

Bible Lessons



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

ADULTS -- YOUNG PEOPLE

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THEME FOR SECOND QUARTER, 2005

For our study this quarter we are going to closely examine the faith of our father Abraham. Romans 4:12 states that Abraham is the father of those who walk in the steps of his faith. Jesus spoke to the Jews on one occasion about His Father, which was God. "They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." John 8:39. We need to be aware of the works of Abraham and the steps that he took in the development of his faith. So in this series of lessons let us study the faith of Abraham as is told about in the Old Testament and discussed in the New Testament. God promised Abraham that he would be a father of many nations, and we are his children if we will walk in the steps of his faith. A good, clear understanding of the faith of Abraham and the sacrifices that he made in obtaining this faith will be a great inspiration and help to us in obtaining the faith that we must have in this dispensation of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We send it forth, with earnest prayer, that God will bless it to the good of every one of us.

In Christian love,

—Bro. Leslie Busbee



APRIL 3, 2005

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

Hebrews 6:11 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 swore 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.

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.

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: For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end. Hebrews 3:14.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The first step of Abraham's faith was his obedience to the command of the LORD to leave his country and kindred and start traveling, not knowing where he was going, but trusting in God for guidance and waiting for His directions and orders.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Hebrews 6:12), "*slothful*": sluggish, lazy, or in a stupor. "*patience*": long-suffering and constant, unfailing endurance.

(Hebrews 6:14), "*blessing I will bless, multiplying I will multiply*": This is a quote from Genesis 22:17, the word of an oath from God, who could swear by no greater, so He swore it by Himself. By this God meant that surely, without fail, He was

going to bless Abraham and that surely, without fail. He was going to multiply his seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand by the seashore. This oath that backed the promise God had already given was because Abraham had fully obeyed God's command in not withholding Isaac, his only son, from being sacrificed unto God. Abraham would have carried it fully out had not God stopped him. This put an everlasting seal upon the blessing that was going to come to Abraham and to his seed in the future and for eternity.

(Hebrews 6:15). "*And so*": In this way, or because of, or on account of. Because he obeyed God's voice so entirely and over all of his own feelings or desires, God clinched the promised blessings for surety and beyond failure.

(Genesis 12:5). "*substance*": property or collected goods. "*souls*": people who had joined themselves to Abraham's company.

(Genesis 12:7). "*altar*": a raised structure of earth or stones upon which an animal was sacrificed as a burnt offering to God.

(Hebrews 11:9). "*sojourned*": lived as a stranger or foreigner. "*tabernacles*": tents; temporary dwellings that could be taken down and moved from place to place. "*with Isaac and Jacob*": In the same manner as Isaac and Jacob lived who came later.

(Hebrews 11:10). "*looked for*": anticipated and expected to have because of the promise of God. It was all to be in the future, far beyond his life span, but Abraham believed in it with all great confidence and assurance.

(Hebrews 3:14). The Greek says: "For we have become of Christ, if truly we hold fast the beginning of the assurance firm unto the end."

LESSON BACKGROUND

There are at least seven steps that the Holy Scriptures show of the progress and development of the faith of our father Abraham. In our lesson today we will consider Step No. 1. We begin with some vital words of admonition in Hebrews 6:11-15. The writer had just issued a warning about the danger of falling away from the grace of God and gives this exhortation to keep the same diligence to retaining this full assurance of hope unto the end. This is an indispensable necessity if we are to inherit

the fulfillment of God's promises. It is through faith and patience that we will inherit them. Then he spoke of Abraham and the blessing God promised him, even with an oath, swearing by Himself. Note that he quotes from Genesis 22:16 where Abraham had just stood the acid test of his faith and obedience by offering Isaac, his son. The writer applies that in reference to God's promise to Abraham, and we are exhorted to be just that diligent in our faith, obedience and patience.

Then we go to Genesis 12 where we find God calling to Abraham to leave his country and go to another land that He would show him. Our text in Hebrews 11:8-10 says that Abraham obeyed and went out, not knowing whither he went. This was a great proof that Abraham faithfully provided in that he obeyed under such difficult conditions that were certainly contrary to what we as humans normally would like. But Abraham went against the tide of feelings and wonderments and obeyed God. Stephen, in his speech in Acts 7, declared that God gave Abraham that call before he left his home in Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia. He went first north to a place called Haran, and after his father died God led him to go on toward the land of Canaan. Here God gave Abraham the promise of his seed inheriting the land. It was evident, however, from what came later that God was pointing to an inheritance far beyond and far better than just the literal land of Canaan. This we will discuss later.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What are the two vital things needed by which we inherit the promises?
2. What difficulties attended Abraham's moving in obedience to God?
3. Why did Abraham have to live in the Promised Land as a stranger?
4. What did Abraham foresee that was to come in the future?
5. What benefit should Abraham's faith have upon our faith?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Abraham's first step of faith is a great example for us. We must, like him, go against our feelings and human tendencies

to want to know what is ahead. He was told to move without knowing where he was going. He obeyed, trusting God for guidance and help. This matter of living one day at a time and not worrying about tomorrow is part of our faith today. We must obey God's Word despite our feelings, emotions or how things look. To truly live by faith one must go "against the grain" of human reasoning. It takes courage and pure decision. In this Abraham was a great pattern for us to follow.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In our lesson today we have seen how Abraham faithfully obeyed the call of the Lord. He was no doubt a wealthy man dwelling in a community that allowed him to live in relative ease but God revealed to him that He had something better. Abraham believed God and responded by giving up the things that seemed to insure his security "and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan."

Abraham's father, Terah, left Ur, which was located in southern Iraq, and traveled up the Euphrates River a distance of some 550 miles to Haran which was located, in the present day, in southern Turkey. It was in Haran that Terah died.

The Lord revealed to Abraham to continue on into the land of Canaan and notice what the Scripture said, "and into the land of Canaan they came." Many people receive a heavenly calling from the Lord and they make a start for Him, but something hinders them and they stop short of the "land of Canaan." Often, much to the displeasure of God, they return to the things they left behind.

The Scriptures give us examples of many who answered the calling of the Lord and never looked back. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew it says, "And they straightway left *their* nets, and followed him." When He called James and John it says, "And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him." When Matthew was sitting at the receipt of custom and the call came it says, "And he arose, and followed him."

May God help us to respond to the call of the Lord today and "...press toward the mark..." as faithfully as our forefathers who obtained "...the prize of the high calling of God..."

—Bro. Willie E. Murphey

APRIL 10, 2005

PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS IN THIS LIFE

Hebrews 11:12 Therefore sprang there even of one (Abraham), and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

36 Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from which they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Hebrews 13:11 For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Psalms 39:12 Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.

13 O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.

MEMORY VERSE: Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. 1 Peter 2:11.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: This physical, earthly life is but for a few days. We are swiftly passing through this fleeting world. This world is not our final home. We need to set our sights above this earthly realm to a better, heavenly country that God has promised for all who trust and obey Him. We are but pilgrims and strangers here and must not allow our hearts to be drawn to the lusts and desires of this fleeting, mortal body.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Hebrews 11:12). "*sprang*": came into being. "*as good as dead*": having died.

(Hebrews 11:13). "*in faith*": by the way of faith. "*persuaded*": convinced and fully assured. "*embraced*": saluted, welcomed and enfolded. "*confessed*": acknowledged and professed assuredly and openly.

(Hebrews 11:39). "*obtained a good report*": were a witness; gave clear evidence and testified. The Greek word is that from which we have the word "martyr."

(Hebrews 11:14). "*country*": fatherland or native town.

(Hebrews 11:15). "*had been mindful*": kept in mind with any regard or favor. If people retain any degree of love or desire for the world and things that they left behind because of their faith, there will be a drawing and enticement for a return.

(Hebrews 11:16). "*desire*": stretch forth to. "*city*": a society or people dwelling together.

(Hebrews 13:11). "*without*": outside.

(Hebrews 13:12). "*without the gate*": Christ was taken outside the city as a criminal in shame and rejection.

(Hebrews 13:13). "*without the camp*": This means outside of the praise and fellowship of the world. "*bearing his reproach*": carrying and being a partaker of Christ's contumely, which was the haughty and contemptuous rudeness and the insulting and humiliating treatment that the Jews heaped upon Him. As faithful believers in Him we can expect such from the proud and worldly society we are surrounded with.

(Hebrews 11:14). "*city to come*": a future society and

homecoming beyond this world in eternal glory.

(Psalm 39:13). *"spare me that I may recover strength"*: The Hebrew renders this: "Look not upon my vanity with contempt, and I will be cheerful."

