

CONCERNING THE WAY

April 8, 2008



Introduction - Abraham Part 1

As we journey through the book of Genesis, we're now going to pick up the pace a bit. The rest of the book focuses on the lives of four men - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph - the Patriarchs. Chapter Twelve of Genesis begins a whole new way of how God deals with mankind. Instead of working with the whole human race, He is going to work with one man and his descendants. The story of Abraham is covered from the end of Chapter 11, and ends with his death in chapter 25, and includes some of the most fascinating and meaningful events of the Bible.

Those of us here in our local study watched a good movie on Abraham last week, to familiarize ourselves with the events in his life. In this lesson we're going to spend some time introducing this section of the Bible, and talk about some important principles and doctrines in the story of Abraham that are applicable to today. *Dusty Rhodes*

Overview of Genesis 12-25 - The Life of Abraham

A major shift in history occurs here in Genesis Chapter 12, God is now going to call out a new people to work through, instead of working through the entire human race. Why does He do this?

You can see that in the first 11 chapters that the human race has failed again and again. God creates everything perfectly, gives men everything they need, but they keep turning their backs on God and going their own way. By showing us example after example of this, God is teaching us that:

- Since we are created in the image of God, we can only have success, meaning, and joy in life if we are fulfilling our role as a representative of God. Image of God = representative of God - we were created to be His representative over creation. Mankind rejected this, rejected divine authority. This caused a domino effect throughout the universe and resulted in horrible consequences.
- The penalty for this action is that we became spiritually dead - separated from God. This also caused many changes in the universe - physical laws, botanical laws, environment, animal kingdom - everything was affected by sin. Through this and the angelic conflict God is teaching that the creature cannot live independently from the creator! He is also teaching, through the events of the Flood and the tower of Babel, that He is the one who sets the terms for salvation, NOT MAN.
- So far we have seen a consistent pattern - man goes from a better state to a worse state. There is a deterioration going on starting with Adam's sin, and it continues even after the flood. God is trying to show us the consequences of sin. There is no way to reverse this, though man continually tries, except through salvation through

Jesus Christ, and eventually through the physical return of Christ.

- The tower of Babel is a foreshadowing of repeated future history, and that is what happens to mankind in rebellion against God, that the nations of mankind cannot survive unless they're in obedience to God.
- Remember that Moses wrote these books to the new nation of Israel so they would know why God called them out from the rest of mankind, what their purpose was, why God was doing this.

Why does God call out Abraham? To separate him from the prevailing world system, which is totally paganistic. This world system still exists today. Let's explore that...

The World System – 1 John 2:15–17, James 4:1–4

We all grow up with some kind of world system, or world view. We can have similarities with people, agree with them on many things, but have a different world system. For example, a Mormon may be very conservative politically and morally, but he still does not operate under a Biblical system, but the world system. Our government is (or was) based on many Biblical principles, but it still is not a Biblical system.

Babel began, or solidified the world system, which dominates human history, all peoples and nations in rebellion against God. This rebellion, or world system, will battle against God throughout history until the end, in Revelation. God vs. the world system (Satan), One true God vs. Paganism, Jerusalem vs. Babylon (Babel).

Every worldly political system has deteriorated or will deteriorate eventually into tyranny, because they come out of this world system. Even our democracy is doomed to deteriorate because it is based on capitalism, of which greed plays a large part. The world system, ultimately driven by the sin nature, will eventually drag every political system down.

Historically the cycle usually goes:

- Slavery/tyranny
- freedom/liberty is gained
- liberty is taken for granted - the system deteriorates
- slavery/tyranny

So we are admonished in the Bible to not become part of the world system, we have to change the way we think. Christians have less impact in our culture today because we're so superficial in our thinking. We do not think in Biblical terms like we used to.

