

CONCERNING THE WAY

May 6, 2008



Introduction - Abraham Part 3

In this last lesson on Abraham we'll go through Genesis chapters 12-25 on a high level and discuss important things we can learn from his life. You'll need to have at least skimmed over these chapters on your own, because we won't be going through them in detail. It would be helpful to have your Bible open to each chapter as we discuss what happened there and what we can glean from it.

Genesis 12-23 - The Life of Abraham

Genesis 12

God tells Abram to leave Ur, and he does. He leaves Ur with his family, then God separates him from his father, who dies in Haran, and his brother Nahor, and he and Sarai move with Lot to Canaan. Then, in Chapter 13 God separates Abram from Lot. All of this is to separate Abram and his seed from pagan influences. This important principle of grace teaches us that God will work with us where we are, not where we ought to be.

God's promises of blessings to Abraham also give us a picture of how God gives believers blessings:

The Principle of Blessing

- A word that is misused by most people, they don't really know what it means - like "Holy", "worship", etc.
- Biblical blessing may not be material prosperity
- Relates to the divine promise which may include protection, prosperity, health, or grace, or happiness, or peace
- This doesn't mean that if God blesses you, you will have no problems or perfect health
- God will provide for you everything you need, so you can have perfect peace and stability in life, and it's not based on what you do or the circumstances of your life, but on your grace-based relationship with God
- Source of blessing is never what we do, but the possession of righteousness
 - Without Christ, we can never receive blessing
 - Our righteous acts do not merit blessing
 - Only being in Christ, His righteousness is imputed to our account, and that is what God sees
 - Because of Christ's righteousness, then God can bless us - Abraham is a good example
- God gives the believer a package of temporal blessings and eternal blessings, and logistical and advanced blessings
 - Logistical - things you need to live - air, food, etc., also resources that you need to grow spiritually, like a local church or Bible study, and the Bible itself

- As you grow spiritually, you will receive temporal blessings and eternal blessings
- Eternal blessings are heavenly rewards
- If you do not grow spiritually, you won't receive blessings and there may be divine discipline and loss of eternal rewards, because we don't have the capacity to receive them
- As you grow, you will develop the ability to receive advanced blessings.
- We also receive blessings by association, for example, if we're in disobedience but married to a strong growing believer, or part of a strong local church, we might receive blessings through them
- If you are growing in your Christian life, your family will benefit, then your friends and extended family, then people you work with. These people will all be blessed by association.
- Ultimately this blesses the community, and the nation. A nation with a lot of strong Christian believers (true Christians) will make better decisions
- This is "being a blessing to others" Look at his life - this is what Abraham was

Keep in mind when you're reading the Bible is that what happens to Israel is often a picture or a type of what happens to a believer individually

- The Abrahamic Covenant is a picture of our position in Christ
 - It is unconditional - freely given not on basis of performance but on God's grace
 - Can't be lost - no matter how disobedient Israel became, they could never lose this covenant, they are secure in that position - this is true of believers, we are always going to be in Christ
 - The land part of the covenant became the basis for blessing - if Israel was obedient, they were in the land and God was blessing. If they were disobedient, they were out of the land. Of course, they will still receive the land eternally.
 - roughly equivalent to the believer's experiential blessing or temporal fellowship (if we're disobedient, we're out of fellowship with God, if Israel was disobedient, they were kicked out of the land.
 - This is true of Abraham, also. When he is in the land, he is blessed. When he is out of the land (Egypt) he is out of blessing
 - When we don't trust God's promises, when we take matters into our own hands, we get in trouble and out of blessing, just like Abraham

Genesis 12:3 is a strong statement against ant-semitism, God wants us to bless His chosen people, not curse them

- This is the believer's responsibility
- Does not mean we support all the decisions made by the state of Israel (most of the Jews are in unbelief), but that we support their right to the land given by God, and expect that His promises to them will someday be fulfilled
- God promises if we bless the Jews and treat them well, He will bless us by association

God takes Abraham through a series of tests in his life. Some he passes, some he partially passes, and some he totally blows it. Of course, we're all the same way!

1st test - Abram responds to what God has told him, and he obeys

- Only partial obedience? Lot wasn't supposed to go with him, he was supposed to get away from his family. Lot causes him problems later on.
- He is trusting God, but not fully

Abram and Sarai arrive in Canaan, the land of promise

- Remember that the Canaanite was the offspring of Ham, the second son of Noah, and Canaan was the son of Ham. The curse was placed on Canaan. So the Canaanites are going to be a wicked, ungodly people from the very time that Abraham comes into their midst, until finally they are more or less destroyed when Joshua and the children of Israel come in some 400 years later. Remember, however, that the Canaanite is in the Promised Land, and Abram is going to have to move in as a nomad.
- Why are we given these details by the Holy Spirit? Why are these places singled out - Shechem, Bethel, then to Negev
 - Shechem is mentioned again and again in the Bible
 - Archeology has revealed that ancient Shechem was a major pagan worship center for the Canaanites
 - Abraham was purposefully claiming this area for God, right in the heart of paganism
 - Abraham is going to each of these areas claiming them for God, not just arrogantly taking the land, but claiming territory that God has promised. He is acting on what has already been given by God.
 - This sets the pattern for what will happen later with Jacob, and in the conquest of the land in Joshua
- Why is Abram building altars at these places?
 - Purpose of the sacrifice is to worship God

The Principle of Worship - a response to what God does for us in grace

- Includes singing, prayer, studying and contemplating God's Word
- It is not just singing - singing is a minor part of worship - and the worship leader is the pastor, not the song leader - Don't confuse what worship is!
- The Lord appears to Abraham (vs. 7) - would assume this was the pre-incarnate Christ, and gives him the first clear promise related to the land. Notice He says "to your descendants", not to Abram. The land promise is defined even more as we go through scripture.
 - The Hebrew word translated descendants is zera', which means "seed", this is the same word used back in Gen. 3:15 ("seed" of the woman)

Famine

- 2nd test of Abram - he doesn't trust God to stay in the land and let God provide, but he goes to Egypt and tried to solve problems himself, just causes more problems - incident with Sarai and the Pharaoh, and he ends up bringing back an Egyptian servant (Hagar) that causes problems later.
- Time goes by as he goes southward. Many times God used famine in the Old Testament to discipline as well as a vehicle to force people to go where He wanted them. A famine is in the Land of Canaan and Abram went down into Egypt. In Scripture, Egypt is always a picture of the world. That's why Israel was always instructed to stay in the Land of Promise and not

to go to Egypt. These things in the Old Testament are living examples of New Testament doctrine, or teaching.

