

3. BIBLE CHARACTER SERIES

SUBJECT: ABRAHAM

TITLE: A MAN CALLED ABRAHAM

TEXT: GENESIS 12-25

INTRODUCTION

I grew up in the Green River Community seven miles west of Sledge, Mississippi, somewhere between the “heart of the delta” and Memphis. My home was about twenty miles east of Mississippi River. Growing up in and around Sledge I was not surprised when some older resident would say something like, “You should have seen the 1927 flood,” or “I remember the ‘27 flood, when we had to move...” I didn’t hear that every day, but older people like to talk about it. One day, someone began telling me about the ‘27flood and I asked, “How high did the water get?” He turned and pointed at the store fronts along the main street and said, “You see those windows?” He pointed to a mark about four feet above the sidewalk and said, “That is the water mark.” That was the highest level for the flood. Sledge, which my old friend Harold Dorman wrote about in the song, “Mississippi Cotton Pickin’ Delta Town,” was made famous by Charlie Pride, whose name now identifies the main north/south highway at Sledge.

Years later, The church I served as pastor co-sponsored two mission churches in south Louisiana and one in central Louisiana. My son John and I visited all three of those churches at least one time. On one trip to visit the church in central Louisiana, south of Jonesville, John and I were sitting in the living room of a church member named Buddy. He began telling us about the flood they had in the 1980s, which I remembered because President Ronald Reagan visited Monroe and helped fill a few sandbags to help contain the back waters of the Ouachita River at Monroe. Buddy pointed to a levy and told us about how people moved their livestock to the levy and either drove them north or kept them there for the duration of the flood. I finally asked, “How high did the water get?” Buddy pointed at a line above the door facing in his living room and said, “You see that line right there? That is the water mark. That is how high the water got.”

In our series of messages or studies on major Bible characters, we will be looking at some high water marks in the Bible. We can start with the Flood, for it did indeed leave water marks on earth which more than qualify for high water marks. The call of Abraham to pack up and leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees and go to a Land of Promise is another high water mark in human history, especially Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12), the arrival in Canaan, and all that happened during his life time. There will be others, but for now we will focus on Abraham.

Abraham is one of the best known people in the Bible; in fact, his one of the best known names in the history of the world. His name appears 272 times in the Holman Christian Standard Bible; Moses, 881 times, and David, 1145 times. Throughout the Middle East,

six million Jews and the greater percentage of the 300 million Muslims call Abraham their father. The Arabs, who make up the greatest part of those 300 million Muslims, generally think of Abraham as their father. To Christians, he is the father of the faithful.

At the time of this writing, August, 2014, war has been raging between Israel and Hamas, a radical Muslim group determined to "kill all Jews and drive them into the sea." Israel has sent cement and steel into the Palestinian area so they could build schools and hospitals, but Hamas has taken all the material they have provided and dug concrete tunnels from 50 - 100 feet deep, with tracks on the floor to allow them to move a lot of material underneath cities in Israel, with the obvious intention of attacking Israel.

The current fighting between Israel and Hamas was triggered by some Muslim young boys who offered three Jewish students a ride home. They actually kidnaped them and killed them. The mother of one of the slain boys was interviewed by Sean Hannity, who told her that the mother of one of the Hamas boys said that if she learned that her son had killed an Israeli boy, even if he (her son) died, she would be proud of him. That did not seem to be a surprise to the mother of the dead Israeli boy.

Over the past two weeks, I have heard both Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity comment on the anti-Semitism behind these attacks. That reminded me of a conversation I had with the late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman many years ago. Dr. Eddleman had been a missionary to Israel right before the Second World War and he told me that he found an Arab who didn't know one word of English, and persuaded him to teach him Arabic. Within six months, he was preaching to the Jews in their language and to the Arabs in their language. Years later, after he had served as President of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, he and I had a telephone conversation about a book written by a man who was highly praised by many Christians. The book was used as a text book in at least one seminary.

I had called to ask Dr. Eddleman a question about some passage in Acts. He had just written his commentary, *A Practical and Expository Commentary on Acts*, so in our conversation I mentioned the other man's commentary and Dr. Eddleman said, "The reason I wrote my commentary on Acts was to correct errors made by the man whose name you just mentioned." He gave one example: The professor stressed that the Book of Acts showed that the Gospel spread "unhinderdly", overcoming all barriers. For an example, he used the spread of the Gospel to the Samaritans under Philip and then Peter and John. That, he said, proved that the Gospel overcame racial barriers. Dr. Eddleman said, "The Jews and the Samaritans were both Semitic! If you had taken a Jew and a Samaritan and dressed them alike and stood them side by side you couldn't tell them apart." Most all of the people in the Middle East are descended from Abraham, and thus Shem. The notable exception would be the Iranians, who are

descended from the Persians. So, hatred among various nations whose people are descended from Shem is not racial but religious.

I. LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT A MAN CALLED ABRAM, Gen. 12.

A. Abram Lived in Ur of the Chaldees.

One of the first questions we may ask is How a man from a pagan family in a heathen land came to know the one true God? If we can answer that question we may also have an answer to the question about how Melchizedek, king of Salem, came to know "the most high God." It is mind boggling to think of how Abram came to have such faith in God at such a time and place.

Abram was from the great metropolitan city of Ur of the Chaldees. Ur was located some distance south of where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers come together, and north of where they empty into the Persian Gulf. Someone referred to Abram as a Gentile, who became the first Hebrew. He was a rugged outdoors man, thought by some to have been a simple beduin-type sheep herder who came to believe in the one true God in the midst of a completely pagan society. He came to know the God who created the world. Who could have imagined that this simple man who wrote no books, left no songs, gave no laws, held no political office, and received no title would become known forever as the "friend of God" (Is. 41:8)? Who could have imagined that millions would look to him as the father of the faithful?

Abraham was a wealthy, powerful, influential citizen. My good friend, Dr. William R. Cooper, of Middlesex, England wrote a very informative and interesting book, "The Authenticity of the Book of Genesis, which he mailed "hot off the press" to me. I read it very carefully. In this book he writes that cuneiform tablets reported that Abraham was a wealthy man who had great herds of animals and a large number of servants. His neighbors, according to cuneiform tablets that have been found, wrote about his departure from Ur. He was obviously missed when he moved away. He was a wealthy herdsman who must have been a man respected by his neighbors.

B. God Called Abram to Leave UR and Go to a Strange Land.

1. It is amazing that Abram came to believe in the one true God in a pagan land. In the first place, what land was not pagan at the time? In the second place, this was not the first time God had a righteous man in place for something He planned to do. Noah was the only righteous man in the world in his day (Genesis 6). The world was so corrupt that God decided to destroy the whole world and start over with Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives (Gen. 6). Job was a patriarch, as was Abraham, and while we do not know exactly when Job lived, we do know that he must have lived in that general time period.

2. It is also amazing to consider the depth of his faith. Some amazing traditions have been passed down through the centuries about Abraham. One tradition is that when he was twelve years old his father left him in charge of his shop where he made and sold idols. A man came in while Abraham was watching the shop and wanted to buy an idol. After some time, the man selected an idol and was preparing to pay for it when young Abram asked, "How is it that you, a sixty-five year old man, have come in to buy a god we made here yesterday" Another tradition tells of a young Abram who was left to watch over the family business while his father was out. When his father returned he found young Abram with a club breaking the idols they had for sale. His father asked what he was doing and Abram said, "If they be gods let them defend themselves." That may or may not have happened, but it does tell us something about the way the descendants of Abraham viewed him.

3. Abram demonstrated his faith by leaving the security of home for an unknown land. God called him to leave the heart of the vast Fertile Crescent for a tiny finger of land along the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea. The Fertile Crescent actually curves over the great Arabian Desert and down into Egypt, but that which the Lord promised Abraham was little more than a little sliver of land which was occupied by small nations or tribes at the time. May we remind ourselves that God promised this land to Abraham's descendants, but only after they lived in a foreign land for four hundred years (actually, they were in Egypt 430 years). Yahweh referred to that land as "a land flowing with milk and honey" when He spoke to Moses and told him to go to the Pharaoh ask him to let My people go (Ex. 3:10).

C. Now, Let Us Consider the Lofty Call Extended to Abram (Gen. 12:1-3).

"I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:2-3).

1. The call came in the form of a covenant. Even after four thousand years, the Abrahamic Covenant is still known. It has been said that in biblical times some referred to the entering into a covenant as "cutting a covenant". They would kill a steer and split from one end to the other, or into two halves. Then the parties who were entering into the covenant would walk between the two halves, signifying that they were closer than the two halves of the steer which could be severed. The covenant, they were saying, could not be broken. So, let us look at the covenant that still stands, not because of Abraham, of any of his descendants, but because of the Lord, who maintains the covenant. Let us look at the Abrahamic Covenant.

2. God promised to make of him a great nation. At no time did that promise depend upon the power, wealth, or wisdom of Abraham, but on the God who called him. The

promise of a son is a part of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1ff). Many nations in our world today can point to Abraham as their father of their nation (through Ishmael). Most of the nations that have sworn to “kill all Jews and drive them into the sea,” are descendants of Abraham, but the focus of the Lord’s covenant with Abraham is upon Isaac, the child of promise, born to a mother who was never able to bear a child, and now beyond child bearing age. This would demand a miraculous birth. Isaac was born by the grace of God and it is, in a sense, prophetic of another miracle birth, a child born to a virgin named Mary, a descendant of Abraham. True believers today are secure in a New Covenant, written in the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

3. He promised to bless him. God promised to bless Abraham and He blessed him richly. He blessed him with a relationship that offered salvation, security, and everything he needed for a successful and happy life. He was already wealthy and successful, but there was something missing that was very important to men and women of that age. They had no son to carry on the family name, protect and provide for family members after the head of the clan died. Abraham and Sarah were totally powerless to correct this problem. God was not.