- The “world system” is an arrangement or system of thinking that is arrayed against God
- Satan is the ruler of the world system - this reflects the thinking of Satan at the time of his fall - John 12:31, 14:30 - it is the expression of Satan's agenda
- John 5:19 - the world is in the power of Satan
- John 16:11 - world system thinking has been judged and condemned by Jesus' life and death - everything He did was in contrast to the world system
- World system has it's own way of thinking, alternate view of reality - it may seemingly express itself in many different types of systems, but ultimately it comes down to only two systems - either the Biblical system or man's viewpoint
- Man has always sought to find his authority for his knowledge apart from God's revelation -

either from his reason, his experience, or mysticism - these things are set against God's revelation

- A way of thinking that adopts a world system form produces a lifestyle that is consistent with it - those lifestyles are called cultures - the core of every culture has always been a dominant religion. What made western culture different was Christianity. Christianity radically changed Western Europe in the early years of the church, and it eventually spread to America - otherwise we would have the same paganistic and polytheistic cultures as the rest of the world has.
- Elements of world system thinking
 - Arrogance - creature-centered - Isaiah 14:13-14 - same principles as Satan's "I will's" the arrogance of the creature elevating himself above the creator.
Arrogance skills:
 - Self-reliance - as opposed to dependence upon God
 - Self-absorption - focusing on ourselves, our own well-being is primary
 - Self-Indulgence- the more we're self-absorbed, the more we indulge ourselves
 - Self-Justification- more we indulge ourselves, the more we justify ourselves
 - Self-Deception- the more we justify ourselves, the more we deceive ourselves, and become divorced from reality
 - Self-Deification - worshipping the creature (ourselves) rather than the creator
 - Fear - a sense of dread of judgment - motivates:
 - Antagonism towards the word of God, real truth (James 4:4) - anger and resentment towards God and the Bible
- The believer is to extricate himself from the morass of world system thinking in his soul - even when we trust Christ we are loaded with this world thinking, need to be reeducated (Romans 12:2)

So this is the state the world was in at the time that God calls Abram, almost like it was before the flood - just a few people who were believers in the one true God. It is believed by most scholars that Job lived about this time, even earlier than Abram. Most had rejected the God of Noah and had turned to worshipping idols

Abram comes out of a family of moon-worshippers, into astrology and pagan practices, yet he is a believer, and is called out by God to help set up a culture that is counter to the world system. It's possible that his family, at least, were still aware of the true God and worshipped Him also. This is similar to what a lot of people do today, try to assimilate God and the Bible into their worldview, alongside other religions or paganistic lifestyles

God is going to work through Abram to counter the world system. God is eventually, through the promised seed of Abraham, going to provide someone who would redeem the world. (John 3:16)

ABRAHAM - Outline

Part One - Prelude - 11:27-11:32

Part Two - Preparation for the Promised Seed - 12:1 - 15:21

Part Three - Provision of the Promised Seed - 16:1 - 22:24

Part Four - Epilogue - 23:1 - 25

These are not just stories or historical narratives, but meant to teach us doctrine

Introductory principles

- God shifts from working with the whole human race to working with one man and then his descendants
- This demonstrates God's determination to bless mankind despite human rebellion - good example of Grace. In the first eleven chapters the dominant theme has been blessing then curse, now the emphasis is on blessing
- What we see in each of these four men is the constant struggle to operate on divine viewpoint instead of human viewpoint and autonomy
- **In Abraham we see a progression in spiritual growth before he receives the promised blessing (Isaac). There is no sudden state of perfection or maturity reached, but a slow process of growing in his faith.**
- Doctrinal themes taught through the life of Abraham
 - a. Regeneration - Sarah is barren, Abraham is too old, but God brings life to both of them - a recurring theme in OT - God is teaching that He is the one that brings life where there is death
 - b. Justification - Romans 4, Galatians 4 - justification by faith alone
 - c. Substitutionary Atonement - Gen. 22 - The sacrifice of Isaac - God provides a substitute to pay the penalty of sin
 - d. Life of Faith, walking by faith
 - e. Personal sense of eternal destiny - Hebrews 11:8-19
 - f. Abrahamic Covenant - it is impossible to correctly interpret past or the future of human history if you do not understand this covenant - human history turns on God's plan for Israel
 - i. Three elements - land, seed, blessing
 - g. Who God is
 - i. Lord God Most High, The possessor of heaven and earth
 - ii. the God who sees (Gen 16:13)
 - iii. El Shaddai - God the Almighty (Gen. 17:1) used 38 times in OT
 - iv. the Everlasting One, the Eternal God
 - v. Jehovah-Jireh - The Lord provides, supplies (22:14)
 - vi. The God of the Heavens
- Abraham was ten generations after Noah, just as Noah was ten generations after Adam
- Abraham was very wealthy man - also Isaac, Jacob, Job, etc. - illustrates that wealth is not wrong, and ownership of property is actually instituted by God Himself
- Came from an aristocratic family from Ur (today in Southern Iraq - close to Kuwait)
- Culture was called Sumer - people called Sumerians, they were a very advanced culture - they wrote, performed advanced mathematical calculations, had architectural innovations, etc. - but very involved in idolatry - main God was Sin (Seen) - the moon god
- Married to Sarai - Sarai means "my princess", "Sarah" just more intensified version, like "my queen"
- Indicates that Abraham and Sarah may have been nobility
- Sarah was Abraham's half-sister - same father, different mother - Remember that incest was not an issue until Moses' time - genetics were not a problem at this point