- The same holds true today. As a believer, as a child of God, we are constantly admonished by the Apostle Paul that we are to separate ourselves from the world. Abram's faith probably weakened a little bit, and famine came in. First thing you know, where is he? Down in Egypt. But he gets in trouble. Just like a believer who goes into the world, it isn't very long until he is in trouble. Had God depicted these great Biblical characters as sinless, the epitome of righteousness without any mistakes, how would that make us feel? We'd be hopeless. But, the Bible doesn't do that. They were just as human as we are; they failed like we do, and it all shows that a merciful God is always ready to restore. Here we see this great man of faith, Abram, fail miserably.
- Abram wasn't a total liar because Sarai was a half sister, but the man is certainly anything but honorable here. He says, "*...they will kill me but will keep you alive. So tell them you are my sister so that it may go well for me because of you and my life will be spared on account of you.*" Imagine that! Not much faith in evidence here! He's trying to protect himself.

Genesis 13

- To the south of Canaan, almost due east and still in the land of Canaan, is the desert city of Beersheba which is still there. Today, it is a thriving university city. Beersheba is probably a half million people by now. Beersheba of the Bible is the same Beersheba that is there today, at least in the same environment. It's down in the Negev part of the desert. Abraham's household goes from Beersheba up north and back, sojourning up and down the land of Canaan.
- **Israel is the earthly people with earthly promises; the Church a heavenly people with heavenly promises.** Nowhere in the scriptures written to the Church are we promised that simply because we are obedient to God and faithful in all the things He expects, that God will reward us financially and materially. That is not part of our New Testament teaching. Now if God sees fit, that's fine. I can show you two references of Paul where it is absolutely fine to establish an estate, and have something for the children. There is nothing wrong with that. Paul also says that a person who doesn't provide for his family is worse than an infidel.
- Don't think that when I say there are no material promises connected with the Church Age, it doesn't mean that we can't be successful and you can't work hard to get ahead. But, there is no promise in the New Testament that God will reward us materially for our spiritual effort. But, in **the Old Testament that was part and parcel of it.** The more obedient they were, the more God blessed them with physical and material things. Abram was one. He was immensely wealthy. God rewarded him. Next lesson we'll look at Jacob and how he came out of Syria after 20 years with Laban with flocks and herds to no end. And what did Job have? - flocks and herds by the thousands. All of this is intrinsic to understanding the Old Testament economy. If they were obedient, God blessed them materially. They had no concept of a heavenly connection other than that was where God was. They were (and are) an earthly people with earthly promises.
- So Abram goes back to Bethel from Egypt. I think that there is also an interesting parallel. Abram, weak in faith, ends up down in the world. After he is embarrassed in that worldly

environment he finds his way back to the place of his beginning, as far as his walk and his worship are concerned. What's the parallel? Well, for a believer, the same thing. We may get down and be enticed by the world, but there is only one way back into fellowship and where is it? Where we began, at the foot of the Cross. I'm not saying you have to have Salvation over again, but the Cross is always the place of a new beginning. So Abram comes back to Beth-el and gets straightened out, getting right with The Lord.

- Then, Abram's people and Lot's people start fighting over the wells. Abram says, "Take your pick of the land, it's up to you." Lot had been to Egypt, and had seen all the things of a material Egypt. Before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, this beautiful Jordan Valley and all the way down to the environs of what is now the Dead Sea, was a beautiful valley. It wasn't the barren rock and desert that it is now as a result of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But it was beautiful and it says in verse 10 "...*that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the Lord*"
- In other words, if ever there was an area on earth that was close to the Garden of Eden, it was this Jordan valley. Lot looked at it and said, "That's for me. So he tells uncle Abram, "I'll take the valley," and Abram said, "Then I'll stay in the mountains." So they parted.
- Note that Lot doesn't jump into Sodom with both feet all at once. It is just like sin in the life of every one of us. It doesn't just all of a sudden engulf us. What happens? Oh, we play with it, we toy with it, it toys with us. Then we just start slipping and slipping, and the first thing we know it has got us. So it did with Lot. Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. He didn't just go there immediately, but where did he end up? In Sodom. He wasn't just a resident of Sodom, but he was one of the city fathers. He was one of the 'big wheels.'

Verse 14,15 "*the LORD said to Abram, "Look from the place where you stand to the north, south, east, and west. I will give all the land that you see to you and your descendants forever."*

- Down the center of the land of Canaan are mountains. From this mountain view, God could literally tell Abram, "Look in all four directions, I'm going to give it all to you." The word 'forever' in Scripture means time without end. Again, if only our world leaders would believe the Word of God. The land of Israel belongs to the Jew. I am not a Jew. But I love the Jews, because of what The Book says, and because I know that all of God's blessings to me, past and future promises, have come through and because of the Jews! This land was given to the Jew and it is theirs forever.
- Abram then moved to Hebron. Hebron is about five or six miles south of Jerusalem. Israel is small and everything is so close. Beth-el is only about twenty miles north of Jerusalem, and now Hebron is about six miles. Off to the southwest about five miles is Bethlehem. Then on down to Beersheba is probably only another forty miles. Then up to Samaria and Nazareth. They're all packed in there close together. There isn't that mileage that we are accustomed to here in America.

Genesis 14

- In Chapter 14 word comes to Abram that some kings from the north and the east have come down, defeated the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, and have taken all the people captive. Abram got interested because that involved Lot and his family, so he put together a small army out of his hired servants, and pursued this conquering king from the north who had overrun

Sodom and Gomorrah, and who had Lot and his family with him.