4. He promised to make his name great. His name was great in Ur of the Chaldees, but it would become much greater. Matthew speaks of Abraham. Mark speaks of Abraham. Luke, the Gentile physician, writes about Abraham. And does John ever talk about Abraham! The Jews who hated Jesus must have been surprised when Jesus declared, “I assure you: Before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58, HCSB) If that seems like a grammatical challenging statement, let me assure you it made sense to Jesus and it should to you and me. Think about it: Before Abram was born, Jesus could have said, “I Am.” He can still say it because He is eternal, ageless, and changeless.

5. He promised to bless all peoples of the earth through him. This is a promise carried out even among Christians who know little or nothing about Abraham. All who believe in Jesus Christ are blessed by the covenant God made with Abraham, the father of the faithful.

6. He promised to bless those who blessed him. There may be many ways to illustrate this point, but let me mention something that should open the eyes of every American. Jews in Spain were being targeted by citizens of that country, just as soon as they got rid of most of the Moors. They saw the property owned by wealthy Jews and began taking their land. The Jews were forced to board a ship and sail through the Straights of Gibraltar, and then down the coast of Africa looking for a new home. Are you aware of the fact that it was very close to this time that Columbus discovered a New World, a world that would offer a new home, protection, provisions, and opportunities to Jews? One wealthy Jew made a loan to the Continental Army that helped finance the Revolutionary War. It is not known that he was ever repaid. Since Israel returned to the

Promised Land and created the new State of Israel, America has stood by Israel. Sadly, there are people who are demonstrating against Israel in the 2014 conflict.

7. He promised to curse those who treated him and his descendants with contempt. Six million Israeli citizens are standing against 300 million Muslims today. Hamas has fired thousands of missiles into Israel, but Israel has struck back with such force that Hamas was ready to agree to a cease fire because their losses have been much greater than ever before. Hamas and other radical Muslim groups are dedicated to the destruction, not only of Israel, but also to America for supporting Israel.

8. The One through whom the world would be blessed is Jesus Christ. Some two thousand years ago Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem. On the third day He arose, and after that He made as many as eleven appearances. At the time of His Ascension, when He returned to Heaven, His disciples waited in Jerusalem as He instructed them for the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to fill all believers so that they would become mighty witnesses for Jesus. The Gospel spread in all directions, sweeping through the Roman Empire. Dr. Bill Cooper has written that there is evidence that the Gospel of Matthew reached his Island within some ten years of the death of Jesus on the Cross. A lot of people will never buy that, because of all the claims made for a much later date for the Gospels. See *The Authenticity of the New Testament, Vol. 1*, by Dr. Cooper. He makes a strong case for the early arrival of the Gospel on His home turf.

D. Abram Was Called to Live on the Highest Moral and Spiritual Plain.

1. Obedience to God is our first proof of his faith and commitment. In fact, faith and commitment declare his obedience, while obedience declares his faith in the God with whom he is still being connected after four thousand years. Friends and family members may have testified to his faithfulness, and we may or may not accept their testimony, but there is a much greater witness. We have the Word of God: "For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness." (Romans 4:3, HCSB)

2. He obeyed Yahweh and began the long journey to the Land of Promise. The point we must see here is that Abraham had such faith in God that when He told him to pack up all his possessions and travel to some distant land, he obeyed the Lord. Even though he was a powerful and wealthy man his neighbors must have questioned his wisdom when he his wife, his nephew Lot, and his many servants started out on a long journey to some strange place.

3. Wherever he stopped he built an altar and called on the Lord, Gen. 12:8. This reminds me a little of the statement I made about the evangelist who claimed, without proof, that every time Abraham's great caravan stopped, Abraham built an altar and called on the name of God, while Lot just pitched his tent. We are not told that Abraham built an

altar at the end of each day's travel, nor or we told that Lot showed very little interest in worshiping the Lord. May I now add to the speculations by reminding you that God actually promised Abraham and David that if the People of Israel would remain faithful to Him, He would give them all the land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River. In other words, if the Hebrew People had remained faithful to the Lord they would own all the oil in the entire region today! When the Lord promised Abraham and his descendants that land is it not possible that He knew there would be oil under all that sand? Can you imagine all those nations lining up to buy their oil from Israel today?