Point of end of chapter 11? Sarai was barren, so it will be the end of the line. This sets the stage for the whole story of Abraham. There must be divine intervention for this to change.

The Doctrine of the Barren Woman

1. The significance of the barrenness is not some sin on the part of the woman, she is not being punished. It is related to something significant God is going to do
2. Six women in the Bible where this occurs - Sarah, Rebekah, wife of Isaac (25:21), Rachel, wife of Jacob (29:31), mother of Samson (Judges 13), Hannah, mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 1), Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist
3. The presence of barren women were a sign of God's judgment upon Israel, absence of barrenness was indication of blessing upon the nation (Exodus 23:26)
4. The barren womb portrays the deadness and lifelessness of spiritually dead mankind
5. In each case God miraculously brings forth life where there is death - picture of regeneration - only God can solve the problem of spiritual death
6. Ultimately points to the virgin womb of Mary, where a unique life would begin, who would solve the problem of everyone's spiritual death, and He would bring life where there is death, the source of regeneration

A NEW AGE - As we mentioned before, Genesis 12 seems to mark a shift in the way God is dealing with mankind. Some theologians call this a change in *Dispensations*

- A dispensation means a stewardship or an administration which emphasizes a responsibility delegated by God to the human race during that period of time - doesn't have to be a **specific time frame**
- A distinct and identifiable administration in the development of God's plan and purposes in human history. Ephesians 3:2, Colossians 1:25, 26
- God manages the entirety of human history as a household. It is similar to how our parents raised us from childhood - the rules changed as we got older; there were different dispensations in my life where my parents dealt with me differently. Now, some things never changed - they always loved me, some things that were wrong were always wrong, etc. This is how God has dealt with humanity throughout history; there are different periods of time in which God deals differently with the human race. Salvation by faith in Christ never changes, some principles, laws never change, but there are distinct differences. The amount of revelation changes, the function of the Holy Spirit has changed, the people or group that God chooses to work through changes, etc. We as believers today enjoy benefits that believers in the OT never had - we have the completed revelation of God (the Bible), we have the Holy Spirit living in us, etc. God used to speak audibly to people or in dreams and visions, doesn't do that any more (that we know of), certain gifts of the Holy Spirit were used after Pentecost, and don't seem to be used any more. The recognition of this principle is one of the main tenets of dispensationalism.
- Each administrative period is characterized by revelation that specifies responsibilities, a test or evaluation in relation to those responsibilities, almost always a failure of that test (because God is trying to show that man is unable to do anything apart from His complete sustenance), and God's gracious provision of a solution when that failure occurs. These are the elements you look for in trying to identify when an administration changes.
- This assumes that you must look at history from a divine viewpoint, God's point of view. This is

why secular historians will always get it wrong, because they're not taking into account God's intervention in history, and not taking into account God's plans for Israel. You can't possibly understand what's going on in the Middle East, or terrorism, unless you understand Biblical history, God's plan for Israel, the viewpoint of God in history.