- Verse 14 " *he mobilized his 318 trained men who had been born in his household, and he pursued the invaders as far as Dan.*"
- That number gives you a picture of how big Abram's estate really was. Abram had enough hired servants to come up with 318 of military age; in other words, they were able to handle the sword. Anyway, he brings all the hostages safely back and utterly defeats the invading kings.
- Verse 17-20 - Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God." Who is this person? One of the most mysterious men in the Bible, he was obviously one of the few remaining believers in the one true God. He appears here and then disappears, never mentioned again except in Psalms and Hebrews. Some scholars and Jewish tradition speculate he may have actually been Shem (Noah's son), who was still very much alive in this time, but would have been over 400 years old by now and much revered. In the book of Hebrews where it is talking about how Jesus is our high priest, it says in Hebrews 5:10 that "*he was designated by God as high priest in the order of Melchizedek*".
- So, Melchizedek is the one who is held up as being a type of Christ. What's interesting about this is that Melchizedek isn't Jewish! You would think that Jesus would have been compared to a Jewish high priest, but instead He is declared as our high priest in the order of a Gentile. To me, this is God saying to us that Jesus is High Priest over all people, all nations, all races.
- Look at the word 'Salem.' What is the word today? Jerusalem! Salem means 'peace.' This Melchizedek was the King of the little village then known as Salem, which becomes Jerusalem.

Genesis 15

- Remember the Abrahamic Covenant. This Covenant now comes back into Abram's thinking. And he said, "Now Lord, You have promised me a nation of people, You've promised me a land; a kingdom, and I haven't even got a child!" He said, "Oh wait a minute! I do have an heir born in my house." Who is he thinking of? Lot! He's the only flesh and blood relative he has.
- The King James version says next "And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, 'This (Lot) shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels (innermost being) shall be thine heir.'" Yeah, that's why I don't use the King James - some things like this don't translate well from the seventeenth century!
- So you can see how this promise of God would have been unbelievable to Abram. They're way up in years and haven't even had a child. He says to God, "You're telling me I'm going to have that many offspring?" In verse 6, however, Abram's faith comes through and he believed. This is why God had such high esteem for Abram. We already saw that he wasn't perfect. But he was a man of faith, even though it seemed so impossible that he and a wife who had never had children could now be the beginning of a multitude of people.

Genesis 15:6 *And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

- A whole lesson could be spent just on this verse alone, but we'll try to be brief for now. We'll study this in more detail when we get to Romans.
- In verse 1 of Romans 4, Paul is using the faith of Abraham as an example of what God is expecting of us today. Remember, Paul writes primarily to the Gentile, but he gets back into the Old Testament economy to show the whole principle of what it is to take God at His word - **faith plus nothing added.**

Romans 4:1-3 *What then shall we say that Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh, has discovered regarding this matter? For if Abraham was declared righteous by the works of the law, he has something to boast about — but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

- It was put to the account of Abraham for what? Righteousness! Not because he did anything. He didn't earn it. He believed God. What do I call that? Faith plus nothing ... Faith plus nothing! Galatians 5 tells us that as soon as we add something to faith, we cancel the work of the Cross.

Romans 4:4,5 *"Now to the one who works, his pay is not credited due to grace but due to obligation. But to the one who does not work, but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness."*

- How many times have you heard someone say, "If I could just straighten up my life, if I could just clean up my act, I'd get it right with God." But those aren't the kind of people with whom God can get it right. God has to take that person right where he is, and He has to perform the miracle of Salvation. Then, of course, there is going to be a turnaround. There will be a change in lifestyle. This person is going to be a new creation, but he cannot do it himself. If he tries, then he is not in the area of faith. He has now done something on his own. We have to be so careful that Salvation is totally the work of God.

Genesis 15:5

The LORD took him outside and said, "Gaze into the sky and count the stars — if you are able to count them!" Then he said to him, "So will your descendants be."

Notice the reference to stars in this verse. Then read Gen.13:16 again: *And I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone is able to count the dust of the earth, then your descendants also can be counted."*

- Remember Genesis 1:1 (In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth.) As we learn more and more about Israel's role, remember that Israel is always God's earthly people, whereas we of the Church are God's heavenly people. We have to keep those two concepts totally separated. Israel is God's earthly people; the Church is God's heavenly people. Now then, when Abraham is promised that his offspring would be as the dust of the earth, what people is He referring to? The earthly. Dust is earthly.
- In verse 5 we don't have the dust, but another analogy - the stars. What is that referring to? The heavenly. Many people are confused, thinking that when we become a Christian we become a child of Abraham, and we become a Jew. Bless their hearts. They are way out in left

field. We become a child of Abraham by virtue of the spiritual connection; that as Abraham was saved by faith plus nothing, we're saved by faith plus nothing! We get adopted into the family only through Christ. Never confuse the issue. When we become a child of God we do not become a Jew. A Jew is a Jew. A Gentile is a Gentile. This whole idea of faith plus nothing began with Abraham. That's our connection. That is why God could tell Abraham that he would have a multitude of spiritual seed as numerous as the stars in the universe. But, the Nation of Israel is likened to the dust of the earth.