E. Abraham Obeyed the Lord, but He Was not Perfect, 12:10ff.

1. The Lord had called him to leave Ur and go to Canaan, the Land of Promise. Ur was his home, where he had grown up, worked and prospered, if we can believe reports. It took a tremendous amount of faith for him to leave the home of his childhood, his youth, and his long and prosperous life in a fertile land. He had that kind of faith and I would like to believe he kept his eye on the Lord the whole distance.

2. When he arrived in Canaan a famine in the land tested his faith. Can you imagine what a shock that was to Abram's faith and to his feeling of security? At the Lord's command, he had left his home in Ur where he had prospered so much that, according to ancient cuneiform records, the people of the region took notice when he packed up all his belongings and set out for a strange new land. He was obviously looking forward to the Promised Land, but when he arrived there what he found was a famine. Who expects to find a famine in his land of promise.

I prepared a sermon a number of years ago for which I used the title, FAMINE IN THE LAND OF PROMISE. The focus is upon what Abraham did when he followed the Lord's commands and traveled all the way from Ur of the Chaldees to the distant land God promised him. He, with his trained servants traveled through many areas where some king might have ordered his army to attack them and take all his possessions. The Lord had protected him and we can only imagine what he expected to find in the Land of Promise. However, when he got there what he found was a famine. That is enough to challenge the faith of any person.

Tim Tebow was praised across the country for his success as a quarterback on the college level. He signed a lucrative contract with a professional team and had a good year with Denver. In the off season Denver signed the Peyton Manning, possibly the greatest quarterback of his generation. Tim Tebow was sold to the New York Jets where people criticized mercilessly for his faith in Jesus Christ. Finally, he was released without having an opportunity to show what he might do with his talent, experience, and potential. It seemed that the biggest problem many had with him was his open confession of faith in Jesus Christ. He was released without ever finding out what he

might have accomplished. What did Tim Tebow do when he arrived in his land of promise and found a famine there? He remained faithful to the Lord and continued to serve the Lord and speak for Him.

What do we do when we arrive at what seems to be our land of promise and discover that there is a famine there? What should we do? To some, Abraham may not our best example in this case.

We may jump to that conclusion based on what we are told here, but are we given the whole picture?

Have we interpreted it as we should. In the first place, our example is Jesus Christ, not Abraham.

3. Instead of building an altar (after leaving Bethel) Abram fled to Egypt. Some Bible students simply jump to the conclusion that the father of the faithful saw a famine in the land and panicked. They say that instead of building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord he fled to Egypt. Had he heard from some caravan that there was food in Egypt? We are not given that information. All we know is that when they arrived in the Promised Land, "There was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine in the land was severe." (Gen 12:10) Is it possible that Abram did the only thing he knew to do at the time? Don't you wish we knew for sure?

F. When They Arrived in Egypt, Abraham Concocted what Seems Like a "Half-Truth."

(11) When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are. (12) When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' They will kill me but let you live. (13) Please say you're my sister so it will go well for me because of you, and my life will be spared on your account." (14) When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. (15) Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, so the woman was taken to Pharaoh's household. (16) He treated Abram well because of her, and Abram acquired flocks and herds, male and female donkeys, male and female slaves, and camels.

(17) But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Abram's wife Sarai. (18) So Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? (19) Why did you say, 'She's my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife. Take her and go!" (20) Then Pharaoh gave [his] men orders about him, and they sent him away with his wife and all he had." (Gen 12:11-20)

1. Abraham was not perfect. In fact, he was far from it. I don't know about you, but when I first heard this story if I had the fleeting thought, "Did the Lord really need to have this recorded?" Just think what a hero Abraham would be today if this story had been left out?" I know, I know. But when you read the story of David and Bathsheba

have you ever had the thought for just a fraction of a second: "Might this story not have been left out of the account of David's life?" Of course, if the purpose was to glorify Abraham or David the story might have been written differently. But God's purpose in the Bible is not to glorify any human being. He wants us to glorify Him. What we read here about Abraham, the father of the faithful, is recorded both to give us an accurate account of the experience of one of the most amazing individuals who ever lived and to provide a word of encouragement to all of us when we fail, when we doubt, or when we simply fall short of the Lord's plan and purpose for us.

2. Abram introduced Sarah as his sister, not his wife. Please note that (a) She was his half-sister, but as this is traditionally viewed (b) this may have been a half-truth, but it was a whole lie. (c) When Pharaoh would have taken her for his wife the Lord revealed the lie to him, and (d) the pagan king rebuked the righteous Abraham and ordered him to leave Egypt.

