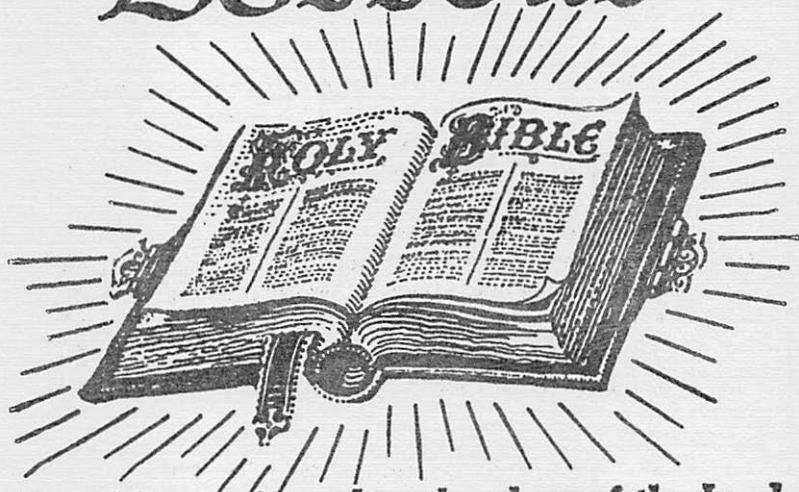


Bible Lessons



**"Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,
we are CHANGED" II Cor. 3:18**

ADULTS — YOUNG PEOPLE

**Vol. 30, No. 1
Jan., Feb., March
1998**

**Faith Pub. House
Guthrie, OK
73044**

Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People
(USPS054-680)

Volume 30

Jan., Feb., March

No. 1

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**Publishing the Bible truths in the interest of
Jesus Christ and His Church
Edited by Leslie C. Busbee and Wayne Murphey**

**Subscription Price-\$1.00 a copy for quarter of year, or
\$4.00 per year, issued quarterly.
Periodical postage paid at Guthrie, Oklahoma.**

**Published Quarterly By:
FAITH PUBLISHING HOUSE
920 W. Mansur Ave.
Guthrie, Oklahoma 73044
Postmaster: Please send address corrections
to above address.**

THEME FOR FIRST QUARTER

For our Bible Lessons this quarter we will study the life of Abraham, the Father of the faithful. There are many wonderful things that are revealed in Abraham that are greatly beneficial to the child of God in Jesus Christ today. Abraham is probably mentioned more times in the New Testament than any other Old Testament figure. God used Abraham to show to us the virtue of faithfulness and obedience. It is in this example of steadfast faith and loyal confidence that Abraham means so much to us. We need this same spirit of faithfulness and trustworthy disposition today as we face a hostile world of unbelief wherein faith has been cast away by so many. So, as we study the life of this Friend of God, may we be inspired and challenged to imitate him and develop and retain this same kind of faith and trust in the Almighty God.

In our study we will use material from both of the Old and New Testaments, at various places going back and forth from one to the other, to get a clearer picture of the account. In some places the New Testament brings into focus certain aspects of Abraham's faith that is not expressed in the Old Testament. Combining the two, we can get a clear and concise history along with the spiritual application. —Leslie C. Busbee



JANUARY 4, 1998

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

Acts 7:2 ...The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran.

Genesis 11:29 And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai;...

30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

Genesis 12:1 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.

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.

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 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.

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.

Hebrews 11:8 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.

MEMORY VERSE: 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. Hebrews 11:8.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God is faithful and just to call every one and give us a chance to follow Him. It is up to us to be like Abraham and respond to and obey the call of God, believing His faithful Word and walking in His marvellous light.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Acts 7:2), "*Charran*": This is the same as "Haran" in Genesis 11:31. It appears that Abram dwelt in a place called Ur of the Chaldees which was situated in the southeastern part of the Tigris and Euphrates River areas. He, with his father, and wife and nephew, Lot, journeyed from Ur north-west to Haran, a distance of about 600 miles.

(Genesis 12:1), "*The Lord had said unto Abram*": According to our scripture in Acts 7:2 (which was the beginning of Stephen's defense before the condemning Jews) God had revealed Himself to Abraham while he yet lived in Mesopotamia (which was the country where Ur of the Chaldees was located). So it is evident that Abram's move from Ur to Haran had been in response to the divine call. And it is also evident that Abram was not persuaded that Haran was the place God wanted him to live in, so we see him leaving Haran and moving westward toward the land of Canaan, perhaps in response to a second call.

(Hebrews 11:8), "*By faith Abraham,...obeyed; and...went out, not knowing whither he went*": Here is the first manifestation of the faith and obedience of Abraham to God. It is a general habit to not make a move unless one knows where he is going. But Abraham moved at the call and command of God and went forward, not knowing of his destination. He moved, believing that God was leading him and would make known His will concerning where he was to go.

(Hebrews 11:9), "*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles*": Here is the second phase of Abraham's faith. Our text in Genesis 12:7 says that the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." In his defense, Stephen put it this way: "And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after

him, when as yet he had no child." He lived in the land of Canaan, knowing and believing that God had promised it to him and to his posterity, and yet he could not possess it. It was all by believing. He lived in tabernacles, which meant that he lived in tents and moved from place to place. He was a stranger and a sojourner in the land that really, by the promise of God, belonged to him.

(Hebrews 11:10), "*For he looked for a city*": Abraham had a vision that showed him that the land and society in which he found himself in Canaan was not according to God's plan and pleasure. Therefore he was content to be a pilgrim and a stranger in the land because he believed that God was going to bring about a better city and a better society that would be according to God's plan and design. We, today, enjoy in the Spirit that fellowship and society of that beautiful city, but it is yet to be finalized, even as the writer in Hebrews 13:14 said, "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

LESSON BACKGROUND

We have in today's study the account of the call of Abraham by the Lord. We read in Josephus, Book 1, Chapter 7, that Abram "was a person of great sagacity (wisdom), both for understanding all things and persuading his hearers, and not mistaken in his opinions; for which reason he began to have higher notions of virtue than others had, and he determined to renew and to change the opinion all men happened then to have concerning God; for he was the first that ventured to publish this notion, that there was but one God, the Creator of the universe; and that, as to other gods, if they contributed any thing to the happiness of men, that each of them afforded it only according to God's appointment alone, and not by their own power." Josephus went further to state that Abraham observed that the movement of the heavenly bodies, that is, the sun, moon and stars were surely controlled by a power other than themselves, being subject to Him that commands them. "It is to Him alone," he concluded, "that we ought justly to offer our honour and thanksgiving."

It was because of this confidence that Abraham had in the power and reality of the living God that he was visited by God

and given the divine call. Isaiah 51:2 says, "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." In order for God to really lead Abram and work with him, he had to obey the call of God and separate himself from his family and former associates. They would hinder him, and God wanted Abram to trust in Him alone.

We draw from Stephen's testimony the beginning of God's call to Abraham. Stephen was on trial before the council of the Jews for his zeal and faith in Jesus. He rehearsed before their non-receptive ears the history of Israel and how they had grieved and vexed God through the years. He said that God called Abraham to leave his country and kindred before he dwelt in Haran. It is evident that God called him the second time to leave Haran and travel on to the land that God was to show him. And Abraham passed the first test of faithfulness to God by obeying Him in making this move.

The writer in Hebrews 11 makes mention of several of the early people who had faith in God. He said that through faith they obtained a good report. The Greek says, "They were attested," that is, they bore witness of the workings of God. And then, starting with Abel, the writer brought out the various examples of faith that these great men and women manifested in their lives, among whom were Abraham and his wife, Sarah.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did God's call to Abraham command him to do?
2. What promise did God make to Abraham in His call?
3. What was in God's call that required faith on Abraham's part?
4. How old was Abraham when he left Haran? (This is important to remember.)
5. What did God say to Abraham about the land of Canaan?
6. Could the famine have caused Abraham to be discouraged?
7. How did Abraham respond to God's call?
8. What did Abraham believe in his obedience to God's call?

9. Why did Abraham not take possession of Canaan?
10. What did Abraham's faith foresee in the future?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

There is something fascinating and wonderful about the call of God to Abraham. Abraham lived in a place called Ur in the land of the Chaldeans who inhabited Mesopotamia, the land between and on either side of the great rivers of Tigris and Euphrates. The word "Ur" signifies fire, and it is generally believed that the people worshipped fire and named their city after their god. But Abraham had heard and been informed of the true God, the report of Whom came down through his family lineage that reached back to Shem, the oldest son of Noah. In Abraham God found a man He could work His eternal purpose through. It was God's time to introduce, before the world, the good pleasure that He has in people believing, trusting, obeying and steadfastly following Him. For this cause He revealed Himself to Abraham and made Him a promise that, if he would obey His voice, He would make him a blessing to all the families of the earth. It took faith on Abraham's part to respond in obedience to the divine call. There were many reasons that he could have had for drawing back. Where was God going to lead him? What kind of land was it going to be? Would he be able to make a living there? All these questions and many more could have come to mind, and I am sure they did, he being in the flesh. But Abraham disregarded the doubts and questions and moved out on the promises of God.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

When Abraham left the city of Ur, he didn't know where he was going, but he knew what he was looking for. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations,..." Hebrews 11:10.

In studying the city of Ur, and the country of Mesopotamia, it is evident that Abraham was sick of the kind of life around him. Ur was a large metropolis which was highly technical for its day. It was in Mesopotamia that the wheel was invented, the numerical basis of 10 which we use today was developed

and its crowning advancement was the first known form of writing, called cuneiform. But Abraham was not enamored by these things. He was tired of living in a place which had no true foundation.