- You might call Genesis 15 "Israel's Deed." You might write it in the margin of your Bible in Chapter 15. This is Israel's deed. It is just as valid today as it was the day God issued it.
- Obviously, Abram was just as human as we are. We take the promises of God by faith, but, being human, we say, "God, prove it." So, understandably, here is Abram with all these promises. God says, "I'm giving you the land." Abram asks, "How do I know?"
- Few people understand what God does next. We mentioned in the last lesson that sacrificial animals being parted is the exact custom of transferring real estate in ancient times. Their system of transferring title deed was exactly what God is doing here on behalf of Abram. What is the reason? - To prove to Abram that God meant what He said.
- Normally in an agreement like this, the two parties would walk between the animal pieces, but in this case only God did that, indicating that he was the only one that was obligated in this agreement. Abram was out of it, both literally and figuratively!
- In verses 13-16 God is telling something before it happens. What is He talking about? - Israel's sojourn in Egypt, and Abram doesn't even have his first child! God is already telling him that at some point in time, generations of Abram's seed would be in Egypt. How long was Israel in Egypt? - 400 years, just as God is saying here.
- Verse 16 *"...for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its limit."* What is God saying here?
- Abram is now receiving title deed to the land of Canaan, God is telling him it is going to be 400 plus years before they can actually come in and occupy it. There was a purpose in God not permitting the Canaanites, referred to here as the Amorites, to be removed from the land until the 400 years had gone by. What was that purpose? Their sin had not yet reached the limit.
- It is hard for us to comprehend the patience of God. Remember who the Canaanites' forefathers were? - Ham and his son, Canaan. These Canaanites started on an immoral plane right off the bat, and kept going down, and down, and down. God is telling Abram He is going to give them 400 years; that by that time they will have gone down so far that in all justice He will be able to tell the children of Israel to clean them out and not spare one; that the land was theirs (the Israelites).
- Did God do it? Yes! When Joshua came in from the east and made that circuitous route out of their wilderness journey, they crossed the Jordan River just above the Dead Sea. The first city they came up against was Jericho. But before they crossed the River Jordan, God gave explicit instructions to the Nation of Israel not to leave a single Canaanite alive. Unfair? Unjust? No, because they have had 400 years to clean up their act. But instead of cleaning it up they degenerated down, down, down until finally God, in justice, could tell Israel not to spare one; that unless they cleansed the land of them, in just a little while they would be just like them.

What happened? Israel got softhearted. Israel just couldn't put those people to death, but saw the better part of making servants of them. They assimilated the Canaanites into their very lifestyle.

- A couple of generations later they turned their backs on God, and were headlong after the gods of the Canaanites. We know their god as Baal. Let's look at an example. Turn to Jeremiah. **It is absolutely unbelievable that Israel, this Covenant people, with all the miracle working of God as a fabric of their lifestyle, would come to this place.** This is exactly what God knew would happen if they spared the Canaanites. In the following verse the Israelites are responding to Jeremiah's plea to come back to Jehovah. Jeremiah 44:16-19
- When you see the term 'queen of Heaven' it immediately tells you it was the worship of the female goddesses. Whenever it got into the worship of the female goddesses, the immorality hit new lows for some reason or other. Jeremiah goes on and almost bewails the fact, that Israel could sink to such a low spiritual condition that they would burn incense and pour out drink offerings to this female goddess. **Not too much later they got so involved in idolatry that they actually offered their own little children into the fire as offerings and sacrifices to these pagan gods.** This is why God tells Abraham in Genesis 15 that the children of Israel would have to wait 400 years, so that these Canaanites would finally reach the epitome of their wickedness. Then God, in justice, could tell Joshua to not spare one. But, the Jews did. The result is as we saw in Jeremiah 44.
- So, God is fulfilling the ancient ceremony of transferring title deed. It is like saying "May I be torn apart like these animals if I break this contract." When Israel today says the land has been deeded to them, this is what they come back to. Although I have not heard the present day leadership say anything, when Prime Minister Menachem Begin was in power he would constantly refer to the fact that the land had been deeded to them, and that it was theirs. I agree. You cannot refute the Word of God. This is God's Title Deed to the Middle East for the Nation of Israel.
- According to the tribes listed in this Chapter, Israel will have everything from northern Lebanon, out to the Euphrates River, cutting across the Arabian Peninsula, and all the way over to the River of Egypt. Do you see how much of the Middle East God deeded to Abraham? Not just to the Jordan River, not just without the West Bank, but it has all, already been deeded. It is theirs; however, Israel will not enjoy this to the full until the Millennial Kingdom when Christ returns and Israel will finally get all of the land promised to them. They are not going to get it all now. I think they will be lucky to hang on to everything west of the Jordan River in the foreseeable future. But, don't forget the fact that when it is all done, Israel is going to have a homeland that goes all the way East to the Euphrates River, and all the way down to the River of Egypt, and all the way up to Northern Lebanon. It has all been deeded. God never goes back on His word.
- Watch the Middle East. There is always a lot of pressure to get Israel to come to a so-called Peace Conference. There can be no peace in the Middle East until Christ returns. There may be a pseudo peace. There may be a makeshift peace of some kind, but there is not going to be any genuine peace in the Middle East. It is absolutely unforeseeable in the light of Scripture. Israel is going to have to stand her ground. The Arabs can do all they want to. We can identify, we can empathize with the Arab people. It is home to them now. We know that. The fact remains that it is promised, it is deeded to the Nation of Israel.

Genesis 16 - The false seed - Abram and Sarai jump the gun

- What Sarai did with Hagar we would call surrogate motherhood. It was nothing new. It was a prevalent custom in the Orient. In the ancient cultures, to be childless was anathema. There was nothing a woman dreaded more than to be left childless. To compensate for it their custom allowed that if a woman could not bear on her own, she could have a slave girl actually bear a child on her behalf. This is exactly what happens here. It is not that they were being unduly sinful or immoral. They were acting according to custom, even as we saw the Title Deed transfer according to custom in our last chapter. There is one thing I want to emphasize. Who have they left out? God! God has not said one word about having a child by way of a slave girl. This is using a human viewpoint. This was Sarai's idea, and Abram listened to Sarai.
- But you can see the human side, can't you? For ten years they have been waiting for God's promise to come to fruition. Ten years ago God promised that Abram and Sarai would have a child, by which the Nation of Israel would come on the scene. Nothing has happened, so they take things into their own hands. When this little slave girl realized she had accomplished something her mistress could not, she got puffed up, arrogant and impossible.
- Verse 10-12- Here is one of those instances when God calls the shots before the child is even born. This is the Bible speaking - not me. God already foretold the very personality makeup of the Arab people before the first one was ever born. Remember, now, it is out of Ishmael that most of our Arab people have come. Not all, there are other branches which feed into the Arabian peoples. Here, however, He gives such a vivid description of their makeup.
- Do you see why the prospect for peace in the Middle East is pretty dim? These people are hard to deal with, and they always have been. They're just hard to deal with. It was a very intrinsic prophecy of God Himself that this would be their personality.