Here is something we must understand: while Abraham told a half truth, the half truth really was a whole lie, but there may be more to the story. Why did Pharaoh not kill Abraham and take Sarah and all of Abraham's possessions? He could have ordered it and no one could have saved them, short of a miracle from the Lord. How is it then that Abraham was rebuked and sent away from Egypt, but he kept his wife, his servants, and all his wealth. Pharaoh might have claimed all he possessed. Why did he not do that? For one thing, there was an internationally recognized legal agreement that was normally honored as one moved from country to country in a time of peace, or so we are told. Dr. Bill Cooper explains the "Sister/Wife Contracts" in his book, *The Authenticity of the Book of Genesis*, and then applies it to Abraham and to Isaac:

"Such legal transactions were a newly - established feature of the law which governed much of Mesopotamia where Abraham and his forebears came from. This is why the pharaoh was flummoxed by it, as Egypt knew no such provisions; and so was Abimelech of Gerar, a Philistine king. Their puzzlement was doubtless due to the comparative novelty of the sister-wife law at the time, again attesting to the antiquity of these events. But it also explains why Abraham was sent away from both kings loaded with gifts. Abraham was, no doubt, able to demonstrate his lawful integrity by the presentation of the contracts under which Sarah had become his sister and then his wife, even as Isaac would have been able to do at a later date. Kings who discover that they have been duped by a rascal, do not usually send him away the richer for his lies. He'd be lucky to escape with his life." (*The Authenticity of the Book of Genesis*, p. 115-116)

G. Abraham Returned to the Place of the Altar.

1. Abraham built no altar in Canaan after he left Bethel, and none in Egypt. At least, we are not told that he built any altars during this long and trying trip to Egypt, or while he

was in Egypt. Before we condemn Abraham, however, let us examine ourselves. What happens when we launch a new business and discover that it was not a good idea? The bankruptcy courts will testify to the fact that many commit themselves to a new business or to a new goal, only to find that a famine has struck in their land of Promise. Many flee from the Lord, who is the only One who can help them.

2. When people backslide they stop worshiping the Lord. I have pointed that out in sermons and no doubt many others have, too. But let me ask you a question here. Do we really know that? Can we really be sure about it? If Abraham build an altar and called on the name of the Lord during times of blessings, is it not possible that he built an altar at some point during the famine and called on the Lord for help. While that is a possibility, and something we might expect of a man like Abraham, there is no indication that he did. We simply do not know, but we do know that those in the flesh do not honor the Lord and if they do not honor him they are not worshiping him, even if they profess to do so.

3. Abram experienced revival when he returned to Bethel, Gen. 13:4. Bethel was the place where he had built the last altar and worshiped the Lord. What an appropriate name for this place which would be a part of the history of the Chosen People for centuries. Abraham was blessed by the Lord, who made him a blessing for true believers of every generation. Bethel means House of God, and Abraham is the father of the faithful.

“Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness, (7) so understand that those who have faith are Abraham’s sons. (8) Now the Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and foretold the good news to Abraham, saying, All the nations will be blessed in you. (9) So those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith” (Gal 3:6-9, HCSB)

“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.” (Gal 3:29)

II. CONSIDER THE CHARACTER OF THE MAN CALLED ABRAHAM.

A. He Was a Man of Faith and Courage, Gen. 13:5-13.

1. He called on the name of Yahweh.

(1) Then Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev – he, his wife, and all he had, and Lot with him. (2) Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold. (3) He went by stages from the Negev to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had formerly been, (4) to the site where he had built the altar. And Abram called on the name of Yahweh there.’ (Gen 13:1-4)

The Negev was the southern region of Canaan. The name Bethel literal means the House of Elohim, or the House of God. Bethel is mentioned 77 times in the Bible and we often associate it with Jacob.

When the Lord wanted him to separate himself from Laban and return to his home land, He said,

“I am the God of Bethel, where you poured oil on the stone marker and made a solemn vow to Me. Get up, leave this land, and return to your native land.” (Gen 31:13)

2. Abraham’s faith seems to have faltered when he found a famine in the Land of Promise. He went down to Egypt looking for help, but after he returned it is obvious that he had repented and committed himself to the Lord. (1) he built an altar and, (2) he called on the name of the Lord. In this context, to call on the “name” of Yahweh was to call on the person of Yahweh.

3. When his servants and those of his nephew Lot could not get along he let Lot choose the territory

he wanted, and then Abram went in the other direction. Abraham was especially considerate of his dead brother’s son. After Lot had chosen he land where he would live, “...Abram moved his tent and went to live near the oaks of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord.” (Gen 13:18)

4. Abraham would later rescue Lot from powerful military leaders.

“In those days Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim (2) waged war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, as well as the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). (3) All of these came as allies to the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea).” (Gen 14:1-3)

Dr. Bill Cooper, in his remarkable book, “The Authenticity of the Book of Genesis,” reveals that Amraphel was in fact Hammurabi. These were not just small tribes at war, this war involved powerful allies in an effort to reclaim an area that had been lost during a rebellion. In other words, it was not a small skirmish. During this invasion Lot and his family were among the people who were captured and taken out of the land. When word reached Abram he sent his 318 trained servants to defeat those kings and reclaim Lot, his family, other people, and their possessions from the enemy.