Ur had no foundation in that, in Mesopotamia, which was the home of many cities, every city had its own government and autonomy. Therefore, there was no central government to keep one from warring with another and thus destroying the city on a regular basis. Abraham loved peace, as later demonstrated by his dealings with his nephew, Lot, and so he set forth to find a place with stability.

This is a true example for us today. We must have a vision, and seek for a place of peace. It is not that a Christian runs from trouble, but he has a desire to live in peace and stability so that others through him can be blessed.

Abraham was also looking for a city "...whose builder and maker is God." Rising high above the walls of Ur was the shrine to the city's patron deity, the Sumerian moon god, Nanna, which today is the only remaining tangible legacy of Ur, located in southern Iraq. Abraham sought a place where God could be honored as the Creator of all things.

—Wayne Murphey



JANUARY 11, 1998

ABRAHAM TAKES THE HUMBLE SIDE

Genesis 13:1 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 made 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,...even as the garden of the Lord,...

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.

MEMORY VERSE: Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. Proverbs 16:19.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Abram took the humble side in

allowing Lot to have first choice of the land, but afterward God gave him promise of all the land as his eternal inheritance.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 13:12,) "*Pitched his tent toward Sodom*": The Hebrew says, "Tented as far as Sodom." The Septuagint says, "And Lot dwelt in a city of the neighboring people and pitched his tent in Sodom."

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Lord had blessed both Abraham and Lot with much wealth in flocks and herds. There was not enough space in the place where they were living to profitably operate, so a change had to be made. Abram was fully aware that God had promised him the land. Yet he took the humble side and offered Lot the first choice of the land. He was willing to take what was left and be content. This was to Abram's credit, for God was beholding the whole thing. After Lot had taken his departure and moved off toward the wicked cities of Sodom and the other cities of the plain, God spoke to Abram. He stated again His promise of giving ALL of the land to Abram and to his seed. He reveals more of His blessings by adding that Abram's seed would be as the dust of the earth in number. He even encouraged Abram to walk up and down in the land and look it over, for it was to be his land. Abram moved to a new place and built an altar unto the Lord. Abram was a true worshipper of God, building altars unto the Lord wherever he went. With Lot, it was a sad decision that he made. He looked at the prosperity centered around the well watered plain of Jordan and the cities there. Not considering the evil influence and the danger to his relationship with the Lord, he went and made his home among those fierce despisers of God. As we shall see farther on, his decision cost him nearly everything he had.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Abram generally do when he made a move?
2. Why was Abram desirous to keep peace with Lot?

3. What did he do in an effort to keep down strife?
4. What influenced Lot in making his decision?
5. How can we "pitch our tent toward Sodom" today?
6. Why was Lot's move to Sodom a disastrous move?
7. What did God promise to Abram after Lot left?
8. What faith did Abram have that made him take the lowly side?
9. In what way was Abram a good example for us?
10. How can we be children of Abram in this way?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

We see in our lesson today the next step in the progression of the faith of Abraham. A separation was necessary because there was not enough space for both Abraham and his nephew, Lot, to occupy together. Knowing of God's promise already to him that the land was to be his, Abraham, in a gesture of true love and humility and self-denial, offered to Lot the first choice. He was willing to take what was left over. It is very important for us to follow this same spirit and attitude. The person who is always contending for "me" and "mine" will go into error and dangerous paths. We must discipline ourselves never to contend for our own way or pleasure. It is indispensable for us to take the humble side in every decision we make in life. Abraham did not seek his own, but put his brother ahead of him. God loved that spirit and intensified His promised blessing to him. In this world of strife and vanity, people are seeking to please self. Behold all the strife that is engaged between people in strikes, lawsuits and wars. This is not the spirit that God wants His people to have. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Matthew 5:9. Paul said in I Corinthians 10:24, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." We must cultivate this kind of attitude and spirit. This is the true spirit of Christ. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Philippians 2:4. You obey the Lord at a sacrifice of your own thoughts and pleasure, and the glory of God will be your reward. It was that way with Abram and it will be that way with us.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

When Lot and Abraham separated, they had more of a difference between them than just that Lot journeyed to the plain of Jordan and Abraham dwelt in Canaan. The greatest difference is that Lot pitched his tent and drew nigh unto Sodom, and Abraham built an altar unto the Lord, and drew nigh unto Him.

It is interesting to note the places in which Abraham erected altars to God. History chronicles several which he built on his journeys after he left Ur. However, we don't read of any altars he built in Ur or in Egypt. What would have been the perception of seeing a small, rock altar erected beside the 70 foot high shrine of the moon god Nanna, in Ur? Or what would his diminutive altar have looked like standing beside the towering pyramids of Egypt? In like comparison, how would Abraham's quiet communion with God have appeared, set side by side with Sodom's revelry? The lack of lustre and excitement would have been held in contempt.

The experience of being with the Lord may be held in disdain by the world, yet every child of God far prefers the blessing of God's communion over the empty revelry of sin. And just as you refuse to cast pearls before swine, the Christian has no inspiration to worship God among the clatter of sinful society. It is in the quiet place that we get alone with God.

—Wayne Murphey



JANUARY 18, 1998

ABRAM REFUSES THE PRIZE OF WAR

Genesis 14:5 And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him,...

8 And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah,...and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim.

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.

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 Eschol, 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.

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, Eschol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

MEMORY VERSE: ...Be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy. I Timothy 6:17.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Abram showed that he was not trusting in earthly wealth for his provision, because he refused to accept the goods he recovered in battle which were offered to him as a reward.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 14:10), "*Slimepits*": These were places where tar and asphalt had worked their way up to the surface of the earth. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, in fleeing from their enemies, fell into these pits and perished, either by being slain or being overwhelmed in the tar and asphalt.

(Genesis 14:11), "*Victuals*": Food.

(Genesis 14:13), "*These were confederate with Abram*": The Hebrew says, "These had a covenant with Abram." These three men no doubt had great respect and friendship with Abram, and were ready to come to his assistance.

(Genesis 14:15), "*By night*": Josephus describes Abram's defeat of the kings: "When Abram heard of their calamity, he was at once afraid for Lot, his kinsman, and pitied the Sodomites, his friends and neighbors; and thinking it proper to afford them assistance, he did not delay it, but marched hastily, and the fifth night fell upon the Assyrians, near Dan, and before they could arm themselves, he slew some as they were in their beds, before they could suspect any harm; and others, who had not yet gone to sleep, but were so drunk they could not fight, ran away. Abram pursued after them, till, on the second day, he drove them in a body unto Hobah, a place belonging to Damascus; and thereby demonstrated that victory does not depend on multitude and number of hands, but that the readiness and courage of soldiers overcome the most numerous bodies of men."

(Genesis 14:18), "*Melchizedek king of Salem*": Salem was the same city which afterwards was called Jerusalem. He was the king of that city and was holding to the worship of the true God, and through his faithfulness to God and his righteous

manner of life, had the office of priest of the most high God. *"Brought forth bread and wine"*: Melchizedek supplied Abraham and his army with food and provisions as they returned, battleworn and weary, from their fight with the kings.

(Genesis 14:20), *"And he gave him tithes of all"*: Abram gave to Melchizedek a tenth part of what he had recovered in the victory the Lord had given him.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Chedorlaomer, king of Elalm, along with three other kings, had conquered the cities and kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and had ruled them for twelve years. In the thirteenth year the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah had rebelled against these other kings. So in the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him came, and the five cities of the plain, (Sodom and Gomorrah being the chief cities) warred in battle against them. Chedorlaomer and those with him overcame the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and took their people and their goods, including Abraham's nephew Lot, and made away with them. One person escaped and came and brought the news to Abram. Abram immediately made preparation to go to the rescue of Lot and all that had been carried away. Abram had 318 servants besides his three close allies and their men. These three men were three brothers, Aner, Eschol and Mamre. Abram had been camping in their area and had no doubt won their confidence and trust. They were ready to join with Abram in his campaign against the forces of evil. By the help of God and wise strategy Abram was able to bring back all the goods, women and people who had been taken captive, along with his nephew, Lot, and all he had. The king of Sodom was so glad to get his people and the women back that he offered Abram all the wealth recovered as a reward. Here is where the faith of Abram took shape again. He refused the wealth, affirming that he had promised God that he would take nothing. His heart was not on the worldly wealth. Even though God had blessed him with riches, yet he drew the line on what he was to have and how it was to be obtained. He did not want the riches of those wicked cities. He consented to allow his three allies to have their portion, but as

for him, God was to be his portion. We shall see in our next lesson that God was highly pleased with Abram in this, and revealed Himself to Abram in a greater way than before, progressing him to the full development of His wonderful plan.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What was the main reason for Abram going to battle?
2. How successful was he on this venture?
3. What did the king of Salem do to Abram?
4. What did Abram do to Melchizedek and why?
5. What did the king of Sodom offer to Abram?
6. Why did Abram refuse what the king of Sodom offered?
7. How did this show the real faith of Abram?
8. What kind of riches are we to seek for today?
9. What happens to people when they get their eyes on riches?
10. Who is the real possessor of heaven and earth?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

A faithful man will abound with blessings. (Prov. 28:20.) Abram had been blessed with the friendship of three brothers and had entered into a covenant of trust and mutual help with them. God is faithful to see to it that His children will have like blessings as these. He knows that we will need the aid of faithful friends. Thank God for all He provides His saints in this way. What a blessing it is to have a friend! "A friend loveth at all times,..." Prov. 17:17. "...There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Prov. 18:24. Abram was proving to be a friend of God, and God was faithful to supply him with the friends that he needed. We have found it so in life. As we choose to serve the Lord and take His way, God is faithful to bring to us the warm and faithful souls who will help us in the great battles of life. As Brother Sam Abbott said in a message once, "God will have someone to stay with us if we will stay with Him, and if we won't faint."

