in 1 Peter 5:7

GENESIS 25:1-11

1 Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. 2 And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. 3 And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. 4 And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. 5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. 6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country. 7 And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. 8 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. 9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; 10 The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife. 11 And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahairoi."

REFLECTION

Verse 1. Abraham is restored to full sexual health and function at 100 Years of age and he fathers many children through Keturah, although she is referred to as both wife and linked to Hagar as a concubine by the scriptures. She is a second wife taken after the death of Sarah so marriage to her is legitimate, yet her sons are not considered as sons of promise, although they are free born and will be sent away with wealth, whereas Ishmael is sent away with his freedom only.

This situation creates some debate amongst biblical scholars, some of whom argue that Abraham has "other concubines" as well as Keturah, and that he was wrong in his old age in living as Solomon was to later.

From my own study of this passage and others, I believe that this is to jump to the wrong conclusion about Abraham and about the concept behind Moses and Jeremiah's reference to Keturah, and their joint usage of the word "concubines" which I believe refers to Keturah and Hagar only. Refer to 1 Chronicles 1:28ff also. Keturah is clearly identified by Moses, as a wife legitimately taken by Abraham. Death ends the marriage contract and he is entitled to remarry and she is God's provision, yet she is also referred to as a "concubine" by both writers of scripture.

The use of the term concubines at the end of the Genesis passage, at verse six, does not refer to other women and their sons, for all the sons of Abraham are carefully named by Moses. He was careful about these things and would not have omitted other names, any more than he would omit the names that are here even though they mean little to us now. The only possible reference to the term "concubines" can be to Hagar and Keturah. One was legitimately taken after the death of the wife, the other wrongly taken as a wife alongside Sarah. Remember, God makes no distinction between de-facto and legal wives; for sexual union creates marriage in God's sight. This is why sexual union with the wrong person is so bad for both people. It is adultery and a great sin against marriage and the family. Genesis 2:21-24, Matthew 19:3-12, 1 Corinthians 6:15-20.

If Keturah is also referred to as a concubine, what is being said by the two authors of scripture here? Now good men differ on their interpretation here and so I do not ask you to agree with my analysis, but simply and prayerfully reflect upon the facts and see what the Lord shows you. I believe that the use of this term reminds us strongly that God's plan is for each person to have one wife or husband, and that although re-marriage, after the death of a spouse, is allowed and even recommended, the second spouse and their children are secondary to the first, and have a different status. This is recognized by most people instinctively, and this is what has caused such conflict in so called "blended", second families through the ages.

For most people today there is no spiritual significance in the birth order of their children, and the need is for parents to be discerning towards their children and encourage all in their spiritual growth. For Abraham this issue was however very significant spiritually, for the line of Isaac was the line of promise and most of the resources he had were to be put into the spiritual line to ensure Isaac prospered in his walk through life.

As we will see Isaac possibly dissipates or misuses Abraham's fortune quite quickly and is unable to pay the bride price for his son Jacob in the way Abraham does for him. As we get to this point we will see some important principles emerging from this. But at this point we need to see God's attitude regarding the families of Abraham; his first wife is the "real" one for the future of mankind, with his two other "wives" being secondary in status. Hence the term "concubine" is used for them, to reflect their secondary status, not their lack of acceptance by God. It would appear that both these women were believers, although many of their sons will not be.

Verses 2-4. Now I will not spend a great deal of time with the names of these men, although many commentators have. The reason for my reticence here is that all absolute assignment of these men to modern Arabian tribes is uncertain and owes more to traditional stories of origins from Islamic times than to actual facts from this early period. Abraham is literate, as is Moses, but these men became sheiks of the desert and their traditions are then almost exclusively oral from this time (2000 BC) until the early years of this era.

From the names here however, and those also listed in 1 Chronicles 1, there are certain connections that can be made with modern Arab nations and tribes. The sons of Keturah intermarry with the Arabic groups of the central and southern Arabian Peninsula, as well as the land of Midian. The modern nations of Jordan and Saudi Arabia carry their and Ishmael's genetic lines, as do the Arab tribes of the Persian Gulf states. They are prospered when they embrace the faith of their father Abraham, and many do so today, and even more will in the Tribulational days to come.