These trained servants of Abraham defeated the combined armies of well known military leaders and returned Lot, his family, and their possessions. Abraham refused any reward from the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as other kings in the area. He returned to them that which was theirs. He also paid a tithe to Melchizedek, the priest in Jerusalem. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews used Melchizedek to illustrate the high priesthood of Christ.

5. God renewed the promise concerning his posterity, Gen. 13:12-18. Lot chose the beautiful Jordan Valley and the valley of the Dead Sea, which included Sodom and Gomorrah and settled there. The Scripture tells us that "Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but Lot lived in the cities of the valley and set up his tent near Sodom. (13) Now the men of Sodom were evil, sinning greatly against the Lord." (Gen 13:12-13)

(a) God again promises a son to Abram. Actually, here He promises that his offspring would be like the dust of the earth:

(14) "After Lot had separated from him, the Lord said to Abram, "Look from the place where you are. Look north and south, east and west, (15) for I will give you and your offspring forever all the land that you see. (16) I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, then your offspring could be counted. (17) Get up and walk around the land, through its length and width, for I will give it to you." (Gen 13:14-17)

It does not take much imagination for us to realize that before Abraham's descendants could multiply to the point that they would be compared to the dust of the earth, there must first be that promised son. Today, there are six million Jews living in Israel, and many more living in America and other places. And, we are told that there are 300 million Muslims, and most of them, except for Iran (Persia) are the descendants of Abraham.

(b) Abram built an altar in Mamre and worshiped the Lord. " So Abram moved his tent and went to live near the oaks of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord." (Gen 13:18)

B. Abraham Was Courageous, Strong, and Unselfish, Genesis 14.

1. Four kings from the east waged war against five kings near the Dead Sea. They came to the aid of king Chedorlaomer, whom they had helped defeat the kings of the area. Five kings rebelled against him 13th year of his reign (Gen 14:5). The four kings of the east came back and defeated the the armies of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and all who supported their rebellion. The kings of that day who fought and won battles were rewarded with the spoils of war. They took whatever was of value, whether gold and silver, weapons, and slaves. Lot and his family were captured by the four kings of the east, and someone got word to Abraham, who sent his 318 trained men to defeat the four powerful kings of the east and rescue his nephew.

(13) "One of the survivors came and told Abram the Hebrew, who lived near the oaks belonging to Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and the brother of Aner. They were bound by a treaty with Abram. (14) When Abram heard that his relative had been

taken prisoner, he assembled his 318 trained men, born in his household, and they went in pursuit as far as Dan. (15) And he and his servants deployed against them by night, attacked them, and pursued them as far as Hobah to the north of Damascus. (16) He brought back all the goods and also his relative Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the [other] people." (Gen 14:13-16)

His 318 trained servants defeated the four kings who had defeated five kings along the Dead Sea, and then returned fourteen years later to defeat those armies again and return the area to Chedorlaomer. Stop and think about this! These four kings and their armies had demolished the five kings of the region and their armies, and they had taken everything of value away with them. Yet, these 318 trained servants of Abraham followed them, attacked them, recovered the spoils of war and the captives. Do we not see the hand of the Lord in this? Yes, we do.

2. Abraham refused to take any of the recovered spoils of war for himself. He returned the wealth to the people from whom it was taken, after he had given a tithe to Melchizedek, priest of the Most High in Salem, Gen. 14:18ff. Melchizedek was a priest of Yahweh, appointed by Him, rather than inheriting the position from his father, as we see in Hebrews, Chapter 7, where it is said of Jesus: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." (Heb 7:17) He was appointed by Yahweh, rather than inheriting the position.

III. GOD HAD NOT FORGOTTEN HIS COVENANT WITH ABRAM, CHS. 16 - 17.

A. After Years of Waiting, Sarah Lost Faith in the Promise of a Son, 16:1ff.

1. She persuaded Abram to take Hagar, her hand maid and have a son with her. God had a plan, but he was moving too slowly for Sarah. She had never had a baby and she was well beyond child bearing age. What could Abraham's God do for her at this time?

2. Sarah told Abraham to take her servant Hagar and have a son by him. Hagar's son Ishmael was born when Abram was eighty-six years old. Obviously, it was not only Sarah's faith that faltered. Abraham, like Adam, went along with his wife's plan, and like Adam, he was wrong.