Blessings awaited Abram as he returned from the slaughter of the kings. The king of Salem, Melchizedek, who later was termed to be a type of Jesus Christ, met him with provisions

of food and blessings from the most high God. He was priest of the most high God, being divinely appointed and approved by his people because of his righteous life and conduct. His name, Melchizedek, meant "king of righteousness." He was the king of Salem, which meant "king of peace." (Hebrews 7:2.) To us today, Jesus is that King of Righteousness and King of Peace. His kingdom is within us, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Luke 17:21, Romans 14:17.)

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Lot's choice of the fertile lands, and his mingling with people who did not fear God nor choose to live right, brought trouble. The Bible tells us that they were exceedingly wicked sinners before God. Observation has taught us that a person should be careful what company he keeps. Many times a person with good morals has been brought down to gross wickedness because he kept the wrong company. Many young people have gone deep into sin, which has wrecked their physical lives, because of the company they kept. They could not resist the taunts from others because they did not want to smoke, drink strong drinks, use dope, indulge in illicit sexual practices and other sins.

"Lot's sorrow commenced when he and his family were taken captive. But dear old Abram came to his rescue. What a wonderful example of forgiveness, love and kindness we see on exhibition here. Uncle Abram gathered together his servants and, with the help of others, went to the rescue. He did not sit quietly and say to himself, 'It serves Lot right since he was so greedy and covetous. He can just get out of his own troubles the best way he can.' No, Abram was a great man. He had God in his heart and acted as God would act. We were lost in sin and chose the wrong way, but God, in His great love, sent Jesus to this world to die on the cross and rise again for our salvation. Jesus rescued us from sin. He forgave us and loved us. Surely we do love our precious Lord and Savior for His great love shown to us."

—Marie Miles (Written in 1969.)



JANUARY 25, 1998

ABRAM BELIEVING UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS

Genesis 15:1 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.

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 carcases, 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 theirs, 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,...

MEMORY VERSE: ...Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. James 2:23.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God revealed to Abram that from his own seed would come a posterity that would be in number like the stars for multitude. Abram believed this promise and God accounted it unto him for righteousness. He also foretold the sojourn of his offspring, the children of Israel, in Egypt and their return to possess the Canaan land.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 15:1), "*After these things*": Because Abraham had faithfully refused to receive the carnal riches for reward in preference to God's promised blessings, the Lord appeared to him and assured him of his protection and a great reward. "*Thy exceeding great reward*": The Hebrew says, "Your reward will increase greatly."

(Genesis 15:2), "*The steward of my house*": The Hebrew says, "The son who holds my house." The Septuagint Greek translation says, "The son of Masek my home-born female slave."

(Genesis 15:3), "*One born in my house*": The Hebrew says, "The son of my house." The Septuagint says, "My home-born servant." This is evidently referring to a son that was born in Abram's household among his servants. His name is called Eliezer here and is probably the same servant that was sent later to get a wife for Isaac, as is recorded in Genesis 24, although his name is not recorded there.

(Genesis 15:5), "*He brought him forth abroad*": The Hebrew says, "He brought him outside."

(Genesis 15:6), "*He believed in the Lord*": Adam Clarke says, and I agree, that this is the most important scripture in the Old Testament. The apostle Paul picks up on this and states it several times in his teachings on us being justified by faith in Christ.

(Genesis 15:10), "*Laid each piece one against another*": The Hebrew says, "And he laid each piece opposite its neighbor." Abram took the three animals and cut each one in two right down the middle and laid them on the altar each piece opposite its counterpart. It is evident that they were not touching, but were laid apart.

(Genesis 15:16), "*The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full*": The people who inhabited Canaan at this time were wicked, but God was not quite ready to judge them. Adam Clarke observes: "From these words we learn that there is a certain pitch of iniquity to which nations may arrive before they are destroyed, and beyond which Divine justice does not permit them to pass."

(Genesis 15:17), "*Burning lamp*": The Hebrew says, "A torch of fire." A flame of fire jumped between the split parts of the carcasses of the animals. This was God's way of showing that He accepted the sacrifice of Abram.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Abram had passed another test of character when he refused the reward offered him by the wicked king of Sodom. God was well pleased with his decision and comforted him with these words: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Abram was also greatly distressed by his having no offspring. He knew that God had promised that in his seed all nations would be blessed. But time was passing and he was getting older. No son to him and Sarai had been born. There was a child born among his servants, but God reassured him that the promised seed would be from the fruit of his own body. It is an inspiring scene to picture Abram going outside his tent in response to God's voice and looking up into

the star-studded skies. There God gave the word, "If thou be able to number them: so shall thy seed be." At that point Abram counted it so just as God had said. Confidence sprang up in his heart as he reckoned that God was able and was faithful to carry out this promise. This is the kind of faith that was to be in the hearts of humanity, those of all nations and families of the earth who were thus to be the children of Abraham.

God gave Abram the promise again of his seed inheriting the land of Canaan where he was sojourning. This time he made it into a covenant, or special agreement. A sacrifice was offered in accordance with God's instructions, and God verified His promise by showing His acceptance, by sending fire down upon the sacrifice. God also prophesied of Abram's seed, as a great nation, going down into Egypt to sojourn and then to come out with great substance to possess the Canaan land.

So we see another progression in the faith of Abraham and the dealings of God with him. We see him, as before, responding with faith and obedience which was well pleasing in God's sight. So it is with each one of us who start out to serve the Lord. God deals with us step by step, and as we respond with faith and obedience to His leadings and directions, we will find ourselves moving forward in our experience, attaining higher heights and deeper depths in our relationship with God.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the promise of God's shield and reward mean so much to Abram?
2. Why was Abram so concerned about having offspring?
3. How did God show Abram how great his seed would be?
4. How did Abram respond to the promise God gave him?
5. How is this the same faith that we should have?
6. What covenant did God make with Abram that day?
7. How did God show his approval upon the sacrifice?
8. What did Abram have to do to protect the sacrifice?
9. What did God show him about the future?
10. Why was Abram not to see the promise fulfilled in his day?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

What a comfort it is to have the Spirit of the Lord whisper to our hearts the very words that God spoke to Abram! God is our shield and our exceeding great reward if we have been faithful and obedient to His call. If we have taken up our cross for Jesus, left the world and its follies and fashions behind, and are following the meek and lowly Saviour, we are in line for these wonderful blessings and rewards. Like Abraham, we are tempted to look at conditions and things on the surface. But let us keep tuned to the Spirit of God. He will turn our eyes away from the things that are seen and of this world. He will bring the Word of God and its wonderful promises and standards to our hearts. Through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and the strength of His Word we can have faith to believe and wait patiently on the Lord. The writer in Hebrews 6:11-12 says, "...We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Then in verse 15 he spoke of Abraham, "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." The children that God promised to be Abraham's seed are all those who are of faith and patience in following the meek and lowly Jesus. Sacrifices are to be made and those who are not willing to sacrifice their selfish desires with respect to God's holiness are not going to reap His rewards. Abraham has passed several tests thus far in our study of his life. First, he obeyed God when he was told to leave his home and family and go to another land that would be showed to him later. That took faith in God, but he obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. He stood the test when he offered Lot the best and was willing to take what was left. He resisted the temptation of earthly wealth when he refused the reward of the goods of Sodom. And now, in our lesson today, we see Abram taking hold of faith in the personal promise God gave him of seed more than the stars in number. Let us follow the example of this man who proved to be a real Friend of God.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"After these things the Word of the Lord came unto Abram..."

The ability to speak a word in season is a special gift. God's words are always in season and He knows how to speak to those who are weary. After the battle and rescue of Lot from the hands of the four kings, the Word of the Lord came to Abram. At first glance you might think that after the battle it was time to celebrate. But consider what Abram might have been thinking. Perhaps he feared the kings he defeated had gone after reinforcements. Or, Abram might have been second guessing his refusal of the king of Sodom's gifts. Whatever the case may have been, God told him, "...I am thy shield,...I am thy...exceeding great reward."

Another great principle to ponder, concerning Abram's frame of mind at this time, is that the achievements of faith never brings self-confidence. And so, even in victory, Abram felt a great dependence upon God.

Victory without God is not a triumph. It is possible to defeat our enemies through our own strength and wiles, but that kind of mastery is accompanied by many bitter pills which must be swallowed. And so every battle of life, which we undertake, must be done with faith in God and not in our own strength. Therein lies the comfort and peace of our Lord.

—Wayne Murphey



FEBRUARY 1, 1998

ABRAM TAKES A SECONDARY WIFE

Genesis 16:1 Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar.

2 And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

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 thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

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 comest 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?

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.

MEMORY VERSE: There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. Proverbs 19:21.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: We must be careful in times of the trying of our faith and waiting upon God, that we hold steady and not take action by human reasoning and get out of the order of God.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 16:4), "*Her mistress was despised in her eyes*": The Septuagint says, "Her mistress was dishonoured before her." Josephus says, "She triumphed, and ventured to affront (oppose or insult) Sarai, as if the dominion were to come to her son."

(Genesis 16:5), "*My wrong be upon thee*": The Hebrew says, "My injury be upon you." The Septuagint says, "I am injured by thee." Although this was all because of Sarai's suggestion, yet she laid the responsibility right on Abram. It was not a damaging point, but at this point Abram's faith was deficient. Later Abram was able to recover his error and go on. But he would have been better off if he had not listened to Sarai's suggestion, and had stood fast in believing what God had already promised him concerning his seed.