(1 Peter 2:11). *"war against the soul"*: are contrary to spiritual life and health.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we want to dwell on the thought of being pilgrims and strangers in this world even as Abraham was a sojourner in the land that was promised to him and to his posterity. Stephen, in his defense before the council as recorded in Acts 7:5, stated that God gave Abraham "none inheritance in it (the land of Canaan), 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." So we see Abraham (and his son Isaac and his son Jacob) dwelling in the land of Canaan as by-dwellers, just moving about and camping in tents and caring for their flocks and herds but not having legal possession of any of it. And yet they believed God would bring about His promise to them to possess the land. But really we know that none of them ever lived to possess the literal land of Canaan. Did God's promise fail because they never got to possess the land? By no means did God's promise fail. Its fulfillment was projecting far beyond the earthly land. There were spiritual values God's promises were pointing to and an eternal phase beyond this fleeting, earthly realm

We today, as the scriptures in our lesson reveal, are still living in this earthly land as pilgrims and strangers. Nothing material here, in this present life, do we really own. Even if we have legal title and in an earthly sense we own land, property or material goods, yet still it is not our possession. We will have to leave it one day and, as Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:7, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." All material gain is labeled by the Scriptures as "unrighteous mammon" (Luke 16:9-11), "filthy lucre" (1 Peter 5:2), and "uncertain riches" (1 Timothy 6:17). The fleshly lusts war against the soul. We are here just for a season. Jesus was a pilgrim and a stranger to this world. We must crucify the flesh and live sacrificial lives. We must be led by the Holy Spirit and

the Word of God, not the emotions and appetites of the animal senses. The only thing we can truly possess is the spiritual kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17.) and this will prove to be the basis of our eternal inheritance in that blessed world to come. —Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why are we pilgrims and strangers in this present world?
2. What kind of country and city are we seeking for?
3. What various things have God's pilgrims suffered in this world?
4. What reproach did our Lord and Saviour endure in His earthly life?
5. In what ways do godly saints bear the reproach of Christ?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Have you ever heard this song? "Here among the shadows, living in a lonely land, with strangers we're a band of pilgrims on the move; through dangers burdened down with sorrows, and we are shunned on ev'ry hand. But we are looking for a city built above." The Chorus goes: "Looking for a city, where we'll never die; there the sainted millions never say good-bye. There we'll meet our Saviour, and our loved ones, too. Come, O Holy Spirit, all our hopes renew!" Is this a reality or is it just a fancy? Notice the second verse: "Here in disappointment often we so sadly roam, and earthly friends no longer speak one word of love; But truly we have found contentment, Jesus promised us a home, so we are looking for a city built above." Now the third verse says, "In this land of dangers we are going here and there. We're simply trusting in the blessed Saviour's love, and mercy; Though we may be strangers, living in this world of care, we're always looking for a city built above."

I have thought much of this song through the years. In this prosperous, big money age of finery and the curse of covetousness on every hand and in the hearts of so many, it means a lot to keep the love of this present world out of our hearts. Paul said in Colossians 3:1-4, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand

of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Many other statements are made in the Scriptures about this important matter. Are we really pilgrims and strangers, sojourners in this world? We are warned about covetousness. Let us be on our guard.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What is your "world view?" The lesson today teaches us the Biblical world view. It is the frame of mind that Abraham and all who have followed in his steps of faith, down through the ages, have had. So what is yours? In how many ways is your life being affected by your being a "pilgrim and a stranger?" More than what you might have thought.

Consider: Is it Biblical for a Christian to bear arms for his country? Do we give allegiance to this earthly land and fight for its causes when the Scriptures teach an entirely different way? Is it all right for an American to go to war, but not, say, a Chinese or German Christian? How did godly men and women down through the ages view this? You will find that those who really lived as "pilgrims and strangers" refused to become involved in their countries' wars. They suffered for their stand and nominal Christians have not understood but God took their side and made a way for them. There is not room to study this subject sufficiently in this article but these are questions for you to consider.

How much should a Christian be moved by the ups and downs of the fashion industry? Does society dictate the rules of decency and modesty for the holy saint of God? Do you long in your heart to "fit in?" Does being able to wear the latest style fill you with a feeling of success and accomplishment? Again, down through the ages you will find that the holy people set themselves apart from society in dress and lifestyle.

If someone inflicts injury upon you, is it scriptural to sue that person? Do we fight for "rights" as the world does? The pilgrims and strangers down through the centuries have shown us the way.

Someone has said, "If you don't know where you've been, how can you know where you are going?" Indeed, knowing the history of the people of God—the pilgrims and strangers—is vital for the saints today. —Sis. Angela Gellenbeck



APRIL 17, 2005

A BROTHERLY, SELF-SACRIFICING SPIRIT

Genesis 13:2 And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

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 strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

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

9 Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

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 forever.

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 though 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: Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Philippians 2:3.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God was pleased with Abram's brotherly and self-sacrificial attitude in giving Lot the first choice of the land. God had promised it to Abram and to his seed, but here we see Abram giving the best to someone else. It showed that Abram had faith in the LORD to care for him and that He was able to fulfill His promises in His own good time and way.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 13:6), "*bear*": support or furnish them with enough pasture for their flocks

(Genesis 13:10), "*plain of Jordan*": the land in the area of the Jordan River.

(Philippians 2:3), "*strife*": rivalry, trying to compete against or outdo others. "*vainglory*": self-honor and esteem.

LESSON BACKGROUND

After Abram and Sarai and Lot, with their associates, had entered the land of Canaan there came a famine in the land, a grievous famine. So they went down into Egypt for a time. When they finally returned from their sojourn in Egypt, we find the LORD had blessed Abram and he was very rich in cattle and silver and gold. They went back to where they had been, at the place where he had built an altar unto the LORD, and there Abram called upon the name of the LORD. We see that Lot also had increased in flocks and herds and tents. Here a problem soon developed. They were too crowded and the need was to spread out. Here we find the sweet spirit of Abram made

manifest in his attitude and dealings with Lot. Lot was the son of Abram's brother Haran, who had died before they had left Ur of the Chaldees. Abram had taken him in, which was a kindly gesture, and so he offered to Lot the first choice of which direction he wanted to take. Abram wanted to avoid strife and a falling out between them. So he took the humble side and gave Lot the chance to choose what he desired to do.

Here we see the humble spirit of letting others go before one's self being manifest in Abram. He could have said, "Since God has promised me the land, I should have the first choice and you will have to take the other." But, no! He gave Lot the first choice. This, we might say, is another step that Abram took in his faith in God. Step No. 2. Taking the humble side and counting others as more privileged is a vital part of faith. Grabbing and pushing and seeking our own way is an indication that we do not really trust in God but rather that we are trying to make sure we have what we think is coming to us. Along with our Memory Verse in Philippians 2 we find in verse 4: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Then he spoke about having the same mind and attitude of Christ who counted not equality with God to be held on to, but emptied Himself, became in the likeness of men, and then went on down to humble Himself to be obedient to the death of the cross. Romans 15:3 declares that "Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." This is a quote from Psalm 69:9. This is the attitude of faith, considering others, for their good, to edification. This was Abraham's faith, a faith we must follow if we would be the true children of Abraham.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the best way to keep from having strife with others?
2. If we contend for our own pleasure will the Lord bless our efforts?
3. How does possessing a self-sacrificial attitude help us to have faith?
4. How do we know that God was pleased with what Abram did?
5. What did God make Abram to know after Lot had separated from him?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The route of faith is founded on self-denial and humility toward others. It is the spirit and the mind of Christ to be self-sacrificing and submissive. Pride and self-pleasing will ruin a person's character and deprive one of true happiness. One cannot lose by giving up selfish desires for the sake of others and to please God. If Abram had been a greedy and headstrong person who was out for self at all cost, he would never have gotten this far. He knew that his whole dependence was upon the Almighty God and not his own striving. Our world today is in the turmoil and pitiful shape it is in because of self-love, self-will, self-pleasing, self-promotion, self-honor and all the other self gods. There is self-preservation, self-esteem, self-pity, self-righteousness and self-betterment. Our Lord showed us the way of real progress and achievement. The way up is down. He said, "Everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Luke 18:14. He said also in John 12:25, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

One must brave the pressures of the current of unbelief in the world and venture forth into a cross-bearing, self-denying way of life. There must be a death to self and daily submitting to the will of God, denying what we might think or want. Strife and vainglory will kill the spirit of faith. This is part of the consecration one must make to receive the Holy Spirit and be sanctified. Without this entire consecration and submission to the will of God faith will not take hold to mean anything. It is one thing to talk about it and quite another thing to actually put it into practice. Here is where our father Abraham prevailed. He took the humble and submissive attitude. He let Lot have the first choice. But he was rewarded many times over. After he had taken that step of humility and preferring his brother, the LORD God came on the scene. He told Abram to lift up his eyes and look in every direction and renewed the promise that all the land that he could see was to be his and his seeds forever. Oh, how the LORD God will reward one's self-sacrifice for the sake of others! We have proved it and experienced it many times over through the years. It pays to take the humble side and it costs us dearly when we fail to humble ourselves. Let us be encouraged to seek to walk in this step of faithful Abraham in our lives today!

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." Romans 12:10. Our example in this lesson is Abraham preferring Lot. This verse goes beyond just the golden rule of "doing unto others as you would have them do unto you." It means that I put my brother ahead of me. I put his desires, opinions and ideas in front of my own.

We have a custom here in Alabama of the man opening the door for the woman. Just a matter of courtesy—but what volumes it does speak. It does not matter if the man is old or young, well-dressed or sloppy, tall or short, black or white. When a woman approaches a door, the man always opens the door and steps back while holding the door open for the woman. This has been such a great help when my arms were full of babies, diaper bags, strollers, shopping bags, etc. But it still happens now that my arms aren't full. So, how does this make me feel as the "taker" of this courtesy? Humble, very humble. It actually genders a great respect toward the giver.

This is such a simple illustration but I believe it has merit. Courtesy and manners go a long way in putting into action my preference of my brother. It is also a perfect solution to every conflict. In fact, if practiced enough, there will be no conflict—it just cannot exist.

—Sis. LaDawna Adams



APRIL 24, 2005

REFUSING THE OFFER OF EARTHLY WEALTH

Genesis 14:8 And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah,...and they joined battle

9 With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam,...four kings with five.

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 Eshcol, and brother of Aner; and these were confederate with Abram.

14 And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

15 And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them....

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....

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.

21 And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,

23 That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine. lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:

24 Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol. and Mamre: let them take their portion.

MEMORY VERSE: A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold. Proverbs 22:1.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: In refusing the offer of earthly wealth, which he could have felt justified in taking, it proved that Abram's trust and faith was fully in God and His Providence, setting a pattern for all of his children that we should not trust in uncertain riches but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy. 1 Timothy 6:17.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 14:8). "*joined battle*": went into battle (against).