Genesis 17

- We now have the changing of his name, primarily adding the letter 'H,' going from Abram to Abraham. Then God does the same thing with Sarai's name. What letter has been added to her name? The letter 'H.' Though I don't dwell much on numbers in Scripture, it is an interesting subject. The number five is the number of grace. The number five will continue to come up in Scripture, designating God's grace. The letter 'H' is the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. All of the main events of Abraham's life are in years which can be divided by the number five. He left Ur at the age of 75. At the age of 100 he had Isaac. He lived to the age of 175. Over and over throughout Abraham's history you'll see numbers divisible by five.
- As we get to the Book of Exodus you will see the same holds true in all of the instructions of building the tabernacle in the wilderness, which is going to depict the grace of God toward His people. Watch for it. All the dimensions are divisible by five; 45 cubits long, 15 cubits wide, etc. The boards were to be made so many cubits, and all numbers are divisible by five. I constantly point these things out to enhance the fact that **the Bible is a supernatural Book**. Men could never have thought of this; only the mind of God could have. So Abraham gets the letter 'H' and Sarah gets the letter 'H' referring to the tremendous grace of God which will be part of their lives.
- They can say what they want about God being through with the Nation of Israel, and about God

transferring the promises made to Israel to the Church. But that flies in the face of what the Scripture says. The Bible plainly teaches that no matter what the Israelite or Jew may do, God is still going to maintain the Covenant He made with Abraham clear back in 2000 B.C. If you are watching the Middle Eastern situation with an open mind, you realize the present day Jew is still the offspring of Abraham. Although we are not yet into the Jewish aspect of the Tribulation, etc., it is all coming. **Everything in the Middle East is setting the stage for when the curtain will rise, and God will again pick up where He left off with His Nation of Israel back in the Book of Acts.**

- Now God is going to, you might say, cement this whole thing with a blood Covenant. I think that is the best way we can look at it. Have you ever watched movies where they made a covenant with one another? They would take a knife blade and put a little slit in each hand. They would then shake hands and literally mix their blood; it was a blood covenant. I think this is the whole aspect of the institution of circumcision. God now has a blood Covenant with the Nation of Israel, or the children of Abraham. So Abraham was given all the instructions of how circumcision was to be instituted even though he, himself, was ninety-nine. From then on, every child of Abraham was to be circumcised at the age of eight days. Medical science has found that an infant's blood coagulation reaches its peak at the age of eight days.
- Many people today think that circumcision is wrong, that it is mutilation. This is another example of human-viewpoint thinking. God knows best! There have been extensive scientific studies done that show that it is healthier to have the foreskin removed.
- *"Then Abraham bowed down with his face to the ground and laughed as he said to himself, "Can a son be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"* I don't think this was a laugh of scorn or ridicule, but of joy and worship. After all, Abraham is 99 years old and it's going to take nine months of gestation for Sarah to give birth. So he knows even if something were to happen shortly, he would be at least 100 by the time that child would be born.
- *"Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live before you!"* There is more in that verse than meets the eye. With such a faith in what God was going to do by bringing about the promised child, coupled with the fact that he had brought Ishmael on the scene without any instruction from God, what does Abraham fear God is going to do with Ishmael? - Take his life! Abraham is pleading for the life of Ishmael when he says, Oh let Ishmael live! A few chapters ahead is the genealogy of Ishmael. How many sons did he have? - Twelve! Exactly as God said he would. And the Arab nations have become great. They far outnumber the Jew.
- **Never lose sight of verses 19 and 21, where God stated:**
 - (1) I will establish My Covenant with Isaac.
 - (2) I will bless the offspring of Ishmael, but my Covenant is going to be with Isaac.

Genesis 18 – Angelic visitors

- What Abraham is doing here is typical of ancient Middle Eastern hospitality (there were no McDonald's or motels every few miles). The desert was harsh and custom demanded that if you were a native and had ample provisions, then wayfaring strangers would be fed and their water supply replenished before you sent them on their way.

- Remember these are spiritual beings; this is The Lord and two angels. Nevertheless, Abraham sees just three men. This would be a good time for us to go back for a moment, and look at the life of The Lord Jesus after His Resurrection. Turn to Luke, Chapter 24. Some of these things are good to comprehend as there is a lot of ignorance even on the part of believers as to our spiritual state when we get to eternity. Remember we aren't going to spend eternity in some ethereal, invisible soul state. We are going to be bodily involved. I think as such we are also going to enjoy a lot of the good things which God is going to provide; among them - eating.
- In Luke 24:36-43 we have The Lord Jesus in the forty-day period after His Resurrection. He has now approached the eleven; He has also talked with a group on their way back to Emmaus. They invited Him in, and He sat at a table with them. He ate food with them, just as He does here in Genesis 18. This is in His resurrected body. A lot of people don't realize this.
- Verse 10 - Now, what are Abraham and Sarah finally realizing? - Who is speaking? You see, for years God has been telling them they are going to be the beginning of a nation of people; kings are going to come out of them. They must have known that only one person had ever said something like that - and, that was God Himself, The Lord. Now I am sure that Abraham, perhaps nor Sarah completely yet, knows who is talking. Sarah heard it and what did she do? She laughed. What does the name Isaac mean? - Laughter. That's what the word 'Isaac' actually means translated out of the Hebrew. He would be a child of laughter.