3. The hostility between the son of Hagar and the son of Sarah would soon surface. Today, that hostility is spreading around the world. Israel is under attack by Hamas, and various extremist groups are attacking more moderate groups, and promising to take their war to America and around the world.

When we ask the Lord to act on our behalf, and then don't see results as soon as we expect them, common sense might tell us that He expects us to do our part. There is certainly some truth in that. The danger comes in our trying to do His part! Sarah had

given up hope that God would bless her with a son, so she decided to help him out a little. The rest may be history, but there are a lot of theological issues involved. The world has never known a people who have been more inclined to hate another people group than the descendants of Ishmael. Let me stress here that the issue is not racial. Both the descendants of Abraham, through either Ishmael or Isaac, and they are both Semitic people. Religious animosity can be the bitterest kind of hatred.

Even after oceans of blood have been shed, the children of Ishmael are still determined to "drive all Jews into the sea." The hatred was fanned into a full flame by Mohammed, and the Arab peoples continue to stoke the fires of that hatred today. Arabs from many nations seek the destruction of the nation of Israel and the death of all Jews, as well as all those who support Israel.

God sent His angel to care for Hagar and Ishmael. Think what a difference it would make if the Arab peoples of the world would acknowledge that fact. He provided for, and protected their ancestor.

B. The Lord Would Honor the Promises He Had Made to Abram, Ch. 17.

Abram was 99 years old when the Lord appeared to Him again, 17:1a. Time, however, may, and often does place restraints on human beings. Time is God's creation and His gift to us. It is His servant, never His master. A delay in the fulfillment of a prophecy may present us with a problem, but only when we assume that He is hindered by the same forces that challenge us.

God had promised that Abram would have the son, and the Lord was in charge of that promise. He has never forgotten a promise, and no force in time or eternity can prevent His doing His will or fulfilling a commitment. He had not forgotten concerning the seed of the woman in the Garden of Eden. The Seed He promised would bless mankind. Abraham, Sarah, and their son were a vital part of His plan.

C. The Lord Gave Abram Instructions, 17:1ff.

1. God said, "Live in My presence and be devout", Gen 17:1. In His instructions to Abraham, God expected loyalty, commitment, obedience, and faith. While Abraham's faith was not perfect, he is still called the father of the faithful.

2. God made a covenant and sealed it with the law of circumcision, 17:10. Please note that the Lord

(1) made a covenant with Abraham and, (2) seal it with circumcision. Circumcision does not save the individual, it is a seal that testifies to the covenant. Today, baptism is a testimony to the individual's new birth in Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8). No one is saved by baptism, and no one is saved by faith plus baptism.

We are saved by God's grace when we exercise the faith He give us to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ and commit ourselves to Him.

3. The Lord changed Abram's name. His name, in Ur of the Chaldees was an honored name. But now, the Lord says: "Your name will no longer be Abram, but your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations" (Gen 17:5). Abram means exalted father, but Abraham means father of a multitude. Sarai, by the way, means Contentious. The Lord changed her name to Sarah, meaning Princess.

The Lord had promised Abraham that his descendants would live in the Land of Promise. How would he ever have all those descendants if he had no children? Well, the Lord had the answer. There would be a son and they would know he was a gift from God. Both Abraham and his promised son were prophetic characters, promising that two thousand years later God would give His only begotten Son so that all who believe in Him will have everlasting life. Those who place their faith in Him will spend eternity in The Promised Land, a place we call heaven. We see in the story of Abraham and Isaac that the Lord is not about to take His eyes off the promise He made in the Garden of Eden concerning the seed of the woman (Jesus).

D. The Lord Revealed the Birth of Isaac to Abraham, Gen. 18:1-5.

"Then the Lord appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting in the entrance of his tent during the heat of the day. (2) He looked up, and he saw three men standing near him....

(6) So Abraham hurried into the tent and said to Sarah, "Quick! Knead three measures of fine flour and make bread..."

(9) "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he answered. (10) The Lord said, "I will certainly come back to you in about a year's time, and your wife Sarah will have a son!" Now Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent behind him.

(11) "Abraham and Sarah were old and getting on in years. Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. (12) So she laughed to herself: "After I have become shriveled up and my lord is old, will I have delight?"

(13) "But the Lord asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Can I really have a baby when I'm old?' (14) Is anything impossible for the Lord? At the appointed time I will come back to you, and in about a year she will have a son." (Gen 18:1-14)

The Lord Himself appeared, with two other heavenly beings, to Abraham and promised that he and Sarah would have a son. This was impossible, humanly speaking, but it would happen because God said it would. And it would be a miracle. Two

thousand years later there would be another birth that would be an even greater miracle. The Seed of the woman (Eve, Gen 3) would be born of a virgin who was descended from both Eve and from Abraham. Jesus lived, taught, preached, performed miracles, and died on a cruel Roman cross for you and me. Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. All who believe in Jesus today receive eternal life, and that, my friend, is a gift from God.