(Verse 9). "*with*": against. "*four kings with five*": This means Chedorlaomer and the three other kings with him went into battle against the five kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain.

(Verse 11). "*goods*": property, possessions, riches, etc. "*victuals*": food.

(Verse 13). "*confederate*": had made a covenant with. These were friends that Abram had won from among the Canaanites. They went with him to battle against the kings and to recover the captives and goods taken from Sodom.

(Verse 22). "*I have lift up my hand*": A gesture along with a vow unto God. Let us notice what the Jewish historian Josephus says about this: "The king of Sodom desired Abram to take the prey (the recovered riches), but Abram would not do so; nor would he make any other advantage of that prey than what his servants had eaten."

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today we want to take up step number three that Abraham took in the development of the faith for which he is so much remembered and referred to in the New Testament. Let us bear in mind that Abraham lived long before God administered His laws and statutes for men to follow. That was to come about four hundred and thirty years later. But at this stage of the unfolding of God's plan we see Him dealing on the principles of faith, trust, and the building up of man's confidence. He needed a man to work with who would yield, trust and obey Him as an example to show to the generations to come. In our studies we find that He found in Abraham the man He was looking for. Already we see Abraham responding to God's dealings and reacting to situations that called for certain qualities of character that were conducive to a stable faith and confidence in Him. In Step No. 1 Abraham obeyed God's call to leave all and go forth, not knowing where he was going, but simply believing that God would show him. Then in Step No. 2 we see Abraham taking the humble side and giving Lot the first choice of the land. We see God responding to this with further words of assurance of the promise He

had already given. And now here we see Abraham refusing the reward of earthly gain for what he did in bringing back those who had been carried away captive.

This was a step of faith and a very important one, too. The men of these cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were, as stated in Genesis 13:13, "wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly." They were later on destroyed from the face of the earth because of their terrible lustful and sinful condition of heart and life. Lot, sad to say, had looked upon the riches of these awful cities with interest and had pitched his tent toward Sodom. (Genesis 13:12.) He pitched his tent, he inclined his heart, and it was not long before he was actually living in Sodom and when the marauding kings came to their city Lot was one of the captives carried away. We have in our lesson the expedition that Abraham ventured forth upon to recover all the goods and the people and how he was successful. The king of Sodom offered Abraham earthly wealth as a reward but Abraham resolutely refused it. He did not want that wicked king to take any credit for his success and blessings. It was a temptation, a temptation that many, many people have yielded to down through the history of mankind. But here was a man who refused it and was content with his faith in God to be his provider and protection.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Abraham so readily set upon to go to the rescue?
2. What did he accomplish on this mission?
3. What was the offer that the king of Sodom made to him?
4. What was Abraham's decision and for what reason did he make it?
5. Why is it so important for us to overcome the temptation of earthly wealth?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

One of the most enticing temptations that come to a person is that of attaining to the riches of this present life. There is something about wealth and worldly possessions that have a great pull on the affections of man. So many, down through the years, have fallen for this ruse of the devil. How many people

have endured adversity and hard affliction and stood fast for the Lord and the right, but who eventually fell into pitfalls of spiritual barrenness and decay in the day of prosperity!

Jesus warned us time and time again of the danger of covetousness and the love of money. The rich young ruler is a prime example of the hold earthly wealth can have upon a person. He had a lot to his credit in keeping the law from his youth up, but when he came face to face with Christ's requirement to go and sell all that he had, give to the poor and then come and follow Jesus, he did what so many have done before. (Mark 10:22.) Many years before him was a man who seemed to have the gift of prophecy given by God. He was called to pronounce a curse upon Israel but he blessed them instead. And when pressured to seek to really curse, he gave the counsel as to what to do to get Israel to sin against God and bring His wrath upon them. This he did for the reward offered to him. Read about it in Numbers 22-24 and also Revelation 2:14 along with II Peter 2:15-16. Jesus said in Luke 12:15, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." It has been a snare for many as Paul said in I Timothy 6:9-10: "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Worldly possessions tend to harden the heart and blind the spiritual eyes. Jesus also said in Mark 10:23 and 24, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God," and "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God." And we could add this also: "How hard it is to have riches and not trust in them!"

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In Matthew 13:44 Jesus taught the principle we've studied in Abraham's life. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." When a person becomes enlightened to the benefit and blessing of salvation, everything else becomes secondary and subservient to God and His will.

Moses also chose God over the treasures of Egypt. Raised in Pharaoh's court, Moses had access to the riches, pleasures, comforts and throne of Egypt. When he came to years it says that he had respect to the recompense of reward. Moses recognized that there was life after this life. It is shortsighted vision for those who choose the riches of this life over God.

Paul said that he had suffered the loss of all things that he might win Christ and be found in Him. God has blessed us with temporal blessings such as home, transportation, income, etc. Let us reverence the Giver and not allow the riches of this life to steal our affections. One song puts it this way, "My home and friends are dear to me, yet he is dearer still; in my affections first he'll be and first his righteous will." He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep.

—Bro. Bob Wilson



MAY 1, 2005

ABRAM BELIEVES GOD

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.

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.

17 And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.

18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.

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: After Abram refused the reward of earthly riches, God assured him that his reward would increase and that the fruit of his own body would be as the stars in multitude. At that point Abram's faith took hold and from the heart he believed God would fulfill what He had promised.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 15:1), "*after these things*": After Abram had refused the offer of material wealth from the king of Sodom. "*thy exceeding great reward*": The Hebrew says, "Thy reward shall increase."

(Verse 3), "*one born in my house*": Since Abram had yet begotten no son of his own, he felt that his heir must be among his servants who had been born in his house.

(Verse 4), "*out of thine own bowels*": or, from the fruit of his own body.

(Verse 5), "*abroad*": outside "*tell, number*": Both are from the same Hebrew word which means *count*. "*seed*": posterity, or descendants

(Verse 6), "*believed*": Let us do a research on this word "believe" from the Hebrew. The main Hebrew word is "a-man" with stress on the last syllable. According to Strong's Concordance Hebrew Dictionary the meaning of this word covers these

points: to *build up or support*; to *foster* as a parent or nurse; to *render* (or be) *firm* or faithful, to *trust* or believe, to be *permanent* or quiet; to be *true* or certain. It appears to have a basic meaning of stability, firmness and unfailing endurance. There are several other words that are closely related to this word, such as "o-men" which means "verity" and is translated *truth*. Also there is "a-men," which means *sure*, from which comes the term, "Amen," which means *so be it*, and also is translated *truth*. There is also the Hebrew word "e-muwn," which means *established*, or *trustworthiness*. Then there is the feminine of that word, "e-munah," which means *firmness*, *security* and *fidelity*. It is very obvious then, from the surveillance of this word, that we have here a weighty and vitally important factor in our relationship with God. Let us sum it up like this: To believe means to firmly, quietly, permanently trust with all certainty and confidence that what God has said is (beyond all question and doubt) the truth and is no lie. Webster defines the word "believe" as meaning to *take as true and real*; and to *have confidence in a statement or promise of another*. It also says that the word segment "lieve" is from the word "love."

(Verse 10), "*divided*": cut in half "*in the midst*": in the middle. "*one against another*": each piece laid opposite its counterpart.

(Verse 17), "*burning lamp*": flame of fire. "*passed between those pieces*": the fire passed from each part (of the animals he had cut in two) to its corresponding part. God manifested His power in this way to Abram to assure him of the covenant He was making with him.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we see the LORD God visiting Abram in a rewarding manner for his refusing the earthly wealth in preference to His own promised blessings. But Abram is becoming concerned about a son, an offspring, an heir. Time is going by and he is getting older, and his wife Sarai is barren. All circumstances are against him as far as having posterity is concerned. He questions: "Shall I look for an heir among my servants born in my house?" Then the word of the LORD came to him, "It will come from your own body." Then we have that touching scene when the LORD calls him outside of his tent to

look up at the stars and declared to him: "So shall thy seed be." At this point Abraham accepted it in his heart that what God was telling him was the truth and it would come to pass. When he asked for some manifestation to help him to know with greater assurance, God instructed him what to do. The sacrifice of three animals and two birds and the arrangement of their bodies gave God space to send His fire in an approving manner. Abraham guarded the sacrifice until the sun went down and kept the fowls away. God made known to him, at this point, what was in the future. His descendants were to be strangers and servants in a foreign land for four hundred years and would return with great substance, but Abram himself would die and be buried in a good old age. Then after the sun went down the fire came down and passed between the parts of the animals, and God spoke again of Abram's seed inheriting the land.

But this part of believing God's promise to the point of it being counted to him for righteousness was Step No. 4 in Abram's development of faith. This statement is quoted and referred to in the New Testament in Romans 4:3, 9 and 22, Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23. This is a decisive action of the inner man, and it is something that we must all come to in the development of our own personal confidence in God.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What was Abram's questioning before God about?
2. What did God say about where Abram's heir would come from?
3. What did God say about the stars?
4. What was Abram's response to the promise of God?
5. Why is it so important to simply believe God and take Him at His Word?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Believing is an action of the heart and mind but it must be followed by outward works for it to be of any profit. If we really believe, we must put it into action. In James 2 and verses 14 through 26 the writer goes into great detail to emphasize this critical point. He says in verse 19: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

There must be something more than just believing from the mind. It must be followed with works. And then the writer used two examples of accomplished faith that was attended with works. The first was Abraham obeying God and offering up his son Isaac upon the altar of sacrifice. He said that "faith wrought with his works and by works was faith made perfect." And then the harlot Rahab was mentioned. We read the account of this woman in Joshua chapter 2. She was persuaded that God was giving Israel the land of Canaan and that her city of Jericho was to be destroyed. She believed the report that had come about Israel and their past victories. She did something about it by taking in the spies from Israel and letting them out to escape through a window. This action proved her faith and saved her life and that of others.