Verse 17,18 *Then the LORD said, "Should I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? After all, Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations on the earth will pronounce blessings on one another using his name.*

- Isn't that something? All the nations in the world, Gentile as well as the Hebrew, can trace their great men back to this man Abraham. From the Old Testament we know that the kings of Israel - Saul, David, Solomon and all the kings, (be they good or bad) were all from the loins of Abraham. But the children of Abraham branched out and encompassed more than just the Nation of Israel. We have already seen that Ishmael is going to be the beginning of the Arab nations. These are all children of Abraham.
- In modern history, even our own democracy of the last 200 years, many of our great government men have been Jewish. Some of the world's great men were direct descendants of this man Abraham. So the Word of God is not stretching the point one bit when it says that all of the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him; but, of course, God was looking beyond the politics and the economics. He was looking to the Salvation He would bring about through The Lord Jesus Who, of course, was born a Jew. All of these are foretelling what God is going to do down through the ages of time.
- Now, in the rest of the Chapter, the two angels, make their way to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Here Abraham pleads with the LORD concerning the inhabitants of Sodom. Why is he so concerned? Lot, his beloved nephew, and his offspring are now living in Sodom. So Abraham begins to 'bargain' with God, saying, "Now Lord if there are fifty righteous in Sodom will you spare it?" Yes. "Forty?" Yes. "Thirty?" Yes. He came all the way down to ten, and The Lord even agreed to spare Sodom if there would be as few as ten believers in that city. But there weren't!
- I think we as Bible believers can take comfort in the future of our own country. As long as we still have a relatively strong Christian community which continues to send the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and as long as our nation is still a friend of God's Covenant people, I think we stand a pretty good chance of surviving. However, any time any of those three things go down the tubes, America has had it. America is ripe for judgment as surely as Sodom and Gomorrah were. We know she is. But you see, if we can take a lesson from this, I think God will spare judgment because of His own people. I know that we who are ardent believers in the Gospel are getting fewer and fewer percentage-wise by the week. Nevertheless, we still have a strong Christian influence in America. We are the lighthouse for sending the Gospel to the ends of the world. Europe doesn't, Great Britain certainly doesn't, and we

can't expect the Orient to because they're saturated, of course, with the eastern religions. So America is the only possible hope of continuing to send the Gospel to the regions beyond. Thirdly, as I have said, as long as we take an official stance of being a friend of Israel, and we do nothing to stab them in the back, I hope and trust that God will continue to grant us our freedoms for a little longer. My prayer is that The Lord will grant us health and strength, and keep America free until Jesus comes back.

Genesis 19

- These two men, who have now left Abraham and The Lord, now make their appearance in Sodom where they are identified. What are they? - angels! The two angels who were part of the three in Chapter 18 now come to Sodom just at evening time. Lot, Abraham's nephew, is sitting in the gate. In the time this setting is taking place, to 'sit in the gate' meant they were the city leaders. So Lot, if he is not the city manager, is at least on the council. He has become an important man in Sodom.
- Do you see that hospitality of Lot coming through? Lot, realizing what the people of Sodom will attempt to do to two strange men, quickly invites the men into his own home.
- We can't imagine a city that had the moral climate of Sodom. We may have areas that are getting close, but at least does not envelope an entire city. But Sodom had come to the place where the whole population was wrapped up in this immoral lifestyle.
- Lot stepped out on the front porch and began to plead with this crowd of Sodomites. This shows us how far down the ladder Lot had slipped. I have a hard time comprehending how he deals with these ungodly citizens of Sodom. Lot's girls were probably late teenagers - young, virgin women. Imagine a father willing to throw his daughters "to the wolves." He said, "You can have them, but leave these two men alone."
- I think Lot's life was in danger. In spite of offering his own daughters, his own life was in danger. So the angels use their power.
- I would rather skip Chapter 19. I don't even want to bring it up. But, we'll have to address it at some point, so it might as well be now. Some of you may well disagree with what I'll present here, but I'm just going to show what the Bible says. We have come all this way, and taken great pains to show that the Bible is accurate, can be trusted, is consistent, and is completely relevant for today. With this subject you either have to accept what the Bible says or you have to reject it. That's between you and God. **Your feelings , your experience doesn't matter, what the world thinks doesn't matter, it's what God says that matters.**
- If you read this chapter objectively and in context, **what do you think is the wickedness in Sodom that compels God to destroy it?** Is it homosexual acts freely being committed in the city? I'm sure that was not the only wickedness going on - there was plenty of heterosexual immorality going on, plus murder, idol-worship and who knows what else, but the wickedness spoken of in this chapter is the men of Sodom wanting to have sex with the two men in Lot's house (the angels). Now, you may say, that was only wrong because they wished to rape them. Other considerations, though, may point to a condemnation of general homosexual acts. The narrator emphasizes the fact that the men of Sodom wanted to have sex with men: They demand that Lot release the angelic messengers (seen as men) to them for sex, and when Lot offers his daughters as a substitute they refuse them and attempt to take the angelic messengers by force.
- In addition the wider context of the Pentateuch condemns homosexual acts as sin. *Leviticus 18:22 - You must not have sexual intercourse with a male as one has sexual intercourse with a woman; it is a detestable act.*

- You may say that this law, like others in the Law of Moses, is not for today. There are ceremonial laws in these books that are obviously not for this age. And, as believers we are not under the Law. But, in the New Testament Paul says that **the Law is our schoolmaster that brings us to Christ. The Law's purpose was to make us aware of our sin, how much we fall short, and how much we need a Saviour.**
- Also, if you look at the other laws in this chapter you would have a hard time convincing most people even in our society today that any of these things are acceptable. The very next verse condemns bestiality. If you say that homosexuality is OK, you would pretty much have to say that bestiality is OK. Remember that when you study the Bible, context is everything! You can't take one verse out and say, well, that's not for today, without considering the context. **If you read the whole chapter it is obvious that these are meant to be moral laws that are for all time.** Of course, with many people nowadays, none of these things mentioned in this chapter are wrong, they are all acceptable.
- Another passage in Romans 1:18-32 clearly describes what happened in Sodom. Remember that this is the apostle Paul speaking to us, the Church, not just to Jews. And, He is speaking through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with the authority of Jesus Christ himself.