(Genesis 16:6), "*Sarai dealt hardly with her*": The Hebrew says, "Sarah dealt harshly with her." The Septuagint says, "Sarah afflicted her." Josephus says, "But when Abram resigned her into the hand of Sarai, to punish her, she contrived to fly away, as not able to bear the instances of Sarah's severity to her; and she entreated God to have compassion on her."

(Genesis 16:13), "*Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?*": The Hebrew says, "Even here have I looked after the One seeing me." The Septuagint says, "For I have openly seen Him that appeared to me." Hagar was able to grasp the understanding of the purpose of the revelation of God to her. She was given insight into the future of her child and how God would bless her if she returned to her mistress and submitted herself into her hands.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we will consider the incident in Abram's life that appears at first to be a blot on his character

and faith, but turns out to be a beneficial lesson. There are several lessons that we can gain from this. Abram's wife, Sarai, allowed her own thoughts and human reasoning to influence her decisions. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes (Proverbs 21:2), and it seemed very logical to Sarai to take things into her own hands. Allowing her maid to be a secondary wife to Abram seemed a perfect solution to the problem. This is what happens in so many lives. Instead of waiting on God and keeping faith, another course of action is suggested. But, as in the case of Abram here, such steps of misguided thoughts so often present new and more difficult problems. It is a constant battle for the man of faith to resist the inroads of the flesh. The flesh is ever there to make its suggestions. Satan uses this means of tempting us to go astray from the way of faith. It was Sarai's idea to use her handmaid in this manner. And it would have been much better had Abram restrained his wife's suggestion. But, as in the case of Adam, he hearkened to the voice of his wife. Then the troubles started. Hagar turned on Sarai. And Sarai turned on Abram. "My wrong be upon thee." In other words, she is holding Abram responsible! Then with Abram's consent, she sought to punish Hagar. Poor Hagar did not know how to handle it or what to do. So, as the case with many have been, she ran off. But there was One who was watching the whole thing. The wise heavenly Father who is just and merciful and full of understanding intervened and sent His angel to rescue Hagar from her trouble. It all came out well because of the help and goodness of God. We will see further in another lesson how it all ended up and the truth that this incident helped to bring out. —Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Sarai suggest Abram taking Hagar to wife?
2. What should she have done instead?
3. What should Abram have done instead?
4. Why did Hagar despise Sarai?
5. Why did Sarai blame Abram?
6. Why did Hagar decide to run away?
7. How was God gracious to Hagar?
8. What did the angel tell Hagar to do?

9. Do we still have to be careful not to listen to the flesh?
Why?
10. Why is being submissive to God so important to our faith?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

No matter how real the Lord can reveal Himself and how plain can be His leadings and dealings, the way of human reasoning and fleshly ideas can present a real good argument to go against faith and take things into our own hands. It has happened in many people's lives, and many times it has caused them to be shipwrecked. As it was in the case with Abram and Hagar, there are times when we might for awhile depart from faith, but through the goodness and help of God we can recover from our error and get back in the way of faith again. But, sad to say, many times it does not come about that way. We need to really ponder the path of our feet, and be careful. If Sarai had thought this thing through and sought more earnestly the counsel of the Lord, she would no doubt have refrained from her course of action. Think of Hagar. It seems that she was the innocent party. She was a slave girl. She was submissive to her master and mistress. The troubles that came upon her were more than she could handle. So she took the seemingly only way out. She just took off. It is that way with so many. In a marriage how many times has a husband or wife come home to find their companion gone, and so often never to return again. Things get difficult and seemingly unbearable. Panic fills the heart and mind. The only way logical is to escape. But there is a better way. Submission, co-operation and becoming humble is God's way. Hagar could not have survived in the wilderness without the help of God, and God would not help her at this point. She had run off of her own free will. Now she must humble herself and go back and make amends. Later she was sent away with her son and God made a way for her. But now she must go back and become submissive. So it is with us today. The way of faith is the way of obedience and submission. The rebellious cannot have faith. It takes an obedient and humble heart to follow the

divine leadings of the all-wise God. Do we want to have faith? Then we must apply our hearts to the fear and submission of God. We must resist the suggestions and temptations of the flesh. We must ever seek to follow the way of the Spirit of God. It will pay off if we will do this in every test of life.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

There is something especially abhorrent about contempt. It is a quality of attitude which you would associate with the devil himself and it is revealed through sneering, scoffing, jeering and derision. Abram, the one who would plead for the lives of those in Sodom, was willing for Sarai to do with Hagar whatever she pleased, because Hagar had despised her. The influence of this attitude was far reaching, for later we see Hagar's son, Ishmael, doing the same thing to Isaac. It certainly pays to cleanse our lives of this most despicable vice should it manifest itself.

Here are some quotes of what others have said about showing contempt.

"Scoff not at the natural defects of any which are not in their power to mend. It is cruel to beat a cripple with his own crutches!"

"A sneer is the weapon of the weak. Like other weapons of the devil, it is always cunningly ready to our hand, and there is more poison in the handle than in the point."

"Jeer not at others upon any occasion. If they be foolish, God hath denied them understanding; if they be vicious, you ought to pity, not revile them; if deformed, God framed their bodies, and will you scorn His workmanship? Are you wiser than your Creator? If poor, poverty was designed for a motive to charity, not to contempt; you cannot see what riches they have within."

—Wayne Murphey



FEBRUARY 8, 1998

GOD'S EVERLASTING COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

Genesis 17:1 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.

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!

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.

MEMORY VERSE: Abraham against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. Romans 4:18.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham that he would be the father of many nations through the son that his wife, Sarai, would bear. Abram's name was changed to Abraham, and Sarai's name was changed to Sarah.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 17:1), "*I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect*": Adam Clarke has some inspiring expressions from his translation from the Hebrew: "I am God all sufficient; I am that God who pours out blessings, who gives them richly, abundantly, continually. Set thyself to walk—be firmly purposed, thoroughly determined to obey—before me; for my eye is ever on thee, therefore ever consider that God seeth thee. Be just such as the holy God would have thee to be, as the almighty God can make thee, and live as the all-sufficient God shall support thee; for He alone who makes the soul holy can preserve it in holiness." Jesus said in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Being perfect implies being complete, entire, fully grown and mature, and also integrity and truth.

(Genesis 17:2), "*Covenant*": A covenant is a special and binding agreement between two or more parties, each having a responsible part to accomplish and fulfill. It also is called a compact, contract, or mutual vow or promise.

(Genesis 17:5), "*Abram*": This name means in the Hebrew "high father." "*Abraham*": Father of a great multitude.

(Genesis 17:15), "*Sarai and Sarah*": Both of these names signify rulership or dominion. Clarke says that the name Sarai signifies rulership in her family alone, while Sarah signifies rulership over the nations of which her husband was father or lord. Sarah becomes a type of the Virgin Mary, Paul considered her a type of the New Testament and Jerusalem above, and all faithful and holy women are considered as her daughters. (1 Peter 3:6.)

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we see how God appears to Abraham more personally than ever before, enlarging, progressing and unfolding His wonderful plan for him. He calls it His everlasting covenant with Abraham. Abraham's part is to walk upright, sincere and perfect before God. God's part is to bring to pass the promised seed and posterity of nations for the blessing of all the earth. Included in that covenant was the land of Canaan (wherein Abraham lived as a stranger and sojourner) as an everlasting possession for him and his seed after him. The apostle Paul called it "the world" in Romans 4:13, "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." Now in being heir of the world, this would necessarily imply the possession of the world to come, the world of everlasting life. But before this could be accomplished, the seed of Abraham in Christ must possess the spiritual Canaan land of perfect holiness and the rest of the soul. So when God made the promise to Abraham that he and his seed would possess the land of Canaan, He was really projecting the fulfillment of it to New Testament salvation and to the endless ages of eternity and the reign of Jesus Christ and His saints in the world to come. It was fulfilled for the children of Israel, literally, in their return from Egyptian bondage to possess the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. But the complete fulfillment is accomplished under Christ Jesus in New Testament salvation and the final victory over death and the grave in the last resurrection. It is to be noticed here that at God's promise of seed through Sarah, Abraham fell upon his face and laughed. We will see how

Sarah also laughed when God made the promise personally to her in our next lesson. Both, in their humanity, laughed at such a thought, but recovered from their doubts to lay hold upon the promise and count God able and faithful to fulfill.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did God charge Abram to do when He appeared to him?
2. What was Abram's name changed to and what does it mean?
3. How far reaching was the covenant of God with Abraham?
4. What was Sarai's name changed to?
5. In what way was Sarah to be a princess or ruler?
6. What is a covenant?
7. How did Abraham respond to the promise of a son to Sarah?
8. How old were they to be when Isaac was born?
9. What was going to happen to Ishmael, son of Hagar?
10. What was God going to establish in Isaac?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

Thirteen years had passed since the birth of Ishmael, the son of Hagar. Abram is 100 years old and Sarai is 90. We see now that God makes another move toward Abram in bringing to light the wonderful blessings He has for him. It is so blessed to realize that we who are saved in Jesus Christ today are reaping the benefits of this great blessing of Abraham. Abram's name being changed to Abraham, he is officially recognized as the father of many nations, a multitude that cannot be numbered. We who live by faith in God and are obedient to His Word are in that great host. We are privileged to possess the spiritual land of Canaan, the great inheritance of entire sanctification and the perfect rest of the soul through believing and trusting in God. Sarai became Sarah, a princess and ruler, along with Abraham, of saints throughout all ages. We are made partakers of the New Testament plan of salvation, and are in the Church of God, which is the New Jerusalem,

which is above. (Gal. 4:26.) We are sons and daughters of Abraham and Sarah in the Spirit. Our dreams and our hopes project far beyond the boundaries of this present, fleeting world into the realms of everlasting life and joy. One poor man is seen being carried from the sad and woeful sufferings of this life to paradise where Abraham received him into his bosom. (Luke 16:19-31.) We see the rich man and his prayer being shut out by this same Abraham. Oh, how it should ravish our hearts with purpose and desire to be the real children of Abraham! To live by faith in God, in obedience to the leadings of His Spirit and His blessed word, puts us in this great multitude. We live for and look forward to that happy day when we will see heaven and all it holds, including our father Abraham. Will it not be wonderful to be there and to greet this precious man who believed and followed God all the way?