It we are to have success in faith and believing in God, we must take definite action. Just talking big about it is not enough. We must move, do, act, live and obey. This takes sacrifice, self-denial, going against how things look and appear, braving the contradiction of sinners and the world and definite and unfailing decision. It means giving up our ways and being willing to go Christ's way of holiness, humility, suffering and death. Earnest prayer and faithfulness in obeying the Lord will help us attain to faith.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

When we consider the most popular verse in the Bible, John 3:16, we can realize how important it is for us to believe in God. A lack of belief on our part will cause our soul to be eternally lost. It is encouraging to read about the faith of Abraham but unless we have some ourselves we are in trouble with God. The Word says that, "...without faith it is impossible to please *him*...."

Even a small amount of faith in God allows His great power to go into action and Jesus illustrated how effectual it was by telling His disciples that if they had "...faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." By understanding these verses we can see that we have great need of faith in God and we will be richly blessed by possessing this precious virtue.

The door of our relationship with God hinges on faith. It gives us entrance into His holy presence and brings the reality of His power into our lives. It is through faith in the sacrifice made by our Savior that we are able to repent and obtain forgiveness from our sins. It is by faith that we can bring our burdens to God and find peace and rest. It is through faith that we are able to overcome the wicked one and live according to His Word in purity and holiness.

Jude 1:20 says, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." Just as a building project is completed a step at a time, it is also true that our faith is built a step at a time. The Lord will work with us and cause the trials and difficulties of life to perfect our faith if we will take His hand and allow Him to gently teach us day by day. By being submissive to His will, obeying His Word and doing our part to exercise faith the Lord is able to fashion us into a masterpiece that reflects His glorious image and we will come forth as gold tried in the fire. It is through manifesting faith in our life that we will be able to be one of those spoken about in Matthew 8:11. "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." —Bro. Willie E. Murphey



MAY 8, 2005

GOD'S 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.

10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

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 a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

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.

MEMORY VERSE: Who (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 changed Abram's name to Abraham, and established an everlasting covenant with him that he would be a father of many nations and that his seed would possess the land for an everlasting possession.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 17:2). "*covenant*": an agreement between two or more individuals or parties. The Hebrew word means a "cutting," which refers to two or more parties sharing like interests, like assets being divided to be shared by all concerned. A fruit pie is usually made to be shared by several, so it is cut into pieces to make it available. A covenant is a dividing, or sharing,

and the covenant God made with Abraham was a sharing of His good will and mercy with Abraham and all of his children down through the ages unto eternity.

(Verse 5). "*Abram*": a high father. "*Abraham*": a father of a great multitude.

(Verse 8). "*everlasting possession*": God said that *all* the land of Canaan would be for an everlasting possession. The fulfillment of this covenant and promise cannot be confined to the earthly realm, but it is a never ending inheritance to be enjoyed in that world without end that is promised to Christ and all who truly love and follow Him.

(Verse 10). "*circumcised*": The cutting of a portion of flesh.

(Verse 15). "*Sarai*": one who rules or dominates. "*Sarah*": a princess or queen.

(Romans 4:18). "*against hope*": beyond hope.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our previous lesson we see where Abram believed what God showed him of his seed being like the stars of the sky in multitude. God was pleased with the faith that Abram had in his heart and he counted it to him for righteousness. Abram carried out God's instruction concerning the animal sacrifices and God caused fire to pass between the pieces of the bodies he had divided in two. And God made a covenant with him that He would give to Abram's seed the land of Canaan. In our lesson today we have God adding more to His covenant with Abram and giving him command as to what He wanted him to do with regard to this covenant.

But something took place in the intervening years between our two lessons. And this has to do with Abram's wife, Sarai. About all we hear about Sarai up to this point was what happened during their sojourn in Egypt when Abram had Sarah to pass as his sister in fear of what the Egyptians would do to him if they knew that such a beautiful woman was his wife. The LORD worked it out that they escaped the trouble they got in and they came back to Canaan. So all this time Sarai had quietly gone about her duties as wife. But after the events in our last lesson something happened that was to cause complications and difficulties later. Sarai gave up hope of having a child from Abram, so she got the idea of having Abram take on as a

secondary wife her handmaid, a young woman from Egypt named Hagar. She figured that since Hagar was young she could conceive and bear children. This was about ten years after they had come to Canaan. Sarai pressed her thoughts on Abram and he hearkened to her and took Hagar to be his wife. And she conceived, and when Hagar realized that she was with child she felt that she was special and despised Sarai, her mistress. This caused strife and trouble in the home. Sarai blamed Abram and Abram in turn gave her liberty to deal with Hagar as she would be pleased to do. And when Sarai dealt severely with Hagar the poor girl ran off out into the wilderness and would not have returned had not the angel of the LORD visited her and instructed her to go back and submit herself unto the hand of Sarai, her mistress. Moreover the angel told Hagar that she would have a son and he would be called Ishmael, and that God would bless him and make him a great multitude. Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born.

At the time of our lesson another 13 years have slipped by. Both Sarai and Abram are past the time of bringing forth children. But now God visited Abram with a renewing of His covenant, changing both his name and Sarai's name. He gave him the charge that all the males in his house were to be circumcised as a token (sign or evidence) of that covenant. He made the promise that they were to have a son to be called Isaac. In that Abram accepted that covenant and instituted the rite of circumcision we see (Step No. 5) taken by him in the progressive development of his faith in God. —Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did God tell Abram to do so that the covenant would be made?
2. What promises did this covenant contain?
3. What did God tell Abram to do with regard to this covenant?
4. How can we tell that Abram was still having difficulty with doubts?
5. What different names did God give to Abram and Sarai?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

God's visit to Abram, changing his name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah, was a great advancement in the working

of God with them. He had already made a covenant with Abraham but now the LORD is adding more wonderful blessings to it. He made it clear that Sarah would be the mother of Abraham's promised son, even giving them the name, Isaac, to call him. This is a wonderful step that Abraham took in response to the LORD's dealings. He obeyed and carried out the instructions God gave him. This is a great step in the development of Abraham's experience of faith in God.

It is interesting to take note of the wisdom of God in dealing with Abraham and Sarah. It was a slow process, working over the years, day after day going by, with them patiently waiting for God's directions and instructions to be given. So it is the way God leads His children today. He gives us promises and visions. He reveals His plan and the blessed hope of the future of the saints of God in that world to come. Day by day we keep moving on, trusting Him for guidance and help. Then comes a day when the Holy Spirit inspires our hearts and opens doors and works out things, advancing us in spiritual realities we never knew before. The route of faith is one of suffering affliction and patient endurance. We must not strain for the future to hurry up and get here. No, we must patiently take it one day at a time, hoping and quietly waiting for the salvation of the LORD. From step to step He moves us along. He is slow but He is deliberate and sure. And someday we will rejoice and give glory to Him for being with us all the way and for His faithful fulfillment of the promises that He gave us on the journey of life. —Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The giving of names, or the changing of names, in the Scripture is never without spiritual significance. In today's lesson we learn that God not only changed Abram's name to Abraham but he also dealt with Sarai, changing her name to Sarah. Sarai meant "one who rules or dominates." Sarah means "a princess or queen." It is interesting to see the events that brought about this spiritual change in Sarah, and God made it significant by giving her a new name.

She had done what many of us have also tried. She decided to take matters into her own hands, push her agenda through and get Abraham that son he was to have! She was being pushy

and domineering—*Sarai*. She demanded that Abraham take Hagar, and in his weakness he listened to her. We can see the turmoil this situation brought into their home.

Now thirteen years have gone by and the hard lesson Sarah learned by demanding her own way has softened her. Instead of being bossy and overbearing, she has learned to laugh and calls Abraham "Lord." Now God calls her "Princess."

True royalty comes by submission. Possession of God's promises comes by giving up our way. The meek inherit the land. We see this later in Genesis when Jacob, lame and at wit's end, surrenders everything to God and God names him "Israel" which means "Prince." Our weakness is always God's strength. Our end is His beginning. When we suffer, we reign; when we give up control, we receive God's power.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck



MAY 15, 2005

SARAH'S FAITH TRIUMPHS AT LAST

Genesis 18:1 And the LORD appeared unto him (Abraham) 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.

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.

1 Peter 3:3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel:

4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:

6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

MEMORY VERSE: Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Hebrews 11:11.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Being barren and then past age for child bearing, Sarah, the wife of Abraham, saw not how it could be that she could have a son and even laughed at the thought. But as Abraham's faith took hold, Sarah finally judged God to be well able and faithful to fulfill His promise, and she was able to conceive and bring forth a son in her old age. She learned obedience and submission and is used as an example for women to follow.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 18:1), "*the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre*": The Hebrew renders this: Jehovah came to him by the oaks of Mamre.

(Verse 11), "*well stricken in age*": The Hebrew says, "old, advancing in days."

(1 Peter 3:3), "*plaiting the hair*": The Greek meaning refers to elaborate braiding of the hair. Elaborate means putting much effort and time. This could include multiplicity of braiding and also entwining ribbons and cloth with the braid in a decorative manner. "*putting on of apparel*": putting on showy and fancy clothes to attract and gain attention and admiration.

(Verse 4). *"hidden man of the heart"*: The concealed, inward beauty of the pure and humble heart, the beauty of Christ shining forth from the inner man. *"meek"*: mild, gentle and humble.

(Verse 6). *"not afraid with any amazement"*: The Greek simply says. "fearing no terror."