Romans 1:18-32 *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness, (19) because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. (20) For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, because they are understood through what has been made. So people are without excuse. (21) For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened. (22) Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. (24) Therefore God gave them over in the desires of their hearts to impurity, to dishonor their bodies among themselves. (25) They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (26) For this reason **God gave them over to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged the natural sexual relations for unnatural ones, (27) and likewise the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed in their passions for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. (28) And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what should not be done. (29) They are filled with every kind of unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, malice. They are rife with envy, murder, strife, deceit, hostility. They are gossips, (30) slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, contrivers of all sorts of evil, disobedient to parents, (31) senseless, covenant-breakers, heartless, ruthless. (32) Although they fully know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but also approve of those who practice them.***

- This began at the Tower of Babel when idolatry and worship of images arose. It has been downhill ever since. Empires have started with something better than that, and they, too, end up on this downward track. Verse 24 tells us that when mankind began to turn his back on the One True God and began to worship idols, then... God gave them up. He didn't give them up to something higher; He gave them up to something lower. So He gave them up to impurity. In verse 26 we see yet another step downward.
- Verse 25-27 This is just plain English! God gave them up again, not to what might be

considered 'common immorality' between the sexes, but this time to a lower level - to 'dishonorable passions.' You can't explain verses 26-27 away. Yet, many people, even Christians, even pastors try to twist the clear teaching of the Bible so as not to offend anyone. In verse 28, these passions become the whole preoccupation in their thinking.

- These verses give a vivid description of the community of Sodom. This is what Sodom was. One commentary says they applaud (have pleasure in them). The Greek seems to imply that not only do they agree with that kind of lifestyle, they actually promote it and applaud those who practice it.
- Notice that it starts with a rejection of God, even though evidence that He exists is clearly seen. Then it develops into worship of other Gods, which may have been idols of wood and stone in those days, **but now is clearly the worship of ourselves, making ourselves out to be "gods"**. Because of these things, God then gives them over to the desire of their hearts. God basically says, "Fine, you want to worship yourself so badly, I'll let you wallow in it, bury yourself in it so that you won't even know how depraved you are." Then, because they are now their own gods, they think they have the right to live and act any way that they want. Any type of "lifestyle" is acceptable.
- So, a reading of the text of Genesis 19 within its narrative context, both immediate and broad, seems to condemn not only the attempted rape but also the attempted homosexual act. It is not easy in this culture today to speak against homosexuality. It will probably not be long before it will be considered a hate crime and it will be a criminal offense to even read these passages. **But we have to teach what the Bible clearly says.**
- We should never hate homosexuals or consider them worse than us. Many of us know people who are homosexuals, some that are very dear to our hearts. They are people just like any of us, there is no difference. **We are all sinners who have fallen far short of what God intended for us to be. Homosexuality is just one of many symptoms of the disease that infects our broken, fallen world.**
- The good news is that we are living in the time Paul refers to as the Age of Grace. Paul makes it clearly evident that where sin abounds, grace is always greater. I want to say to any homosexual that **homosexuality is still something that the grace of God can overcome.**
- One more passage to wrap this subject up - 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, (10) thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. (11) **Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***
- Most of us can find ourselves somewhere in this list of those people Paul says will not inherit the kingdom of God. The key verse, and what I want to stress about this subject is verse 11. Read it again. That's what makes all the difference. We are all sinners, but we can choose not to live that way, not to practice that lifestyle, by being washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus and by the Holy Spirit.

- I think you can see why I would just as soon skip over Genesis 19. I don't like to teach it, but it's in the Book and we must. Remember that human nature hasn't changed one iota, God certainly has never and will never change.

Genesis 21

- So the long-promised event finally occurs. Sarah becomes pregnant and gives birth to Isaac. As Isaac grows, Hagar becomes a problem again, showing arrogance and mocking Sarah. Sarah demands that Hagar and Ismael be banished from the community. Sarah is speaking from a mother's heart, but also speaking the truth of God. For God had said that Isaac was the one in whom the Covenant will continue. From Abraham's point of view it was grievous as he had come to love Ishmael.
- Verse 13 Even today the Arab people still adamantly claim that Abraham is their father. Let's look at Galatians, Chapter 4. This is the beauty of studying, especially Genesis, **how Genesis fits so wonderfully with all the New Testament**; in particular, I think, with the writings of Paul. As you read the Book of Galatians, understand the reason it was written. Word was coming back to the apostle that the churches he had established in Asia Minor (which is present day Turkey), were being besieged with Judaizers saying they couldn't be saved unless they kept the Jewish Law; circumcision and the rest. They fell for it. After all, you know that works always appeal to the human intellect. **Read Galatians 4:19-31**
- God had nothing to do with the birth of Ishmael; that it was all man's idea. Now here it comes. Ishmael was born of the flesh but he, Isaac, of the freewoman was by promise. For twenty-five years God had promised Abraham, "You're going to have a nation come from you; you're going to have a son." You see, this was the son of promise.
- God gave the Law to Moses (Exodus 19,20). Moses came down off the mountain and gave God's Law to the Nation of Israel. This is a comparison, then, with Ishmael because Israel is God's earthly people with earthly promises. Everything concerning them is earthly. So Ishmael, also, was of the flesh by way of the slave girl. Consequently, **the allegory is that the Law given to Israel through Moses was fleshly**; it was carnal. Don't get me wrong. The Law was spiritual. It was God's perfect Law, but in its setting, its usage and its practice, it was fleshly. It depended upon the activities of the people who were under that Law.
- Galatians 4:25 *"Now Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children."* At the time Paul is writing Galatians, about 58 A.D., the Temple is still operating in Jerusalem. Israel is still under the Law. They are still practicing it. Sacrifices are being offered by the thousands.
- Galatians 4:26 *"But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother."* He is now referring to Sarah, who was the freewoman who had the child by promise, and who stands in contrast to the Law as it was given to Moses at Sinai.
- Galatians 4:29 *"But just as at that time the one born by natural descent (Ishmael) persecuted the one born according to the Spirit (Isaac), so it is now."* Throughout human history, **religious people have been the biggest persecutors of the true believers**. Religionists - in the name of religion they persecute the true believer. Paul indicated here in verse 29 that, "so it has always been and always will be."
- Galatians 4:30,31 *But what does the scripture say? "Throw out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not share the inheritance with the son" of the free woman. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman.*
- Standing over against Sinai and the giving of the Law we have the same God who now speaks

from Heaven to the Apostle of the Gentiles. He gives to Paul those doctrines of grace. Paul comes to the Gentiles with this message of grace; not to the Nation of Israel, but to the Gentiles. It is all heavenly connected, whereas Israel was earthly. Turn to Romans Chapter 6 and maybe we can put the frosting on the cake. The whole world of Christendom is constantly trying to subjugate us to legalism. Even good men are writing books trying to convince the Christian of legalism. Legalism is simply anything we can do in the energy of the flesh as against the finished work of the Cross, which is by faith, and by faith alone. I think the following Scripture says it all. Plain English! There is no getting around it. Paul states: Romans 6:14 *For sin will have no mastery over you, because you are not under law but under grace.*