E. Abram Was a Man Who Practiced Intercessory Prayer, Gen. 18:16ff.

“The men got up from there and looked out over Sodom, and Abraham was walking with them to see them off.” (Gen 18:16)

(17) “the Lord said, Shall I hide – The chief stranger, no other than the Lord, disclosed to Abraham the awful doom about to be inflicted on Sodom and the cities of the plain for their enormous wickedness. God’s practice before he carried out judgment was to inform a prophet (Amos 3:7), and Abraham is the first person called a prophet in Scripture (Gen. 20:7). (New Commentary on the Whole Bible, OT, QuickVerse Electronic Library)

When the Lord determined to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He revealed it to Abraham (Gen. 18). Most Bible students are familiar with the intercessory prayers Abraham prayed for Sodom (Gen. 18:22ff). Abraham kept “bargaining” with the Lord, would He spare the city if he found 50 righteous people in Sodom? “The Lord said, “If I find 50 righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” (Gen 18:26) Abraham continued to lower the number until he finally agreed to spare the city if he found 10 righteous people there. There were not 10 righteous people there, so God was committed to destroying the city.

Now, returning to Isaac, the Scripture tells us that “Sarah conceived and bore a son who was named Isaac” (Laughter), 21:1-3. This all happened according to the will and word of the Lord. When the Lord told Abraham that Sarah would have the promised child a year later, she was listening and she laughed. The Lord heard her but she denied it. When she gave birth to the son she named him Isaac, meaning laughter.

IV. GOD PUT ABRAHAM TO THE SUPREME TEST OF FAITH, Ch. 22.

A. God Told Abraham to Offer His Son Isaac to Him on an Altar, 22:1ff.

1. God gave specific instruction, 22:2.

“After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he answered. (2) “Take your son,” He said, “your only [son] Isaac, whom you love, go to

the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (Gen 22:1-2)

2. Abraham obeyed God explicitly , 22:3ff. I will deal with this passage in the next sermon (Bible study) when we look at A Man Called Isaac, but what I would like to stress here is that God commanded Abraham to do something unimaginable. He told him to sacrifice his son Isaac, the son of promise on Mt. Moriah at Jerusalem. We can only imagine the shock this must have been to Abraham, after waiting so long after God promised that son. Now, the Lord ordered him to sacrifice his son Isaac. What would he do? He obeyed the Lord.

B. At Mt. Moriah, Abraham Prepared an Altar and Placed Isaac on It, 22:6-10.

Isaac asked about the sacrifice and his father assured him God would provide a sacrifice. The amazing thing is that Abraham had such faith in the Lord that he obeyed him in every detail. When the Lord saw that Abraham was fully committed to sacrificing Isaac, He intervened. He stopped Abraham from slaying Isaac, and he provided a ram for the sacrifice (Gen. 22:11-14).

This speaks of two things: (1) The substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. He died a horrible death on the Cross for our sins. (2) There is in this story another important truth, and that is the picture of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It also means that in Jesus Christ we are assured of our own resurrection (Heb. 11:19).

CONCLUSION. There can be little doubt that as Isaac watched that ram being sacrificed, he was thinking, "That could have been me" - and it almost was. Abraham was fully prepared to sacrifice his own son on that altar. Two thousand years later, our heavenly Father offered His only begotten Son on another altar, this time on top of a skull shaped hill outside Jerusalem, not far from where Abraham was told to build the altar and offer Isaac as a sacrifice. I thank God He did not withhold His only Son, but let Him die in my place. There was no ram to offer in His place that day, no last minute substitute. Isaac willingly let himself be placed on that ancient altar by his father. Jesus willingly offered Himself on the cross as the once for all substitute for sinful man. He who all the time loves us, once for all died for us. All who believe in Him will have their sins covered by the blood of the Lamb of God. That is Substitutionary Atonement. There is another message here, and the New Testament stresses the connection. When Abraham lifted Isaac from the altar of death, the Lord was giving us a picture of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who actually did die, but was raised on the third day.

Now, for just a moment, stop and look on the cross of Jesus, "The Old Rugged Cross". Think of Jesus hanging from that cruel Roman cross. Now, repeat the word in your mind and in your heart: "That might have been me. In fact, it should have been me!"

Jesus died on that cross as a sacrifice for your sins and mine, but only if we believe in Him with all our heart. We cannot muster up that kind of faith, only God can provide it. This is a faith that commits us to Him forever. Jesus is the answer to our sin problem, and the fulfillment of a key part of the covenant God made with Abraham. Jesus is God's answer to man's greatest need. If you will trust Him now, His blood will cover your sins and you will have everlasting life.