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we view a touching and inspiring scene in the life of Abraham. The language of our text is very descriptive, but we have left some of the details out in an effort to not be too lengthy. In those details we see Abraham instructing Sarah to quickly prepare bread while he himself went out to his herd and picked out a young calf to be killed, butchered and dressed, to be cooked and prepared to serve with the meal for the three visitors. He served it all with butter and milk and stood by them under the tree while they partook of the food. It is evident that one of these was the LORD God Almighty taking upon Himself human form and the other two were heavenly angels.

While the heavenly Visitors were partaking of the food, Sarah was keeping out of sight in the tent but she was listening to the conversation that was going on. The question was raised about her whereabouts, and Abraham answered that she was in the tent. It was then that the LORD made the statement to Abraham that Sarah, his wife, would at the time appointed bring forth a son. We can picture Sarah inside the tent door, listening. At the mention of her going to give birth to a son Sarah laughed, even as Abraham did in time previous to this. This was the reason that the name for the promised son was to be Isaac, which means "laughter." The LORD heard her laugh and caught the language of her heart. When He questioned about why she laughed, the LORD asked the question: "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" And then He verified it again that she was going to have a son at the time appointed.

In our Memory Verse from Hebrews 11:11 we can find a clue for the reason that Sarah was able to receive strength in her body to conceive and bring forth a child. She simply believed. I would like to imagine, knowing a little about how we as people think and talk, that she and Abraham discussed this matter

later. Perhaps a few words of encouragement from Abraham helped, but I like to think that Sarah did some serious thinking herself, perhaps like this: "Well, if the LORD said that it would be, regardless of my physical condition or my age. He can cause it to come to pass. Why not? I believe that I will be able to bring forth the son that we have longed for so long!" Don't you think that she may have thought that way? The Scripture says that "she judged Him faithful who had promised."

And then we have the writings of our beloved brother Simon Peter, the apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was speaking to wives to be in subjection to their husbands and how the unbelieving can be won by the chaste conduct of the wives. He speaks words so wise and fitting. Not the outward adorning makes a woman beautiful. Women who seek for the outward adorning show the proof that within their heart is little or no excellence. It is the inner beauty that God looks at and that really makes one attractive. Plainness of dress and modesty to cover up and clothe the surface, form and figure of the flesh is the rule for godliness expressed in this scripture, and in Paul's writings in 1 Timothy 2:9-10 where we find the word "shamefacedness," which means to not be bold to expose the body. This kind of behavior will help make a woman to be a daughter of Sarah as well as a daughter of Abraham. Thank the Lord for His precious, holy way!

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did the Lord promise concerning Abraham's wife, Sarah?
2. How did Sarah react to the promise of her bringing forth a son?
3. What caused her to change her mind about the matter?
4. What are the traits that are found in a real daughter of Sarah?
5. Why are we counseled in the Scripture to avoid outward adorning?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We are studying the progress of a man and his wife in obtaining the blessings that God promised to them. Let us be encouraged to know that every person has the same privilege to attain to faith and victory that they did. These people were plain,

ordinary people like anyone else. What they could do we can do also. We can have faith in our own lives. We can attain to experiences of fellowship and communion with God just as they did. God can inspire and lead us step by step in the pursuit of triumph and success in Him. There is a price that we must pay to have experiences of faith. It all lies in the realm of submission, humility, willingness and faithful obedience. For every advancement of faith and victory in our lives there is a balance of submission and obedience. You can see it in Abraham's life over and over. And the conflict is not over yet. There are still two more critical steps that Abraham is going to have to take. These that he has already taken and mastered have prepared and conditioned him to meet the challenges that are ahead of him. So it is with us in our experience with God. Start out for Him and be faithful to conquer in every test of life. Thus we will succeed.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Can an old woman conceive and bring forth a child? Can a young lad subdue a Philistine warrior? Can hungry lions refrain from eating a man? Can a virgin conceive? Can three men survive a heated furnace? Can five loaves of bread and two fish feed five thousand men, plus wives and children? Can a dead man arise from the grave? Can one million people cross a large sea without drowning? "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

The angel answered Mary, "For with God nothing shall be impossible." Luke 1:37. Sarah and Elisabeth can both testify to God's ability to make two old women conceive and bear babies. David's testimony would be of God's ability to guide the stone that slew Goliath. Mary knows of God's power to allow her to conceive while still a virgin. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could all testify of their survival through a fiery furnace. The multitude all witnessed the low food supply and yet they were all filled. The Israelites could testify of their passage to the other side of the Red Sea on dry land! Lazarus could testify to you of his death to life experience. Because with God all things are possible.

Do you have some impossibilities in your life? Some barren, lifeless places? Some furnaces to face? Are there giants to slay? God specializes in things thought impossible. Sarah believed and bore a son.

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

MAY 22, 2005

ABRAHAM INTERCEDES FOR LOT

Genesis 18:16 And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.

17 And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;

18 Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

20 And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;

21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.

22 And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

23 And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

24 Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?

25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous shall be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

26 And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

27 And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes:

28 Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.

29 And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake.

30 And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.

31 And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.

32 And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

33 And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

MEMORY VERSE: I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men. I Timothy 2:1.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The LORD God came in human form to investigate the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah concerning their wickedness. When Abraham realized that the LORD was considering destroying those cities, he thought of his nephew Lot who was living in Sodom. So Abraham entreated the LORD to spare the cities if at least ten people could be found there who were righteous.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 18:20), "*cry*": This is referring to the outcry of evil and wickedness that the Almighty God was hearing and beholding from heaven.

(Verse 21), "*I will go down now and see*": We might wonder about this statement, and ask these questions: "Does not God see every secret thing? Did He not know how wicked and sinful these cities were? Why would He have to come down to check on things?" God is wise and merciful as well as being all-seeing and all-knowing. Yes, He knew all about Sodom and the cities of the plain and what was going on. But before He would execute judgment upon them He must come down in human form to view things from a human standpoint before He made the decision. That shows how merciful and forbearing God really is. He hears Abraham's intercession and plea for the righteous who might be living among the wicked. And let us not forget that for

this purpose in the fullness of time God sent Jesus down in the likeness of men to behold mankind and to be on their level and to make reconciliation for us before He would "come and smite the earth with a curse." (Malachi 4:6.)

(Verse 24). "*Peradventure*": Perhaps there possibly may be a chance.

(Verse 27). "*I have taken upon me*": Abraham feels his unworthiness (like dust and ashes) to try to entreat God, so he assumes all responsibility for what he is trying to do and say. This was his second approach, as he had already proposed the figure of 50 righteous people who might be in Sodom. Now he drops it down to 45. Then he dropped it to 40. Still feeling that the number might be pretty high, he proposes 30, saying, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak." When he dropped the number down to 20, he said again, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord." Then he still doubted if there were 20, so he tried one more time, saying, "Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once; Peradventure ten should be found there." Abraham was interceding to God for his nephew Lot and whoever else would be found righteous before God. Somehow he was confident that, even though Lot had chosen to pitch his tent in the wrong direction, his nephew had not given over to wickedness. It proved out that Lot was still counted to be a righteous man.

LESSON BACKGROUND

After the LORD and the two angels had finished their visit and time with Abraham and Sarah, they rose up and looked toward Sodom and the purpose of their visit to human level. Abraham walked with them, probably thinking that he needed to show them the best way to go. At this point the LORD decided to inform Abraham of their purpose. In His statement we see revealed the high regard and trust that the LORD had concerning Abraham. Note the things that He said about Abraham and the reason why He did not want to hide the matter from this faithful man. He said that Abraham would surely become a great and mighty nation and that all nations of the earth would be blessed in him. He further said that He knew him, that Abraham would command his children and his household after him, and that they would keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment. All this was so that He would bring upon

Abraham that which He had spoken of him. This was quite a testimony that the Almighty God made about our father Abraham.

Then he informed Abraham about the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah coming to Him on account of their sin which was very grievous. He said that He was going to see about it, meaning that He was going to view the situation from a human perspective.

Abraham knew that the people of Sodom were "wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly." (Genesis 13:13.) And he discerned that the destruction of these wicked cities of the plain was about to be accomplished. But then he thought of Lot, his nephew, who was living in Sodom. Lot had pitched his tent toward Sodom but now he is living in Sodom. It took effort and courage on his part to detain the LORD for awhile and to make this intercession. God was gracious to His servant and heard him out. When he was through the LORD went his way and Abraham committed things to God and went his way.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the LORD decide to inform Abraham of what He was about to do?
2. Why did the LORD see fit to come down and view things as a man?
3. What was Abraham's purpose in his entreaty concerning the matter?
4. Why did he persist in lowering the proposed number of the righteous?
5. How did the LORD respond to Abraham's proposition?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The merciful and brotherly attitude of Abraham for his nephew Lot is a commendable virtue along with the other good points of his character. In the first place he took Lot under his wing after his brother Haran's death. Then he gave Lot the first choice of the land when it came the time to separate from each other. Then when Lot was carried away captive, Abraham went through great effort and danger to rescue him. Lot faded out of the picture after that, but when Abraham was aware that God was considering pouring out destruction upon Sodom, Abraham steps forward again to plead for mercy and consideration. This

spirit of brotherhood is brought down and is one of the great attributes of Abraham's seed, the Church of God, the Bride of Jesus Christ.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Intercession comes from the word intercede, which according to Webster means to intervene between parties with a view to reconcile. This is a good example for our role as Christians. "And hath made us kings and priests unto God..." Revelation 1:6.

Abraham could have taken the attitude that Lot was getting what he deserved after selfishly choosing out the best watered land for himself. However Abraham's faith and love was deeper. He had a genuine concern for people. He entreated or interceded for them.