- Do you see the big difference? I have been amazed that so many people say they have never heard there was a difference between Law and Grace. There is all the difference in the world. It's like daylight and dark to come out of the darkness of legalism, and to step into the light of God's grace. Remember that grace is unmerited favor. Nothing that I can do will count with God. **It is all based on what He has done on my behalf!**
- Romans 6:15 *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Absolutely not!* See the difference? **Paul is constantly reminding us of this very thing; that our Salvation is based on the grace of God, and not on anything that we can merit.** Legalism - God hates it! That's why He told Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. Notice that He didn't tell Abraham to give Ishmael a separate tent so he wouldn't have to go too far. That isn't what He said. He said to cast them out. Sarah said it all when she said, "He shall not dwell under the same roof with my son." Now, put that into the context. **Law and Grace cannot mix.**

Genesis 22

- Years had gone by and Isaac was probably a late teenager, maybe even twenty years old. God put Abraham to a tremendous test. If you're a new believer, you need to know that **God is going to test your faith.** We see it all through Scripture. Abraham was no exception. How do you think Abraham felt after years of waiting for a child. Ishmael finally came on the scene, grew into a teenager, and God told Abraham to send him away? Abraham loved Ishmael. This had to be excruciating for the old man. Then Abraham had his son of promise, Isaac. For nearly twenty years, he was deeply attached to him. What did God tell Abraham to do with him? Kill him! Imagine what Abraham must have gone through!
- Notice the word "only" in verse 2 - as far as God is concerned, Isaac is Abraham's only son. Ishmael didn't count as Abraham's son. The reason is that it is through the line of Isaac that the Nation of Israel and The Messiah were to come.
- The mountain to which God directed Abraham we know today as Mount Moriah, in the heart of Jerusalem. Mount Moriah is the very same place in Scripture where Solomon's Temple later rested. So, everything in Israel is connected in time, in prophecy, in everything. And here we see that before the Nation of Israel was a reality, Mount Moriah becomes a place of tremendous importance.
- Notice in verse 4 the phrase "on the third day." This should immediately tell us that this is going to be a picture of Christ's death, burial and Resurrection.
- Underline "We will worship and then return to you." What did Abraham know in his heart? He knew that even if Isaac's life had to be taken, God would raise him from the dead so that he could come back with his father. That much Abraham knew and believed. **This again, is the total picture now of what Christ would accomplish on the Cross.** In this situation, Isaac is a

type of Christ and Abraham is a type of God the Father. They exhibit the same love relationship, the same sacrifice situation that Jesus and God shared.

- For the ordinary, eighteen or twenty-year-old, what would we expect his reaction to be? This was one situation in which the son could have easily whipped his father. But what do we see in Isaac? Complete obedience! Again, take this example 2,000 years into the future. When it came time for those Romans to begin scourging Jesus, and whipping Him, and pulling out His beard and crushing that crown of thorns onto His head, what could He have done? He could have rebelled. He could have thrown it all aside. Scriptures say He could have called down ten legions of angels. He didn't have to go through all that! But what did He do? In complete obedience to His Father, He suffered at the hands of all those infidels and the raging religionists of His day, and He went to the Cross. So it was with Isaac. He obediently let Abraham bind him and lay him upon the altar.
- Now, let's relate this to the life of a believer. Do believers suffer? Some of them have gone through tremendous suffering, yet they have maintained the best attitudes and happiest dispositions that you can witness. Their suffering has allowed them to prove to God just how much they love Him. **The reason God brings times of testing and tribulation is to test our character.** What do a lot of people do? They get bitter and angry and rebellious.
- But to the truly believing heart, when hard times come, God becomes all the more precious. This is a lesson we all have to learn. **God is not going to let us escape problems, He is simply going to be our hope as we go through them.** This same thing was happening to Abraham. God said to Abraham, "I know now that you love me, because you were willing to sacrifice your beloved son." It's the same way with God the Father, we know that He loves us completely because He sent Christ to the Cross. The only things that put Jesus on that Cross were the love of God and the sins of mankind.
- You almost have to wonder whether Abraham was expecting something like this, when in verse 8 he said, "God will provide." It seems he must have known. He had learned to trust in God!
- In Chapter 23 Sarah dies after living 127 years. It's interesting that Sarah is the only woman mentioned in The Bible whose age is given! Sarah is held up in scripture as being a great example of a "holy woman who hoped in God" (1 Peter 3)
- Though Abraham had the Middle East deeded to him in Chapter 15 by God, he still bought a tract of land to have a place to bury his wife.
- It was surveyed and the ownership was legally transferred to Abraham. It wasn't only Sarah who was to be buried there, but also Abraham, Isaac, and Rebekah were buried there.
- In Chapter 24, Abraham is going to send his servant back into the land of his relatives to get a bride for his son, Isaac. But why go all that way when there are lots of eligible girls right at home? Abraham instructed his servant not to take a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanite women. But later on, when Esau came on the scene, he married two Canaanite women who were a grief to Isaac and Rebekah. So, keep all these things in the perspective of Scripture, because God is preparing everything for the Covenant people of Israel.

We'll pick up from here next time and have a lesson on the life of Jacob, Isaac's son.

- Dusty