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The first reaction of Abraham and Sarah to the thought of bearing a child in old age, was a typical response of incredulity. However, after a little consideration, faith prevailed in the God who had led and performed miracles in their past.

We need a similar faith that will cause us to rest in the promises of God. When John G. Paton, first missionary to the cannibals of the South Sea Islands, was translating the New Testament into their language, he could not find an adequate equivalent for the word faith. One day a runner came into his tent out of breath and, with an exclamation, sank down upon his bamboo couch. Paton leaped to his feet crying, "That's it! That's it!" He asked the native to repeat the word. It meant that the native was casting his weight upon the bamboo couch. Paton said, "That's what faith in Christ is; it means to cast yourself upon Jesus Christ for reconciliation, for forgiveness, for redemption, for peace and for everlasting life."

Such faith is essential to please God. We must open our hearts and accept this soul saving quality. One woman, responding to a man who marveled at her faith, said, "I would give you some to take home with you if you had anything to put it in."

—Wayne Murphey

FEBRUARY 15, 1998

ABRAHAM'S SPECIAL VISITORS

Genesis 18:1 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 fetched 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.

16 And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.

MEMORY VERSE: Is any thing too hard for the Lord?...
Genesis 18:14.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Abraham entertained three men one day and fed and refreshed them, thinking at first that they were travelers, but became aware that one of them was the Lord God, when He gave to Sarah the same promise Abraham had received just previously, that Sarah was to give birth to a son.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 18:1), "*In the plains of Mamre*": The Hebrew says, "By the oaks of Mamre." The Septuagint says about the same.

(Genesis 18:5), "*Therefore are ye come to your servant*": In those days it was the general belief of every traveler that he had a right to be entertained and refreshed, when he was needing thus, at the first tent he met on his journey. Abraham was not yet aware of the Divinity of his sudden guests, but entertained them as passing travelers.

(Genesis 18:8), "*Butter*": The Hebrew meaning of this word is "curdled milk or cheese."

(Genesis 18:12), "*My lord*": She is referring, of course, to Abraham, her husband. This is what Peter mentioned in 1 Peter 3:6 about how Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. The word "Lord," here, means in the Hebrew "ruler, sovereign, controller." This same Hebrew word is developed into a more emphatic term which is used as a name for God.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The events in today's lesson followed very soon after what took place in our previous lesson. God told Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son "at this set time in the next year." In our lesson today, the Lord speaks again of His promise concerning Sarah bearing a son. In the heat of the day, as Abraham was sitting in the doorway of his tent, he looked up

and saw three men walking toward him. He hurried out to meet them, and bowed himself toward the ground in humble greeting. Being a hospitable man, and willing to give help to the wayfaring, he invited them to the comfort of his dwelling. He prepared a lavish feast for their enjoyment and nourishment, and then stood by them under the oak tree and watched them while they ate, ever ready to minister more to them. Suddenly the men began to inquire about his wife. Sarah was inside the tent, listening to their conversation. When she heard the words foretelling her delivery of a son, she reacted much like Abraham did. She laughed, thinking how impossible and improbable such could be. When she heard the Lord's reply of reproof, she and Abraham, both became aware that these were no common visitors. They recognized that one was the Lord, and the other two were angels. What a wonderful blessing it was to be visited by the heavenly Beings! So glad Abraham was that he had treated them so well. Now both Abraham and Sarah had been personally informed about the coming birth of their son, which was to be called Isaac. Their patience and enduring trust was paying off. Hebrews 11:11 says, "Through faith also Sarah 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." Although Sarah, as Abraham had done, had faltered at the first thought of her bearing a son at her age, yet she recovered her faith and counted God faithful and able to keep His promise.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Abraham do to show his hospitality?
2. Who did these men turn out to be?
3. What caused Abraham and Sarah to know who they were?
4. What were these visitors wanting to tell Sarah?
5. What was Sarah's reaction to their words? Why?
6. How did the Lord reprove Sarah for her doubting?
7. How do we know that Sarah recovered her faith?
8. Why did Sarah deny that she laughed?
9. How did the Lord reprove her for that?

10. What did Abraham and Sarah do in our lesson that shows a good quality of character?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

We have found that God in His loving dealings with us surprises us with special blessings from time to time. It surely pays to seek Him diligently and hold fast our confidence in Him! He lets us go through deep, dark places where every ray of light of hope seems to be extinguished. It just looks altogether impossible and very much not probable for the blessing to materialize. But we must be steadfast and keep trusting. God has a way to do things when there seems to be no way. Romans 11:33 says, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" As the poet William Cowper says:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform:
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never fading skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are great with mercy and will break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face!

God seems to work in stages and steps. He starts us out in small beginnings, dealing with us wisely as we are able to handle and take it in. Then, as we respond to His leadings and obey His divine impressions (no matter what the cost), He

progresses us on to the next stage. And so it is throughout our mortal journey. It is so vital to start out right with God and keep in step with Him.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

I wonder if the apostle Paul was thinking about Abraham when he wrote, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Heb. 13:2. It certainly fit his situation, and we never know when it might apply to us.

The tale is told of a man who committed a crime and moved to a secluded farm so he wouldn't be found. One morning, some lawmen hid in a nearby forest and were watching the house. The man opened the door, stepped onto the back porch and hollered, "Why don't you all come in and have some breakfast?" In amazement, the lawmen stepped out of hiding and went into the house. They were perplexed as to how the criminal knew they were there, but the truth of it was, he had been yelling that every morning for years just in case someone was outside observing.

It is important that we be kind and considerate to everyone with whom we come into contact. We should be hospitable to the helpless and lowly, always bearing in mind that more may be there than meets the eye.

By doing so, we will also find joy, for Christ said, "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Matt. 25:40.

—Wayne Murphey



Does your Bible Lesson subscription expire with this quarter? If it does, be sure to have your renewal in this office by March 1 so that you won't miss the second quarter of 1998.

We trust these Sunday School books will be an inspiration by helping to open up just a few of the hidden mysteries of our majestic God.

FEBRUARY 22, 1998

ABRAHAM INTERCEDES FOR MERCY

Genesis 18:17 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...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, O 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.

MEMORY VERSE: ...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Genesis 18:25.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: When Abraham learned that the Lord was seriously considering the destruction of Sodom, he thought of his nephew Lot who lived there and began to interced for God to spare the city if there were found so many righteous people there. He started with the number fifty and, fearing that there were not that many righteous there, kept lowering it until he got the Lord to promise to spare the city if only ten righteous people lived there.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 18:21), *"I will go down now, and see"*: The cry of these wicked cities had come up before God and their sin was very heavy. God did not need to see any farther to know that this was true, but for this great and sore need He put on human flesh, so that He could look at things from a human perspective, before He rendered His final decision of judgment to their destruction.

(Genesis 18:24), *"Peradventure"*: If so be; perhaps.

(Genesis 18:27), *"I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes"*: An humble expression of one sensing his own unworthiness and insufficiency to entreat the Lord concerning His operations and doing. What God does is His business and He knows what He is doing, but we have the privilege to approach Him with our concerns and requests.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Abraham had entertained three heavenly visitors, One proving to be the Lord God, and the others angels. After serving them food and refreshments, and receiving the promise again of a son

to be born to Sarah in the next year, the Lord and the angels arose and turned toward the city of Sodom. Already Abraham had proven himself to be a faithful and obedient soul. God was not willing to hide from His faithful servant what He was about to do. When Abraham heard of His intentions of destroying the cities of the plain, he was immediately concerned about his nephew, Lot, and family who were, at this time, living inside the walls of the city of Sodom. Lot had made an unwise choice in pitching his tent toward Sodom. Now he was living down in the midst of that wicked place. But still he is regarded as a righteous man. II Peter 2:6-8 says that God turned "the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.)" Peter went on to say in verse 9, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." The Lord still is faithful to bring His saints through the great and sore trials of this present, evil world. Although Lot had been unwise, yet he had clung to the teachings of his uncle, Abraham, and was endeavoring to trust and believe in God. So Abraham was interceding in Lot's behalf. He sought to detain the Lord and obtain His mercy for the righteous people who might be there. He did not know how many, and he started his plea pretty high. But he fairly well knew that no way could there be fifty righteous people down there, so he kept lowering the figure until he felt better about it. But, as we shall see, there were not even ten righteous people in Sodom. The doomed city was already in its final twenty-four hour day.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why was the Lord willing to tell Abraham of His plans?
2. Why was the Lord considering destroying Sodom?
3. Why did He have to come down to see about it?
4. Why was Abraham so concerned when he heard about it?
5. What did Abraham believe was far from God to do?
6. Why was Abraham not satisfied with the first number?
7. How did Abraham feel about approaching the Lord for this?