Example - Acts 1:6-7 - Disciples recognize here that the kingdom has not come yet, has not been given at all yet. "Times" (succession of events) and "Periods" (age or epoch, a large period of time) - these two words are important to understand dispensations. Paul then later on in Thessalonians, 20 years later, says, "Now is the Times and periods, brethren" What's the difference? The church began ten days after Jesus said this in Acts, it's a different dispensation. Jesus didn't mean we're not ever to know these things, but the disciples didn't need to know it yet.

The reason we're discussing this is because *there seems to be a dispensational shift here with the life of Abraham, God is giving new revelation*. In early Genesis, we had a period of human perfection or innocence with Adam and Eve. That ended with the fall. Then we had an period that has been called "The Age of Conscience", or self-government, which ended with the Flood. Afterwards came the Noahic covenant, which can be called the "Age of Human Government". There seems to be a new dispensation starting here with Abraham.

Don't get too hung up over dispensations right now, we will study in detail later on. Some criticize Dispensationalism for trying to identify specific time periods. The important thing to remember is that God has dealt with man in different ways throughout history, and recognizing this fact helps us understand how God deals with us today and how He will deal with us in the future, and is really the only to correctly interpret the Bible.

A Divine Call

(Gen 12:1) Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go out from your country, your relatives, and your father's household to the land that I will show you. (2) Then I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, so that you will exemplify divine blessing. (3) I will bless those who bless you, but the one who treats you lightly I must curse, and all the families of the earth will bless one another by your name."

In these three verses, "blessing" is used 5 times (NASB), "curse" two times - blessing is the emphasis now

- This mandate explains why Abram left Ur. He may have already been a believer, we don't know for sure
 - Jewish legend indicates he was a believer from an early age
 - Supported by Hebrews 11:8, Acts 7 - despite his families involvement with paganism, Abram leaves when God tells him to leave
 - "Go out" actually has the stronger meaning in Hebrew of "Get yourself out of there"
 - Acts 7:2-4 - Stephen tells us that God appeared to Abram while he was in Ur and told him to leave there. This is another example of the Hebrew traditional narrative of briefly summarizing the event and then going back and describing the details. The summary was in Chap. 11:28-32, and the details are in Chapter 12
- God was separating Abraham from the pagan environment - illustrates the principle of separation

- Was this only partial obedience? He took his family with him
 - Separation - a mental attitude which results in removing from our lives people, events, and circumstances that are distractions from our spiritual growth and occupation with Christ. (Hebrews 12:1)
 - This is not necessarily physical or external! Doesn't mean we have to remove ourselves completely from the culture, or not have anything to do with anyone who's not wearing a halo! This is not the point!
 - Separation begins in a believer's personal life as he learns and applies doctrine in the direction of his own sin nature. Romans 6:11 (keep in mind that death in the Bible always means separation, not cessation of existence)
 - Separation involves separating yourself from human-viewpoint thinking - Romans 12:1-2 (Holy means set apart). This verse is not talking about individual thoughts in your mind, but changing the way you think, stop thinking like a pagan!
 - 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 - Separate from believers who are continually living unrestrained and immoral lifestyles
 - Separate from believers who reject sound doctrine - 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15
 - Separate from believers who continually make their internal lust patterns the motivation for their life Romans 16:17-18
 - Separation from the immoral social scene - stay away from peer pressure - 1 Peter 4:4, 1 Corinthians 15:33
 - Separate from unbelievers to avoid having our doctrine compromised - 2 Corinthians 6:14 - includes dating, marriage, business partnerships
 - False separatism -
 - abstaining from outward things, like movies, TV, dancing, or certain food or drink, and expecting others to do the same. Feeling that this makes you more spiritual, or better than others who do these things. These things are between each person and God. This leads to the attitude that "I have the truth, and no one else does". Also can give you a false sense of righteousness or holiness.
- God will use Abraham to start a counter-culture to the pagan world
 - What was Abraham's response? He obeys. Hebrews 11:8-12 Watch throughout the narratives how his faith grows
 - Verse 3 - strong comment against anti-Semitism

Closing Comments:

We'll continue from here next time with an in-depth study of the Abrahamic Covenant. This is a very important and fascinating subject, so we will spend an entire lesson on it.

Dusty