On one occasion the Lord and disciples were rejected, the people did not receive the message of salvation and the disciples asked the Lord if they should send fire down from heaven and consume them. Jesus told them He had not come to destroy men's lives but to save them. Their response was very human. I have been learning more about love, patience, long-suffering and forbearing with people. When they don't see issues like me; when the efforts seem useless and to no avail; when I feel rejection; when I see the detriment of their way and they continue on unconcerned; when they appear to be so far from God; when your heart aches and bleeds. The flesh can be tempted so quickly to write people off or wash our hands of the responsibility. There is a little poem that has blessed me many times. it's called:

Outwitted

He drew a circle that shut me out
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in.

—Bro. Bob Wilson

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MAY 29, 2005

LOT'S ESCAPE FROM THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM

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.

9b 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.

MEMORY VERSE: The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Luke 17:29.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The two angels sent from the LORD to destroy Sodom made contact with Lot, the nephew of Abraham for whom he made intercession, and gave him a chance to escape from Sodom with his wife and two daughters before fire and brimstone fell from heaven and destroyed the city and all who were in it.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 19:2), "*lords*": Lot recognized these two as heavenly beings, worthy of the title "lord."

(Verse 3), "*pressed upon them greatly*": Lot urged them very much to come into the safety and shelter of his house because he knew what kind of people lived in that awful place. II Peter 2:8 tells us that Lot, "that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." And Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that when "the angels came to the city of the Sodomites Lot entreated them to accept of a lodging with him; for he was a very generous and hospitable man, and one that had learned to imitate the goodness of Abraham." Josephus went on to say, "Now when the Sodomites saw the young men

to be of beautiful countenance, and this to an extraordinary degree, and that they took up their lodgings with Lot, they resolved themselves to enjoy these beautiful boys by force and violence."

(Verse 5), "*that we may know them*": These people were what is termed "sodomites," which in our language is homosexual. Notice their behavior, old and young, coming from every quarter and demanding that Lot would bring them that they could satisfy their wicked lusts upon them.

(Verse 11), "*they wearied themselves to find the door*": The Hebrew said, "They struggled to find the door." Even after these men of wicked passions were miraculously struck blind, they still were wanting and trying to get in and fulfill their evil lusts.

(Verse 14), "*as one that mocked*": as one that was joking.

(Verse 16), "*set him without the city*": They laid hold of Lot's hand and in like manner his wife and daughters and would not let them go until they had them outside the city.

(Verse 17), "*abroad*": outside the city.

(Verse 24), "*brimstone*": very inflammable substance like resin or sulphur.

(Verse 26), "*pillar of salt*": a statue of salt.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The two angels who had been with the LORD when they visited with Abraham beneath the oak trees of Mamre made their appearance at the gate of Sodom where Lot was sitting. Why was Lot sitting there? He was probably watching for innocent travelers who would need shelter for the night from the wicked men of Sodom. But when he saw these two messengers from heaven, he recognized them as such, and bowed himself with his face toward the ground, entreating them to accept the hospitality of his house for the night. Though Lot was not wise in pitching his tent toward Sodom and eventually moving into Sodom to live there, still he was evidently clinging to the teachings of his Uncle Abraham. The scripture we quoted above from II Peter 2:8 labels Lot as a righteous man. Abraham counted Lot a righteous man or he would not have interceded so readily for him.

If the angels had come to investigate the city of Sodom as to whether it merited destruction, they were soon convinced that it was ripe for the wrath of God to be poured out upon it.

The behavior of the old and young from every section of the city manifested an uncontrolled passion of unbridled lusts and violence that made them unfit to live and walk on God's green earth. Sodom had passed all bounds of tolerance and mercy. The two angels wasted no time. After giving Lot a chance to talk to his sons-in-law and seeing their insolence and pride immediately they pressed Lot, his wife, and daughters to get on the move to get out before the fire from heaven would fall. II Peter 2:6 says that God, turning "the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly." It is said that the Dead Sea, the point of lowest elevation on earth, is the place where Sodom was.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Lot want to do for the two angels who came to see Sodom?
2. Why did the old and young men want to have these two angels?
3. For what reason did these two angels come to Sodom?
4. What chance did these angels give to Lot before they ushered him out?
5. Why was Lot's wife turned to a pillar of salt?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Our Lord Jesus spoke of the destruction of Sodom in Luke 17:28-29 when He was speaking of His second coming. He spoke before that about the days of Noah and how it would be that way in the days of the Son of man. In the days of Noah before the flood, "they did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all." Then He spoke about the days of Lot, how "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." Our Saviour is speaking in this place of His second coming. Verse 30 says, "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." Then Jesus said in verses 31 and 32: "In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down

to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife." Let us conclude by this that we must sever our love entirely from our earthly possessions. When He comes in glory this world will pass away. If we have any undue and unholy love for this material world, it will hinder us from escaping its destruction. Why did Lot's wife perish? She looked back, indicating that she had not severed her affections from what was behind her in Sodom. May this be a challenge and a warning to us.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The message that the world received from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is just as relevant today as it was in the day of Abraham. The smoke of these wicked cities ascending into the sky was a fearsome witness to all who saw it that God will not allow sin to go on forever. God has not changed. He is still a righteous God and His fiery indignation continues to burn against sin and unless the sinner is converted and escapes to the mountain of the Lord he will be destroyed.

Some of the sins of Sodom are identified in Ezekiel 16:49-50. It says, "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good." The prosperity that the world has enjoyed has allowed these same selfish, lustful sins to ripen and the wrath of God is hanging heavily over the head of the wicked. The angel of mercy is urgently calling for every sinner to flee for your life.

Do not be as Lot's sons-in-law who responded to the warning to flee as if it was only a funny joke. But believe God and begin breaking off your sins now while there is still time to escape His horrible wrath. The world offers a form of religion that will attempt to soothe your conscience and allow you to continue in your sin, but false religion still dwells in the plain around Sodom and will not stand the fire and brimstones of God's judgment against sin. The only way of escape is to flee to Christ and have your sins forgiven and be made free from the yoke of sin. You will forever be glad that you found the place of refuge.

—Bro. Willie E. Murphey

JUNE 5, 2005

CASTING OUT THE BONDWOMAN

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.

6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

8 And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the *same* day that Isaac was weaned.

9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son. *even* with Isaac.

11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman: in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice: for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

14 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

16 And she went, and sat her down over against *him* a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against *him*, and lift up her voice, and wept.

17 And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not: for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

20 And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

21 And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

MEMORY VERSE: They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. Romans 9:8.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Because of what Sarah saw in the actions of Hagar's son, Ishmael, she requested that Abraham send the bondwoman and her son away. Abraham was very grieved about it, but the LORD God spoke to Abraham and told him to hearken unto Sarah, for in Isaac was his family to be brought forth. So Abraham, in obedience to God, sent Hagar and Ishmael away, and God was merciful to spare them from perishing in the wilderness.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 21:8), "*weaned*": Taken from being nursed by the mother. It is generally believed that a child was weaned at three years of age.

(Verse 9), "*mocking*": laughing him to scorn.

(Verse 10), "*cast out*": drive away.

(Verse 11), "*grievous*": bad or evil.

(Verse 12), "*called*": brought forth.

(Verse 14), "*bottle*": container made from skins, tied up to hold water.

(Verse 15), "*cast out*": put or placed. Ishmael is reckoned to have been about 17 years of age.

(Verse 16), "*over against*": opposite, a ways off.

(Verse 18), "*hold him in thine hand*": More properly rendered: "support him with thine hand."

(Verse 20), "*archer*": One who shoots with a bow and arrows.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we find Abraham faced with a very difficult situation. As we mentioned in a previous lesson, Abraham, at his wife Sarah's suggestion, took her handmaid, Hagar, as a secondary wife. She reasoned that since she was not able to bear children it would be permissible for Abraham to do this, Hagar being a much younger woman, so that he could have an heir. Abraham consented to her request and Hagar did bear him a son named Ishmael. Abraham was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born and was one hundred years old when Isaac, the son of Sarah, was born. Reckoning a child being weaned at the age of three, this would make Ishmael now, at the time of our lesson, to be about seventeen years of age. Adam Clarke comments that, in those primitive times, a young man of seventeen years "was able to gain his livelihood, either by his bow in the wilderness, or by keeping flocks as Jacob did."

Abraham and Sarah, in their faith and patience, had been rewarded with a son in their old age. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90. Sarah had laughed at the idea of having a son at such an advanced age and now she laughs for joy that it was fulfilled as God had promised. At the time Isaac was weaned Abraham made a great feast to celebrate the occasion. And Sarah saw Ishmael showing a scornful attitude toward Isaac. The apostle Paul labeled it as "he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit." Galatians 4:29. The matter highly displeased Sarah and she demanded that Abraham send Hagar and her son away. This was a "very grievous" thing in Abraham's sight. Although he had relinquished any thought of Ishmael as being the heir and avenue for his promised seed, yet there was no doubt a very deep and warm affection in his heart for his son. And to have to turn him and his mother out was a very painful and repulsive step to have to take. But God came on the scene and instructed Abraham to hearken to the voice of his wife in all that she had said to him.