8. What was the Lord's response to Abraham's intercession?
9. May we interceded with God today on the behalf of the lost?
10. Is God still able to deliver the Godly today?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

Abraham's attention was drawn from his own hopes and dreams to the terrible plight of a city not far distant which was in danger of immediate destruction. He had a nephew down there in that city and it was his intense burden to prevail with the Lord for his salvation and escape. Because of God's great respect and honour for this man of faith, He had revealed to Abraham His intentions to investigate the matter of the wickedness of Sodom that had come up like a cry before Him. It took courage to approach the Lord about his burden for the righteous people who might be in the doomed city. The people of Sodom were wicked sinners before the Lord. God had blessed them with a fertile plain from which they had drawn prosperity. But they had given themselves over to vile passions of lust and immorality. The horrible sin of homosexuality was having full sway. They were not aware of their impending doom. Jesus said in Luke 17:28-29 that "in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded: But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all." We today live in a world that is on the verge of eternal destruction. It is a discouraging time; a vexing time. We see so much looseness and wickedness all around us. We are grieved and vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked. May we carry the burden of the work of the Lord for the benefit of others. Let us live that righteous and holy life that the Lord is pleased with. So much of the time what we say people will ignore, but we can live the life.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In Isaiah 59:16, we read that the Lord "...wondered that there was no intercessor." He wondered at the folly and unbelief of His people, in neglecting this most effective means of blessing. This is a privilege within the reach of every child of God, a sphere of service open to every believer—to make intercession.

There are examples set before us. Abraham interceded for the doomed city of Sodom (Gen. 18:24), Moses on the hilltop with

uplifted hand silently pleading for victory (Exodus 17), Elijah praying for a Divine manifestation that the nation might be rescued from idolatry (I Kings 18:37), Job in the midst of his sorrow and sufferings making intercession for his mistaken friends (Job 42:10).

Think also of "the Man of Sorrows," who was wounded and bruised for our iniquities, yet He made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:12), and His last prayer on earth was for His murderers, "Father, forgive them." Well may we pray, "Lord, teach us to pray." The need for intercessors is a great and growing need, for the harvest is plenteous, but the divinely equipped laborers are few.

—Taken from writings by James Smith and Robert Lee



MARCH 1, 1998

SODOM AND GOMORRAH DESTROYED

Genesis 19:1 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.

9 ...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.

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.

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.

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.

MEMORY VERSE: Remember Lot's wife. Luke 17:32.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 7.)

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we have the Lord destroying Sodom and Gomorrah from off the face of the earth. It is said that the Dead Sea is where these cities were. It seems that the Lord made a great depression in the earth when He wiped these wicked cities out of existence. He rained fire and brimstone upon them. Brimstone means in the Hebrew an inflammable substance such as cypress-resin or sulphur. Whatever it was, it made everything burn as a tinder box. The Lord wanted the destruction of these wicked cities to be as an example for ages following to remember. People seem to have forgotten that God is a God of recompense. They seem to think that they will get away with their wicked ways. But, oh, how mistaken they are! Lot's sons-in-law just treated Lot's warning to them as if he was joking. Sodom be destroyed? Why, that was unthinkable to them. And so it is today. God is angry with the way men and women are living and conducting themselves. He is letting them go on for now in His great long-suffering and forbearance. But the time clock is ticking. Judgment will soon fall and eternal destruction will be a reality. Let us take lesson from the example of Sodom and Gomorrah. They were warned to escape and not to look back. Jesus warned us to remember Lot's wife. Oh, how we need to be so delivered from this present, evil world that we will not be tainted with its love in the least! If we love this life we will lose it, but if we sever all love and concern for it, except in the will of God, we will save it.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Lot insist that the two angels stay at his house?
2. Why did the men of Sodom compass Lot's house that night?
3. What shows that they were full of impure motives?
4. How did the two angels show their power and divinity?
5. What did they tell Lot to do first?
6. How did Lot's sons-in-law respond to his warning?
7. What did the angels do when Lot lingered?

8. Why did the angels tell them not to look back?
9. Why did Jesus warn us to "remember Lot's wife?"
10. How did God "remember Abraham" when He destroyed Sodom?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

In musing upon the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, I thought of two scriptures in Ecclesiastes. One is in chapter 8 and verse 11: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily (or right away), therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." The other scripture is in chapter 9 and verse 12: "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." There is something in the minds of men that makes them think that calamity and such awful things can happen to others but are not so apt to happen to them. Think of all the terrible things that history reveals has happened to people. Earthquakes, tornadoes, volcano eruptions and other such natural disasters have taken millions of people to an awful end. In our modern time there have been fires, train and airplane crashes, wars and bomb explosions. Many of these things are natural occurrences, happenings generated into being by consequences of fault, error and neglect. But many have been the direct result of the wrath of God. But do people take lesson and warning from these things? It seems very little good is accomplished. Do people today think of Sodom and Gomorrah and get troubled about their sinful way of life and where it is taking them? So because of their indifference and feeling of security that "it will never happen to them" their heart goes on in their pride and wickedness. They know not their time. Can we not see where men are missing the mark? Let us be as Abraham who believed, obeyed and trusted God faithfully and was not in any way close to the danger of the destruction of the ungodly. His was a life of serving his God and ever drawing closer to Him.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The story has been told about a man who went to a revival meeting, more out of curiosity than anything. When the altar call

was given, one of the Christians went to the man and asked him if he was saved.

The man replied, "No."

"Do you want God to forgive your sins?" the Christian asked.

"No," was the reply, "I like my sins."

Sadly, too many people today fit in that category. The shame of sin is being removed by a wholesale acceptance of it, and people not only seem content in their sin, but they revel in it.

Sodom and Gomorrah really didn't have much on many people of today. They, too, were "having the time of their life." But it all changed about one second after the fire and brimstone began to fall. If another invitation had been given to come out of the city after the destruction began, there would have been wholesale exiting.

When the last trump of God sounds, the wicked will fall on their knees and plead for mercy. But that will be the day of judgment, not the day of invitation. "...**now** is the accepted time; behold, **now** is the day of salvation." II Cor. 6:2.

—Wayne Murphey



MARCH 8, 1998

THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON CAST OUT

Genesis 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.

5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

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.

Galatians 4:22 ...Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.

23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

MEMORY VERSE: ...Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. Galatians 4:26.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The bondwoman, Hagar, and her son, Ishmael, became a type of the old law system along with every other way of this present, evil world and the flesh. All such is unapproved and rejected of God. Sarah is a type of the New Testament covenant in Christ and the spiritual Jerusalem which is the Church of God. We who have the true faith of Jesus are children of the free.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Galatians 4:24), "*Allegory*": A story in which people, things and happenings have another meaning.

(Galatians 4:25), "*This Agar is mount Sinai*": Agar is Hagar, the bondwoman, and she typifies the old law system which was given on mount Sinai. "*Answereth to Jerusalem which now is*": Hagar and the old law system corresponds to and is on the same level with the literal, present day city of Jerusalem.

(Galatians 4:26), "*Jerusalem which is above*": This is the heavenly Jerusalem, the Jerusalem which John saw coming down from God out of heaven in Revelations 21:10 and which Paul mentioned in Hebrews 12:22. It is inhabited by all who are truly born again of the Spirit of God. The Greek expression for being "born again" (John 3:3), is "born from above."

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we have the casting out of Hagar and her son, Ishmael, from the heritage of Abraham. Ishmael was 14 years older than Isaac. As we have already learned, Sarah had suggested that Abraham take Hagar to wife in hopes that through her, Abraham could have seed since she herself was barren. A great conflict arose right away between the two women, but was resolved for the time being when Hagar obeyed the counsel of the angel, and became subject to Sarah. But when Sarah beheld Ishmael making fun and looking in scorn upon the child, Isaac, the conflict arose again. She demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out and sent away. Naturally, this was a grievous problem to Abraham, but, as always, when the Lord spoke to him, this faithful servant was ready and willing to obey. The Lord spoke to him and told him to hearken unto all that Sarah had said, for in Isaac was his seed to be called. So Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, and sent her and her son away. When the water was spent, it looked dark for the poor girl. But God heard their cries and opened up a well of water for them. God was with them and the lad grew and became an archer. His mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

We have included what the apostle Paul wrote concerning this to the Galatians. We see how he applied this casting out of the bondwoman and her son to the casting out of the old law system. Although this taking of Hagar to wife was not a good thing that Abraham did, yet the Lord took advantage of it to bring out a spiritual thought. Paul said that Hagar and the old law system

and the present day, literal Jerusalem were all on the same level. Sarah and the New Testament in Christ and the Jerusalem which is above are on another level, the accepted level with God. We that are saved through faith in Christ are children, not of the law, nor of the old Jerusalem, but of the new Jerusalem from above, the holy Church of the living God. This is a wonderful truth! Thank God for this blessed liberty of being married to Christ. Paul quotes from Isaiah 54:1 which is a message to the Church. "...For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife,..." In other words, those who are of the flesh will have more converts and followers than those who are really married to Christ in the Spirit. That is what he is really saying. We are to rejoice and be glad even though we may be barren in our own strength and natural powers. The offspring of the true Church comes through faith, prayer and prevailing with God in the Spirit rather than human organization and wisdom. We who are truly born of the Spirit of God are free indeed through the truth of God's blessed Son!