Verses 5 - 6. Abraham gave all his remaining earthly goods to Isaac to ensure that the line of promise will prosper, and that all that he has built up will continue to be resources for Isaac to do the work that he has done for the Lord. Now this is after significant gifts of wealth to all the others, to ensure they were able to start out in life in the lands to the east. The biblical doctrine of separation is applied here, with Abraham recognizing that the sons of Keturah must be away from Isaac, so that they grow and prosper apart and so that Isaac's witness and path is not affected by any cares towards these other boys and girls, or their demands upon him.

In the Middle East the senior member of the family is responsible for the finances and problem solving of the younger family members. By sending them formally away with gifts of wealth, Abraham frees Isaac of this distracting responsibility, just as his high payment for the burial cave freed him of the distractions associated with land ownership under the Hittites.

The sons of Keturah were younger, (all in their twenties), and Isaac will, if he is the senior person in the family, be left as the responsible one for them all. He will be in danger of being the "sugar daddy"; the rich relative to whom they will all come for loans and with cares and concerns. Both any worry about these others, and their problems, will potentially distract Isaac and so Abraham wisely sends them away to find their path in life. Abraham ends the extended family obligations, and also ends the family as such. This is a drastic measure, but is needed for financial and judicial reasons, as we have seen, but also for spiritual. We are to be "workers", not "trust fund babies".....

It is also probably a sad recognition that none of these boys has found strong faith in the Lord, so that none of them can be help mates to Isaac in his spiritual journey, they can only be well meaning and pleasant company who will spiritually slow him down. Abraham has found pleasure and comfort with Keturah, but he has not found the most important thing, which is spiritual growth and comfort from their children. These are good and even great men, but they cannot walk where Isaac and Jacob will need to walk. Their descendants will however play their vital part in the future, when the great invasion of the Middle East occurs (Ezekiel 38-39) and when the Anti-Christ attacks the area later (Daniel 11:40-45.) In September of 2020 their descendants signed the "Abrahamic Treaty" with Israel ready to face Iran together.

Verses 7-8. Moses celebrates the life and times of Abraham and describes his death in a wonderful way. His own death will be marred by his loss of temper at a crucial time (Numbers 20:11) and so he will not be buried in the land, but he too will be gathered into the Lord's company at a good old age. Deuteronomy chapter 34. Abraham has lived all his life; he has not lingered on in useless days. His life has been lived fully and his death comes peacefully surrounded by his family.

The two key sons are there to bury him, although the sons of Keturah are not mentioned. This is a strange omission if they were there, and may indicate that all the boys are gone East by this time, and that Keturah has died by this time, for she drops out of the record here also. Ishmael is reunited with his brother for the burial of Abraham, and so must have been there at the end also, as days were not taken before burial in the ancient world, which was done often within twenty four hours.

The Lord blesses Isaac after the death of his father, with peace between Ishmael and himself, and with prosperity. He continues to live close to the place where the Lord last appeared to Hagar, and it may be that Ishmael was also in the vicinity. He certainly gives Isaac a record of his sons and their doings, for Moses is able to record the details that Ishmael gave and add to that information the things he knows from later times. Ezra may also add in further details at this point. Moses, as an Egyptian prince and general, was in a position to know where a lot of the tribal descendents of Ishmael were in his day, and Ezra had access to the records of the Babylonians and Persians who also fought with and traded with these people.

Verses 9 – 11. Abraham is buried in the cave he had purchased for the burial of Sarah by his two sons and their extended families. Notice what is said and what is not said here. The funeral is private, short, dignified, and the focus is upon the burial of the corpse of Abraham, with the body of Isaac's mother, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection, and the fact that they will all stand together there in their resurrected state.

Isaac is so focused upon this that he will seek to be buried here also, and the teaching of his son will be done in such a way that Jacob will also want to be buried here, and even Joseph will leave instruction that he is not to be buried in Egypt but to be brought back to the land for burial. Genesis 33:19, 50:25, Exodus 13:19, Joshua 24:32. Burial for the Patriarchs was not like the pagans amongst whom they lived, and was the last testimony of their lives, just as it is our own.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Marriage is a serious thing and not to be entered into lightly. Believers are to be very, very scared about entering into a marriage with the wrong person for them, for the Lord holds the contract sacred and so are we. Second wives or husbands are not to feel inferior in God's sight today, where the marriage has been in the

Lord, but for Keturah there was a second class feel to things, because Sarah was the wife of promise and in her line the blessing would come.