In our lesson we see Abraham obeying the LORD and the great goodness that God showed to Hagar and Ishmael after they left. This was another step of faith for Abraham, Step No. 6, a move that went against his own thoughts and desires. In our next lesson we will consider the spiritual aspects that the apostle Paul brought out about it. —Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of laugh was Sarah's when Isaac was born?
2. Why did Sarah ask Abraham to cast out Hagar and her son, Ishmael?
3. Why was Sarah's request so very grievous in Abraham's sight?
4. Why did God tell Abraham to hearken to the voice of Sarah?
5. In what way was sending Hagar away a step of faith?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There are decisions that are made in a person's life that may not just cut us off from God but may prove to be detrimental and bring about the need for adjustments and corrections later on down the road. It would be far better not to have taken that step and would have saved us much trouble. The Lord understands us human beings and why we are influenced by others. Jesus said in Luke 14:26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." These are areas of influence in one's life. It is very expedient that we put the Lord first and above all. Abraham gave in to Sarah about taking Hagar to wife, and, though God did not forsake him over the matter, yet it worked problems and difficulties later. Far better would it have been if he had never taken Hagar to wife and had a son by her. But the time came when something had to be done. I am sure that Abraham this time sought God's guidance and help in prayer. And the Lord showed Abraham what He wanted him to do. I am sure it was very difficult and went against his emotions and desires, like everything, to carry all of this out by sending Hagar and Ishmael away. To sacrifice one's own feelings and desires in order to please the Lord is a sacrifice that God honors. It is one of the greatest proofs that we truly love God when we give up something that is dear to us. There is yet one more test that God will give to Abraham, a test of giving up his own pleasure and what is most dear in order to obey and please God. All of these steps of the faith of Abraham carried a sacrifice. So will it be with us if we walk in the steps of this godly man's faith.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Why did God tell Abraham to hearken to Sarah's request? This is an interesting question. For over seventeen years Sarah had lived with her mistake. She and Hagar made the best of things and Hagar also had learned submission to her mistress, just as Sarah had learned to submit to Abraham. So is she returning to her old, domineering ways when she asks Abraham to have Hagar and Ishmael leave? I tend to think not; I believe that God had brought Sarah to the place that she fully understood the significance of her unbelief and the implications it had spiritually. She realized that Isaac was the child of promise while Ishmael was the result of her own frustration and impatience. She could see that separation forever had to be made between the two.

The apostle Paul also related to this separation between that which is of the flesh and that which is of the Spirit. (Gal. 4:22-31). He likened Hagar to the Jewish law system given on Mount Sinai and the literal city of Jerusalem which was in the bondage of fleshly worship and sin. In contrast, he pictured Sarah as a type of the New Jerusalem which came down from above. We know this is the Church of God, the bride of Christ, the assembly of all who are made holy by the blood of Jesus. The two can never be combined. The separation has to be made, even today. We put away the flesh, being spiritually circumcised in our hearts. We come out from among idolatry, false religion and human organizations. We worship Christ in the Spirit and have no confidence in the flesh. —Sis. Angela Gellenbeck



JUNE 12, 2005

THE BONDWOMAN VERSUS THE FREEWOMAN

Galatians 4:21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

22 For it is written, that 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.

Hebrews 12:18 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest.

19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words: which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:

22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels.

23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

Revelations 3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God.

MEMORY VERSE: Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Galatians 5:1.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Hagar, the bondwoman, corresponds with the Old Law system given on Mt. Sinai and the present literal Jerusalem. These are of the flesh which will bring us into bondage. But Sarah, the freewoman, relates to the law

of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which has brought about the new spiritual Jerusalem, the mother of all who are born again and led by the Holy Spirit.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Galatians 4:24), "*which things are an allegory*": An allegory, according to Webster, is defined as a story in which people, things, and happenings have a hidden or symbolic meaning. He is saying here that Hagar, the bondwoman with her son born of the flesh, and Sarah, the freewoman with her son born through faith by the promise of God, are symbolic and on the same level with the two covenants. Hagar represents the covenant of the old law which was given on Mt. Sinai, which is to spiritual bondage. He does not say what the other covenant is, but we know that it is the New Covenant which Christ brings to us of the Holy Spirit writing the laws of God in our hearts, which is the freewoman. "*gendereth to bondage*": bringeth forth to slavery.

(Verse 25), "*answereth to*": corresponds to or is on the same level with. "*Jerusalem which now is*": This is the earthly, literal city of old Jerusalem. It is on the same level with the bondwoman (of the flesh) and the Old Law system given by Moses on Mt. Sinai. These three are at variance and in conflict with the faith of Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus and the spiritual Jerusalem which is made up of all who are saved by faith in Jesus and born from above and led by the Holy Spirit.

(Verse 26), "*Jerusalem which is above*": It is interesting to note that this word "above" is basically from the same Greek word as "again" in the expression from the words of Jesus in John 3:3, which says, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The term "born again" would more properly be expressed as "born from above." So we conclude that Jerusalem which is above is a spiritual city just as being born from above is a spiritual birth, a birth of the soul of man to spiritual life and peace in Christ Jesus. Oh, how we rejoice in this wonderful truth! No longer do we hold to old, literal Jerusalem! It means no more to God now than any other city on earth. The city that God is with and looks upon with favor is the souls of men who are changed to a new creature and born from above to a risen life with Christ.

(Verse 27), *"the desolate hath many more children"*: Paul had just spoken of the Jerusalem which is above as being our mother in salvation and the New Covenant in Christ. Concerning this he quoted from Isaiah 54:1. the chapter which is a beautiful prophecy of the New Testament Church. In that chapter, verse 13, it speaks about the children of the Church, the Bride of Christ, being all taught of the LORD. Jesus quoted this very verse in John 6:45 like this: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Can we not see how all this connects together to reveal the Church of God which Christ purchased with His own blood? The real Jerusalem that we need to get into today is the spiritual Jerusalem. These are the children of the married wife, begotten by the new birth of the Spirit. The children of the desolate are the converts of all false religions and churches who are void of spiritual life and power. They are many more in number than the true saints of God, the children of the married wife.

(Hebrews 12:18), *"mount that might be touched"*: Mt. Sinai.

(Verse 23), *"general assembly"*: The Greek word means a mass meeting and a universal fellowship. This is referring to the worldwide Church of God which includes every soul who is truly saved in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. *"church of the firstborn"*: This means the Church of the first-begotten which is Christ, "the firstborn of every creature," Colossians 1:15, and "the firstborn from the dead," Colossians 1:18.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson today is Paul's application of the spiritual significance of the bondwoman, Hagar, and Sarah, the freewoman that we studied about in our previous lesson. Quoting from Isaiah 54:1 Paul applied the freewoman to be Jerusalem above, which is spiritual Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ. We who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and risen from the dead state of sin to a life which is led by the Holy Spirit are in that Jerusalem which is above, the same as our scripture in Revelation 3:12, spoken by Jesus and labeled "new Jerusalem," the city of His God. It is wonderful how the New Testament writers apply the prophecies to this New Testament salvation. We have more from the writer in Hebrews concerning the New

Testament Church, in prophecy labeled as Mt. Sion (or Zion), and are written in heaven in the Lamb's Book of Life. We are children of the free, set free from the bondage of sin and this present, evil world.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What are the other two things that correspond to Hagar, the bondwoman?
2. What are the other two things that correspond to Sarah, the freewoman?
3. What is the Covenant that we are under now?
4. What is the Jerusalem which is above, the new Jerusalem?
5. Who are the children of the free woman, the married wife?

COMMENTS APPLICATION

The Old Law System brought us under the literal things of the law worship, namely, the animal sacrifices, the literal temple worship, the physical and material elements of this present, earthly realm, such as the literal city of Jerusalem. This kind of religion failed to meet man's real need, the freedom from sin and a spiritual experience with God. In Christ and New Testament salvation we are set free from the carnal ceremonies of the law of Moses to enter the spiritual realm of fellowship with God.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"If you love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15. The commandments are the old law—all of the "thou shalts and thou shalt nots." But Christ did not leave us hanging there. He went on to explain that. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever and...I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." Christ knew that we could not live the way of holiness without an agent to guide us, to strengthen us, to comfort us and to enlighten us. That agent is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a compass that points to the Saviour. It is a compass that leads me in the way of holiness. And yet everyone else has access to this compass also. It will lead my brother in the same path of holiness as well as me.

“ For as many as are led by the Spirit of GOD, they are the sons of GOD.” Romans 8: 14 “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” Galatians 5: 18. Notice how many times Holy Spirit is mentioned along with the word “led.” The Holy Spirit does not drive us but gently leads us, each one, into all paths of righteousness. The Holy Spirit does not rule us but leads us.

It is a dangerous thing to handle the Word of GOD without the Holy Spirit. If we leave this ingredient out, we will quickly fall into bondage of the law/letter. When the Holy Spirit is cast aside, we open ourselves to man rule. —Sis. LaDawna Adams



JUNE 19, 2005

THE SUPREME TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH

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.

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 VERSES: 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.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Abraham obeyed God and was willing to sacrifice the life of his precious son, Isaac, at the command of God. Although God stopped him from actually carrying out the burnt offering procedure, in his heart Abraham had made the sacrifice. God was well-pleased that Abraham had proven that he truly loved God in that he had not withheld his only son from Him.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 22:1). "*God did tempt Abraham*": God put him to the test.

(Verse 2). "*burnt offering*": An offering in which the victim is killed and burnt to ashes.

(Verse 3). "*clave the wood*": This means that he split the wood into thinner pieces, so as to render it easier to burn.

(Verse 12). "*thou fearest God*": This means he was God-fearing and reverent. He proved that he was such by not drawing back from obedience to God's command.

(Verse 17). "*thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies*": This was a direct reference to Jesus Christ who would conquer sin and death by His own supreme sacrifice.

(Hebrews 11:19). "*from whence also he received him in a figure*": The Greek puts it: "from where indeed he obtained him in a parable." Parable here means a similitude or comparison. Abraham stopped short of slaying his son, not because he drew back from doing it, but because God stopped him. In his heart it was as though he *had* slain his son. In this way it was as if he had received him back from the dead, so complete was his submission and consecration to God. He was determined to obey God because he believed that God would raise Isaac up from the dead to fulfill the promises made in his son. When God stopped him from the actual performance, it was as if he was receiving Isaac back from the dead.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we have portrayed Step No. 7, the final step of the faith of Abraham. And we see that it was the greatest and most difficult step of them all. It was the ultimate step of obedience and devotion to God. And in so doing it was as if he verified and made the promises God had given him as an oath. Because he had obeyed God's voice in this manner, it clinched the hope and assurance that he had before God of the future inheritance of eternal life. God gave Abraham this final test and it is a testimony for us today to help us in the ultimate sacrifices we also will be called to make.