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Sarah want Hagar and her son to be cast out?
2. Why was Abraham grieved about this?
3. What did God tell Abraham to do about this?
4. What did Paul say that Hagar was likened unto?
5. What kind of bondage is literal Jerusalem ensnared in?
6. What is the Jerusalem which is above?
7. How are we the children of the Jerusalem above?
8. In what way are we children of the free?
9. Why does the desolate have more children than the married wife?
10. What is the conflict between those born of the flesh and those born of the Spirit?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

It is wonderful to be a part of what God chooses and is pleased with! We do not want to be of the bondswoman of this present, evil world and its lust and strife. We are glad to be free from the bondage of sin and the domination of Satan. We can be of faith, yes, the very same kind of faith that Abraham experienced in his life. Oh, how glad we are to be no longer under the

law and its binding ceremonies and empty rituals! We have the laws of God written upon our hearts by means of the blessed Holy Spirit. God works within us by His love, inspiring, comforting, encouraging and strengthening. We have found a better city than the Jerusalem in "the Holy Land." We have gained, through the grace of Christ and the Holy Spirit, entrance to that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. That is the city that Abraham looked forward to. We have found it in full salvation. We are heirs of the righteousness and holiness of Christ, and have hope of a home in glory with Him some blessed day. There we will meet the saints of all ages, including this wonderful, faithful Abraham.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

God's design from the beginning was one man for one woman, they two becoming one flesh. It would take that completeness of union to produce Abraham's true seed. Thus we see that no one else but Sarah would be able to deliver to him his true seed as long as she was alive, for no one else was one with him. To present to him a handmaid could be nothing else but the work of the flesh, and of course it was not eligible to receive the benefits of the promise. Study reveals that Hagar rose up against Sarah, her mistress, feeling no doubt, that since she had borne Abraham's child, she must be at least equal with or perhaps even above Sarah. But not so! Only Sarah, by virtue of marital vow, was one with Abraham, and that position could not be set aside. God stepped in and with His power honored the virtue of marital oneness that He had designed and brought it to fruition abnormally, thus producing one eligible to inherit the promise. The child of the bondwoman came first, and was older by several years than the child of promise.

Paul applied the relationship to the two covenants, referring to Mt. Sinai as the old Mosaic law and determining that it "gendereth to bondage." The bondage involved was none other than that of sin. Now we can see how this included not only the old Jewish nation, but every other nation as well.

At its very best, the old law was not able to deliver from the power of sin and so was not eligible to take a place equal with nor above the gospel. It was a literal law given to a fleshly-minded people and it had to fall in subjection to the gospel, just as Hagar did before Sarah.

—Clifford Wilson (Written in 1971.)

MARCH 15, 1998

GOD PUTS ABRAHAM TO THE GREATEST TEST

Genesis 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.

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 Jehovah-jireh: 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.

MEMORY VERSE and **CENTRAL THOUGHT:** By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. Hebrews 11:17-19.

WORD DEFINITIONS:

(Genesis 22:3), "*Clave the wood*": This means he split or ripped the wood into smaller pieces.

(Genesis 22:17), "*Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies*": The word "gate" here denotes the strength, the authority, the control and the leadership. Abraham's seed is Christ, and this is a prophecy of Christ's ultimate overthrow of the powers of Satan and this present, evil world.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Josephus, the Jewish historian, has a most touching rendition of Abraham's offering of Isaac. In Book 13, Nos. 3 and 4 of the Antiquities of the Jews we find his description of the altar scene: "As soon as the altar was prepared, he said to his son, 'O son, I poured out a vast number of prayers that I might have thee for my son; when thou wast come into the world, there was nothing that could contribute to thy support for which I was not greatly solicitous, nor any thing wherein I thought myself happier

than to see thee grown up to a man's estate, and that I might leave thee at my death the successor to my dominion; but since it was by God's will that I became thy father, and it is now His will that I relinquish thee, bear this consecration to God with a generous mind; for I resign thee up to God, who has thought fit now to require this testimony of honour to Himself, on account of the favours He hath conferred on me, in being to me a Supporter and Defender. Accordingly thou, my son, wilt now die, not in any common way of going out of the world, but sent to God, the Father of all men, beforehand, by thy own father, in the nature of a sacrifice. I suppose He thinks thee worthy to get clear of this world neither by disease, neither by war, nor by any other severe way, by which death usually comes upon men, but so that He will receive thy soul with prayers and holy offices of religion, and will place thee near to Himself, and thou wilt there be to me a succourer and supporter in my old age; on which account I principally brought thee up, and thou wilt thereby procure me God for my Comforter instead of thyself.'

"Now Isaac was of such a generous disposition, as became the son of such a father, and was pleased with this discourse; and said, 'That he was not worthy to be born at first, if he should reject the determination of God and of his father, and should not resign himself up readily to both their pleasures; since it would have been unjust if he had not obeyed, even if his father alone had so resolved.' So he went immediately to the altar to be sacrificed. And the deed had been done if God had not opposed it; for He called loudly to Abraham by his name, and forbade him to slay his son; and said, 'It was not out of a desire of human blood that he was commanded to slay his son, nor was he willing that he should be taken away from him whom he had made his father, but to try the temper of his mind, whether he would be obedient to such a command. Since therefore he now was satisfied as to that his quick willingness, and the surprising readiness he showed in this his piety, he was delighted in having bestowed such blessings upon him.'"

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What was God's purpose in commanding Abraham to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering?
2. What shows that Abraham didn't hesitate to obey?
3. What temptations do you think Abraham suffered in carrying out God's command?

4. Do you believe that God can and does call for such sacrifices from us today?
5. What did Abraham say that makes us know that he believed Isaac would be saved?
6. Why did Abraham believe that God would provide Himself an offering for the sacrifice?
7. How do we know that Abraham would have carried the sacrifice of his son to completion had not God stopped him?
8. What did Abraham's obedience show before God?
9. What was God's response to Abraham's obedience?
10. What did God prophesy concerning Abraham's seed?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

Abraham's faith had been tested different times before. In each trial he had proven steadfast in spirit and faithful to God. His son, Isaac, had at last been born and, according to Josephus, was twenty-five years old when Abraham was called upon to offer him up for a sacrifice. The scene, in our lesson today is one of the most touching and inspiring scenes in holy history. It has inspired our hearts many times. Abraham's deep love and affection for his son, for whom he had waited many years, makes the scene even more touching and full of wonder. Would he obey this divine impression and carry it out to the full? Sometimes people wonder why God has to be so thorough in His trying and testing of us. He subjects His children to such strange and difficult situations. It made Job cry out, "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" Job 7:17-18. The Psalmist said, "For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." Psalm 66:10-12.

A certain crystal chemical, in its last stage of development, is mixed with horrid, black carbon, the blackest stuff you can imagine. But after it is thoroughly mixed with the carbon, it is run through a several layer filter under high pressure. The crystal comes through the filter while the carbon does not come through. But the crystal comes through with beautiful whiteness. They

say that the dark carbon polishes up the crystal. And so it is with us. We are the crystal. God puts us in the carbon and filters us through His providential working to bring us out polished and beautiful in His holy sight. Such it was with Abraham and such will it be with us. How do you think Abraham and Isaac felt after God had spoken from above and delivered them from this dark scene? I am sure they embraced one another and shed many tears of joy. Perhaps they expressed how glad they were that they had obeyed God. So it will be with us if we will cleave to the Lord, be faithful to Him, and make every sacrifice in life that He requires. We will surely come, in His divine pleasure, to that wealthy place.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Our lesson today illustrates the great faith of Abraham. It was not a faith built simply on a belief that God would give him another son if he slew Isaac, but it was a faith that no sacrifice is too great for God. You might wonder who made the greatest sacrifice, Isaac or Abraham? The answer is Abraham. He is the one who would have been compelled to live with the dreadful decision, and the one who would have had to lean heavily upon God to continually reassure him that he had done righteously in offering his son. This act of his required great faith, and could only be achieved by knowing the clear will of God.

The scripture says, concerning Abraham and Isaac, that "...they went both of them together."

This reminds us of another father and son—God and Christ. Christ gave His life on Calvary, but just as Abraham and Isaac walked together to the place of sacrifice, God walked every step of the way with His Son also. Isaac carried the wood, and Christ carried the cross. Abraham built the altar, and God devised Mount Calvary. Isaac was bound with chords, and although Christ was nailed to the cross, there was a force much greater that held Him there, and that was love. By the very voice of God Himself, Isaac was released from death's bands with a new lease on life, and by an eternal power, we see Christ resurrected and reunited everlastingly with His Father.

We also have a part in this story. It is found as we follow the footsteps of our Saviour and experience that of which He was the firstfruits.

—Wayne Murphey



MARCH 22, 1998

BEING ABRAHAM'S SEED IN CHRIST

John 8:56 (Jesus said to the Jews): Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

57 Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

Romans 4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Galatians 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Hebrews 6:11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

13 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself,

14 Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.

15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

James 2:21 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.

MEMORY VERSE: So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. Galatians 3:9.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: If we belong to Jesus Christ in faith and obedience, we are the seed of Abraham and will inherit eternal glory with him in the blessed world to come.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Romans 4:13), "*Heir of the world*": The promise to Abraham that he and his seed would inherit the land of Canaan takes shape in the promise God is giving us in Christ, of eternal inheritance in that blessed world without end, which is to come.

(Romans 4:18), "*Against hope believed in hope*": Beyond or without visible support for hope, Abraham still believed that his hope would come to pass.

(Hebrews 6:12), The Greek text reads: "Lest you become dull, be imitators of those who through faith and long suffering inherit the promises."