2. Nations prosper depending on their relationship to the blessing that comes through Abraham. There is blessing only in the tents of Shem for the other sons of Noah. We are to serve the line of promise and not abuse the other lines of Shem, descending from Ishmael and the sons of Keturah either. The West may be receiving judgment on both counts in our own days; we have not stood by Israel, and we have exploited the Arab nations for their oil. God has blessed them all. Pause and reflect upon this with the world's oil reserves, both Arab and Israeli, and be prayerful for the children of the believers Sarah, Hagar and Keturah.

Pray for salvation for their children daily, that the now predominantly Moslem people might come to acknowledge the one they call a prophet but often do not read as their Koran orders them to; Isa (Jesus). Pray that the sons and daughters of Hagar and Keturah read the Injeel of Isa (the words of Jesus), and let us as the churches of the Lord witness, without insult or offence, to the reality of the message of Jesus and the relevance of his message for the Arabic peoples, the sons of Abraham by these two women.

3. Old Age can be a terrible thing. Dementia can be awful, but in most cases it can be avoided by good heart health care, and physical, mental, and spiritual activity through life. When we can no longer be as active as we were, we can still draw close to the Lord and have our inner batteries recharged daily in our fellowship. We must commit now to growth in fellowship daily with our Lord, for it is in the habit of daily close fellowship that we build a good place for our life to be in through older age.
4. Life is the provisioning of the ship of our soul for it's eternal voyage. 2 Timothy 4:1-8. Fear of death is a sign of lack of reality in our walk with the Lord in life. Let us be convicted of any slackness here and advance into our daily lives with spiritual focus every day.
5. Keturah's children have been a mighty source of both conflict and support down the years for the children of Isaac and Jacob. She was a joy to Abraham but her legacy has proven a mixed blessing to his descendents. Having said this, let us remember that all the peoples of this area are cousins! All can enter the blessing through their acceptance of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the Bible teaches that they will in the Last Days.

The way for us to be part of the solution must be sought and found, rather than continue to be the money hungry westerners who have been part of the recent problem in the Middle East! That solution is to be preachers of righteousness to the Moslems, and that means being teachers of the prophets without Crusader-centred offence being given, and that means especially being teachers of the Injeel of Isa – the words of Jesus. We should be giving out quality Arabic gospels throughout the Middle East, for many of Hagar and Keturah's children will respond to the truth, if they hear it, just as their mothers did. Even today many of Keturah's children in the Persian Gulf States support Jewish people and Christians in their midst without persecution.

6. The doctrine of separation is an important truth, but is open to perversion, just like all other truths. Separation does not mean we separate from all who do not agree with every minor doctrine we preach, but it does mean we recognize that we must move away from carnal believers, just as from immoral unbelievers who have rejected our message. We must take actions to stop ourselves being distracted from our mission for the Lord. Let us take any action that strips away distraction from our daily lives.
7. Our funeral is the last opportunity for witness to be given to those around us. Carefully plan your own funeral now. Think about the songs to be sung, the passage of scripture you would want read aloud and the message you would want people to walk away with. Write all this down now. Having done this, reflect now upon your life, and live in a manner worthy of the message you want given after your death.

Let us also be rightly related to graveyards. They are placed where the bodies of the dead lie awaiting resurrection, they are not the places where the dead are! The dead are either with the Lord or in Hell awaiting the last judgment. Let us be rightly related to our dead, and not be distracted by those who have passed on, any more than we are distracted by those who would lead us astray in the manner of their lives. We are here to serve the Lord as his ambassadors, not spend too much time in looking backwards at those who we loved, but who are already enjoying eternity, or regretting their wasted lives.

- 2 Timothy 4:1-8** *“1. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;
 2. Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.
 3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;
 4. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.
 5. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.
 6. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.
 7. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:
 8. 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.”*