We have chosen for our Memory Verse selection what the writer in Hebrews said about Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac,

for we deem what he said so descriptive and conclusive of what Abraham did, the spirit in which he did it and the wonderful result and lesson that comes down to us. For this cause we have made the Memory Verse a combination of three verses. It would do everyone good to put forth an effort to memorize this wonderful scripture. And let us never forget its vital message for our spiritual success and prosperity in offering the sacrifices that God is well-pleased with.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did God command Abraham to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering?
2. Why was Abraham so courageous and obedient to this command?
3. Why can we be assured that Isaac was submissive to Abraham?
4. How did Abraham prove that he truly feared God?
5. What was God's response to the obedience of Abraham?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We might wonder about this most unusual scene in the Holy Scriptures as to just how Abraham was able to accomplish it. I would like to quote from Josephus, the Jewish Historian. According to him, Isaac was at this time twenty-five years old. He relates what Abraham said to Isaac when all things were entirely ready for the sacrifice: "O son, I poured out a vast number of prayers that I might have thee for my son, and that I might leave thee at my death the successor to my dominion; but since it was 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. Thou, my son, wilt now die, not in any common way, but in the nature of a sacrifice." Josephus further relates what Isaac's response was. "Now Isaac was of such a generous disposition as became the son of such a father, and was pleased with this discourse, and stated that he was not worthy to be born at the first, if he should reject the determination of God and his father, and should not resign himself up readily to both their pleasures.

and it would be unjust to not obey, even if his father alone had so resolved. So he went immediately to the altar to be sacrificed." I think this is not far from how it really was. Isaac is to be commended along with his father for being the submissive son of peace and faith, following in the steps of his precious parent.

It has also been questioned concerning Sarah, and how she fared with all of this. But we see in Genesis 21:33 that Abraham was in Beersheba, and it appears that this is where he was when God told him to go and offer up Isaac. In chapter 23:1 we learn that Sarah died at Hebron. Hebron and Beersheba are over twenty miles distant from each other. It could have been that the sacrifice of Isaac occurred while Abraham and Sarah were temporarily separated from each other in these two places. This may be just speculation, as the Scripture does not tell all the details. But He may have wisely had Sarah and Abraham separated at this time to avoid any difficulty or conflict.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

I well remember when we were bringing our first child home for the very first time. It was an awesome feeling that she belonged to us. As I reveled in the thought, we were starting over the viaduct in Guthrie, when the Lord brought the words of a song to my mind so strongly—"The things that I love and hold dear to my heart are just borrowed they're not mine at all. Jesus only let me use them, to brighten my life, so remind me, remind me dear Lord."

We are just temporary stewards over what God has entrusted. That truth has great bearing on how I deal and treat my family—they are not mine, they belong to God. God doesn't ask us to offer them as a burnt offering; nevertheless, the consecrations are real. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

There is an old saying, "blood runs thick." We do love our families and have special bonds, but not to the point where it deters us from being and doing what God is calling us to.

—Bro. Bob Wilson

JUNE 26, 2005

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES TO ABRAHAM

Isaiah 51:1 Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

Matthew 3:7 When he (John) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Luke 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham

John 8:39 (The people said unto Jesus:) Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

Galatians 3:7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

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

14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

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.

MEMORY VERSE: Know ye therefore that they which are of faith. the same are the children of Abraham. Galatians 3:7.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The real seed of Abraham is made up of people, whatever race they are, who will walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham and follow his example of obedience and patience to do the will of God and trust fully in Him.

LESSON BACKGROUND

For our lesson today and the final lesson in this series of studies on the steps of the faith of Abraham, we have gathered several scriptures from various places that speak of Abraham and the influence of his life of faith. Each scripture is very plain and simple in its declaration of what God was able to accomplish in the life of this great man. It is brought out, very clearly, that the true children of Abraham are not his lineage in the flesh or natural generations. But it is rather those who partake of the salvation which Christ, the seed of Abraham, brought to us through His life, death and resurrection. And when we truly believe in Christ Jesus and follow in His steps of faith and obedience to God, it will, without fail, put us right in the steps of Abraham and his blessed lineage. —Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Who are the true children of Abraham?
2. Who does our lesson say is the seed of Abraham?
3. Name the various lessons portrayed in the life of Abraham.
4. What did Abraham see in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
5. What must we do to be the real children of Abraham?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Let us survey the character of Abraham portrayed in this series of lessons, particularly in the seven steps that he took in believing and obeying the will of God concerning him. Remember that in these matters he is denoted by the Almighty God as being the father of the faithful. He set an example that God wants us to take heed to and follow.

In Step No. 1 Abraham exercised a very important aspect of faith, and that is making a move without any visible prospects to depend on. All he had was the call of God and His promises of blessings. He considered not his own desires but moved in answer to the call of God. This is a very vital part of the faith life, looking beyond what is seen with respect to what God had promised. To live above what pleases one's own selfish self is a mark of noble character. In Step No. 2 he preferred his brother, Lot, and gave him first choice. A brotherly attitude and esteeming others better than one's self is another mark of worthy character. Abraham showed this all the way toward Lot, whom he had evidently taken under his wing after his brother, Haran, had died. He put forth special effort to rescue Lot when he was taken captive and later interceded for Lot to be spared from the destruction of Sodom. In Step No. 3 he showed an excellent character of being void of the love of wealth by refusing the riches of Sodom which the king of Sodom had offered to him in reward for rescuing his people. Covetousness, selfishness and greed have spoiled many a character. Abraham made it clear that he had none of this vain and foolish disposition in his heart. At the same time he made it clear that the other young men who had helped him should have their share but as for him he wanted nothing. Oh what a different world this would be if there were more people with a character like this!

Then in Step No. 4 Abraham came up to a standard that is very rare among the ordinary. "Abraham believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness." Simple faith eludes so many because of pride and self. Man would rather find his own happiness than to come to terms with believing in God. Faith is so far from the current of society of our present world. Worldliness and fleshly lusts drown the souls of men, barring them out from the only true happiness, that of believing from the heart in the faithfulness of God. Even though adverse thoughts and doubt and wonder would try to rise up in his mind, Abraham thrust them away and drowned them in simple faith and obedience to the instructions of the Almighty. He made that special sacrifice of dividing the animals, placing them in the order God prescribed, and waiting and watching until the sun went down, guarding the sacrifice. Then in Step No. 5 he

submitted to the injunction of the rite of circumcision in connection with the promises of God for his future posterity. He believed that God would give him a seed of all nations for eternity, and by him submitting himself to the unpleasant, physical circumcision it showed that he was willing to relinquish his own desires to obey and please his God.

In Step No. 6 he did something in obedience to the instruction of the LORD that was near like the old saying is, that it seemed like tearing his own heart out. He had to send the handmaid that had fathered his child and had been with them all those years, doubtless a faithful helper, yes, send her away, out into the wilderness. God assured him that he would care for Hagar and her son, Ishmael, but we know that, according to human nature and the kindly disposition of his heart, it was a terribly difficult thing to do. But he did it. It was hard and he had to go against his own feeling and desires. If we are going to live by faith and walk in the steps of Abraham, there will be times when we will have to go against our emotions and feelings. To live above feelings and how things seem to be is part of our responsibility before God in believing and trusting in Him.

And then we come to the final test and Step No. 7. God put Abraham to the ultimate test. We are sure that God knew Abraham's heart and how he would react to this order to offer up his only son as a burnt offering. But God wanted it to be brought out as a testimony for all of us. He wanted us to know all about it and to behold in the Spirit a man who would dare obey God in the face of the most extreme anguish and self-denial. Yes, He wanted it to be declared to the whole of humanity, especially to those who would seek the life of faith. It is not hard to sacrifice something and give up what is not dear and precious to you. To love the Lord more than something loved and cherished is the kind of love that God is looking for. We must love the Lord more than father, mother, husband, wife, yea, and our own life also. Abraham loved Isaac so dearly and God wanted Abraham to show that he loved God more than his own beloved son. And here Abraham passed the test and carried it out unto unmistakable proportions. He went as far as to take the knife in his hand to slay his son. And then God stopped him. The language of the account of this unusual scene in our

Genesis text is vibrant with spiritual glory and triumph. God responded to Abraham's faithful obedience with dazzling splendor of pledges and promises of great and marvelous reward on account of Abraham's obeying His voice. In all of these steps Abraham proved to be the Friend of God. (James 2:23.)

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Many of us do not have a claim to the lineage of Abraham by a physical birth but God promised Abraham that "...In thee shall all nations be blessed." We can be justified and blessed by manifesting the same faith that Abraham possessed. It is our blessed privilege to experience a new birth that causes us to become a part of this glorious kingdom of God.

Our earthly parents may teach us the truth of God's Word and instruct us in the ways of righteousness but unless this faith takes root in our heart we will be lost. We cannot slide in on the faith of another, not even that of our earthly companion. Each person who reaches the age of accountability must press into this Divine plan of God by faith.

The "Christian" world around us talks much of being "born again," but when you observe their life it becomes apparent they are still living in the same city where the rest of the world is dwelling. When one partakes of the faith of Abraham they will be moving to a different city, one that God leads them to—"...a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." True faith will prompt an individual to draw nigh to God. If there is no move in that direction, one can justly discern their faith is dead. May God help us to not follow the direction of Lot and settle down somewhere in a life of ease and luxury in the plain that will be destroyed but choose to dwell in the land of promise where God is your shield and your exceeding great reward.

—Bro. Willie E. Murphy



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