LESSON BACKGROUND

We have surveyed the various places in the New Testament where Abraham and the value of his faithful life are mentioned, and have chosen a few choice passages for our study. The first is from the sayings of Christ, the Seed of Abraham, Himself. Jesus was having a very antagonistic time with the contradicting Jews. He had spoken of His father and their father (which was really the

devil, as He brought out later). They retorted that Abraham was their father. But Jesus replied that if they were Abraham's children they would do the works of Abraham. But they were seeking to kill Jesus and this proved that Abraham was not their father. How sad that these people were of the physical lineage of Abraham but were far from being true kin! The apostle Paul spoke a great deal about Abraham in his teachings to the Romans on faith and the law. He shows how that we, in Christ, are the seed and the offspring of Abraham in reality. To be children of Abraham we must be of the same steadfast faith. Then he brought out to the Galatians that the promises were not made to Abraham's seeds (as plural or many), but to one seed, and that seed was Christ. And if we are Christ's purchased possession, we are Abraham's seed and heirs of his promise. Praise the Lord! Then the writer, in Hebrews, encourages us to endure and hold faith and patience in our pursuit of the promises of God just as Abraham did. In James we find the apostle admonishing us to have works along with our faith. He gave the example of Abraham and how it was his obedience in offering Isaac that perfected and brought to completion his faith. Had he drawn back from this obedience of sacrifice, he would not have really obtained God's blessings and been called by God Himself as His Friend.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. How was Abraham able to see Christ's day?
2. What was there about it that made him rejoice?
3. How far reaching was God's promise to Abraham?
4. In what way was Abraham a "father of many nations?"
5. What did Abraham believe God was able to do?
6. What causes people to hesitate to believe God's promises?
7. Who was the Seed of Abraham?
8. How can WE be of this Seed?
9. What often lies between the promise and its fulfillment?
10. How can we also be called Friends of God?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

Of all the many I shall meet in yonder world of rapture sweet
 There is one character of old with joy my arms yearn to enfold.
 It is a man who taught my spirit the way of faith to life inherit.

A faithful man named Abraham, who trusted in the great I AM!
 There're many things I yearn to say to him who trod this narrow way
 And trusted God so faithfully, a good example prov'n to be.
 I'd like to tell how blest I've been to learn how he obeyed God when
 He told him to leave all behind, a land that He would show to find.
 I've tho't upon his journey north to Haran, and from there went forth.
 I've pictured him when God made known the land of Canaan all alone
 To be his heritage for aye, though but a stranger he would stay.
 I trace his footsteps by the way, and how he rescued Lot that day.
 I see him growing older still, entreating God to do His will
 And give him a beloved son, a Seed, an Offspring to be won.
 I want to tell him how my soul has been inspired to God's control
 By seeing how he faltered not, but kept believing without spot.
 That sacred scene one fine hot day when three men did a visit pay
 I've tho't and studied o'er and o'er, and cherish it still more and more.
 God gave to him a faithful word, as Sarah laughed as it was heard.
 I gaze in wonder how he pled to spare old Sodom's city spread,
 But looked in grief and dark dismay as it went up in flames that day.
 Of Hagar and of Ishmael, of them I've pondered quite a spell,
 The sad mistake of taking her, the bondmaid and the cause to err.
 How sad he was to turn her out, but was God's will there is no doubt.
 For she became a goodly type of bondage of a woeful snipe.
 Of present day Jerusalem, of fleshly lust and diadem.
 But I would tell him I am glad that Isaac was his little lad
 At last a crown in his old age, forerunning his rich heritage.
 But most of all I want to say, I marvel how he did obey
 The call of God to sacrifice and offer Isaac, such a price!
 I see him bind his only son, and take the knife, it must be done!
 I weep for joy to hear God call, "Hurt not the lad, enough, tis all!
 For now I know, your love I see, You've not withheld your son from Me!
 And I will bless you, bless you more, as sand upon the ocean's shore."
 And then perhaps I can reveal how faith has been to me so real,
 How I have sacrificed my all, and sought to follow Heaven's call,
 And how rememb'ring what he did, I overcame and never slid.
 And then we both will praise the One who died for us that we be won.
 And glorify the God of all who likewise heard His holy call!

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"...he was called the Friend of God." James 2:23.

God evidently needed a friend, and He found in Abraham just that friendship that His heart craved.

What are the essentials to true friendship with God? This

question is answered by noting what are the requirements for earthly friendship.

Confidence—There can be no real friendship without confidence, or trust. This is its foundation. Confidence is the child of knowledge. The more we know of our friends, the more we trust them. Faith is the beginning of friendship with God.

Love—Confidence alone will not make an ideal friendship. Love is essential. This is essential to friendship, true friendship with God.

Frankness—Friends have frank, familiar exchanges with one another. A little girl defined a friend as one who knows all about you, and yet loves you in spite of that. A friendship that cannot bear the truth is of no value. Friendship with God welcomes the truth.

Loyalty—True friends will stand up for each other, especially when absent one from the other.

Perpetuity—A true friendship is not for a time, but will stand the passage of the years.

—Taken from *Handfuls on Purpose*.



MARCH 29, 1998

IN THE BOSOM OF ABRAHAM

Luke 16:9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in

water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

MEMORY VERSE: ...If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. Luke 16:31.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: For those who believe and trust and obey the living God and His Son Jesus there awaits, in paradise above, a sweet, eternal rest from their labours and sorrows of this present life. There we will see Abraham and the Lord Jesus and all the faithful saints who have lived through the ages. This blessed state of happiness and recompense for all of life's sorrows will endure forever and ever. Whatever we suffer here, we will be rewarded for over there.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Luke 16:9), "*Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*": Let us read this verse in the Greek text: "Make to yourselves friends by (or with) the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it fails, they (these friends) may receive you into the eternal dwellings." By using the material goods and money that we have in this life to help others and to support the work of the Lord, we make friends of saints and angels who will welcome us

to that eternal home above. This will be true ONLY if we walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham.

(Luke 16:19), "*Fared sumptuously every day*": The Greek says, "Having been merry day by day in luxury."

(Luke 16:23), "*In hell*": The Greek word for "hell" is "Hades," which means "the unseen," which refers to the world of departed spirits. There are two compartments in Hades. One is a place of rest for the faithful, and the other is a place of suffering and torment.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus gave us two important parables in this 16th chapter of Luke. The first one is about the steward who, being caught up with wasting his lord's money and was about to be put out, employed his lord's goods to cut his creditors' accounts way down in an effort to win their favour which he hoped would afford him refuge and shelter when he was put out. In our lesson we include the Lord's application of this thought to us in using the riches of this life that come to us in making friends in heaven. He implies that using earthly means for selfish purposes and neglecting to use it for the good of others will be to our ruin. The second parable is what we have in our lesson today. There are those who would discredit this part of scripture. But it is the message of our Lord to us, a warning to not allow the riches of this life to choke out the true Spirit of Christ. And, sad to say, this is what has happened in the lives of so many. We know nothing about the moral condition of this rich man. His downfall was his love for wealth and luxury and the neglecting of spiritual values. And, as for the poor beggar, we see his suffering and misery short-lived. The angels came and bore his sweet, gentle spirit away from the shadows and sufferings of this present life up to the happy world above where he was embraced by faithful Abraham and welcomed there forever.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Jesus say we should do with money?
2. What kind of friends does He want us to make?
3. What was the state of the rich man?
4. What was the state of the poor man?
5. What happened to the beggar when he died?
6. Why was he taken into Abraham's bosom?

7. What were the two things that Abraham told the rich man?
8. What did the rich man want Lazarus to do?
9. What did Abraham say those on earth had to hear?
10. Where are the rich man and Lazarus today?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

We see the climax in today's lesson on our studies of Abraham. We see him there in paradise welcoming the weary pilgrims of earth and enfolding them in his embrace. He, the father of many nations, is beckoning his faithful children to meet him in that heavenly home above. Oh, this is more wonderful than what we can comprehend! It ravishes our hearts and fills us with a stronger purpose and decision to live our days for God and make heaven our eternal home! We are all beggars in reality. But so many do not realize how poor indeed they are. The wealth of this world is deceitful and vain. It brings a false security and a snare that few are able to escape from. Lazarus did not ask for very much from the rich man. Just a few crumbs would have satisfied his hunger. Jesus did not say whether the rich man helped him or not. But the day finally came when they found the poor beggar dead. They probably had to pick up his pitiful frame and go bury it as a sanitary measure. But oh, where was his spirit, and who had eyes to see what really happened to him? The angels bore him away from the horrid scenes of this wicked world to a far better place. There Abraham and all the saints welcomed him with open arms. Abraham took him in his arms and let him recline upon his breast. He was safe now. All the tormenting pains of the old flesh were gone. He was free from it all forever and ever. Is this a fairy tale? No, thank God! It will be yours and mine to enjoy one day, if we will walk in the steps of that faithful Abraham here in this life.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“...the dogs came and licked his sores.”

It has been said that there is a healing virtue in dogs licking a wound. But the *Interpreter's Bible Commentary* has this to say, “Dogs were regarded as unclean animals, and their unwelcome attentions were the climax of the poor man's miseries.” Rather than being beneficial, they seemed almost like buzzards, hardly

able to wait for death to occur. Did you know there are people like that today?

Once there lived an infidel blacksmith who was always carping about Christians, especially when he could find a Christian to talk to. Or if he knew there was one near enough to overhear him, some choice morsel was sure to be served up about an erring minister or a Sunday School teacher who had committed sin.

One day he was speaking with uncommon relish on his favorite theme to an aged Christian who had stopped to have his horse shod. The good old man bore it quietly for awhile, and then he said, "Did you ever hear the story of the rich man and Lazarus?"

"Yes, of course I have," he replied.

"Well, do you remember about the dogs, at the gate there, how they licked Lazarus' sores?"

"Yes, why?"

"Well, you remind me of those dogs—always licking sores. All you notice in people are their faults."

I don't believe Lazarus found much comfort in the dogs, and there are people in this life who bring us little consolation. Where Lazarus found complete healing and comfort was in Abraham's bosom.

Abraham was willing to give comfort to Lazarus because of his great heart of compassion, as incidents in our lessons this quarter have demonstrated. He was also able to offer it because of his ascendancy to power. If you want to consider the extent of the ascendancy which he possessed because he was a close friend of God and believed in Him with great faith, note the difference between the position he was in as described by Genesis 18:23-32, and the position he held in Luke 16:24.

—Wayne Murphey



