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## Abraham and Faith!

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Genesis 17:1-2*

### Genesis 13-23, key verse 17:1

**Timeline, about 2000 BC.** During Abraham's life, the areas were ruled by Egypt and the Pharaohs, the Sphinx and great Pyramids are built, and the Bronze Age is in high gear.

**Key personalities:** God, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and a Promise Land.

Abraham *itches his tent* to demonstrate that he follows God. He becomes the example of impudence, producing the thorn in his heritage's side, as well as his doubts and saying his wife was his sister, demonstrated his authenticity to the "regular" people (as we all are.) We all make mistakes, and God is there with his forgiveness and restoration. At the end of the day, He is faithful—we can be, too!

God fulfilled this promise while, at the same time, Abram had to learn patience, faith, and trust in God. Such as with oaths: when one takes an oath, something greater is sought to bind him or her to it. We are bonded to God by His work and our faith in response. God is above oaths as an oath is something you swear by that is greater than you or the oath. Nothing is greater than God so He does not swear by anything since nothing is superior to Him or His Word. Oaths are binding; the oath God gave Abraham and us is even more binding, as nothing can bind or change God. God has given us His oath and promise--His unchangeable love and presence--so we can have courage and confidence in Him and the faith and life that He gives.

Sarai laughed at God's message that she would give birth and names her son Isaac (meaning 'laughter') as a reminder that she had to learn God's providence, trust in His provision and to temper her anger.

### Key Happenings, an Offering of Faith!

**Chaps. 13, 14; Lot and Abram separate.** Their wealth becomes so overwhelming; there was not enough pasture land to feed both of the herds. Abram gives Lot a choice and Lot chose unwisely, leaves his herds, and abandons his call and purpose to live in a sinful city.

- **Altar.** Abraham built altars to show his focus, devotion to the One True God. It helped center and 'pitched his tent' meaning placed his focus onto God as Lord Almighty, to place Him first and foremost over all things, thoughts, aspersions and desires. This is the pattern to the mature Christian (Gen. 12:8).
- **Lot** ran to a city of sin, yet was called a "righteous man," even though he performed the dubious action of offering his daughters to be raped, not to mention what happened to his wealth and what he was doing in that city. This is very perplexing. Perhaps hospitality customs, a code of honor, and the honor of entertaining and protecting the angels when the city folk wanted to rape them was greater than the rights and honor of women back then. Later on, Lot allowed his daughters to

rape him twice to produce sons, thinking the world was ended and they were all that was left. Thus, maybe he just was not wise like Abraham and acted with good intentions, and, even though he was wrong, thought he was doing the right thing. Perhaps he was forgiven; perhaps the veracity of his life was good. In any case, God chose him to be righteous by grace just as he has done with us. Perhaps God honored Abraham's intercession for him. Take comfort that when we are in Christ, God will deliver us out of temptation and rescue us. How is Lot important? Jesus becomes Lot's descendant through Ruth by Lot's son Moab (Gen. 13: 10-11; 18:23-32; 19:1-17, 30-38; 2 Pet. 2:6-8).

- **Melchizedek.** Meaning a king of peace and righteousness, he is the "antecedent type" as he prefigured the traits and virtues of Jesus Christ. He held offices of both king and priest--very rare. He blessed Abraham and pointed to the priesthood and Christ to come. (Gen. 14:18-20; Psalm 76:2; also stated in *Josephus, Philo* and the *Dead Sea Scrolls* as "Melek the King," as well as an *Egyptian Execration text*, while no more info other than what we already have in the Bible, is a wonderful collaboration and apologetic).
- Why is Melchizedek important? He was a great priest and king and a prototype to Jesus Christ. He is an archetype to how Christ is our Priest as Divine Mediator and Guide. He is like Christ in his traits, role, and manner. As Melchizedek's priesthood was greater than Abraham, so is Christ's greater than all that came before Him. The Levites superseded Melchizedek and Christ supersedes the Levitical Priesthood and He also becomes the Temple. This is set in the context of our trusting confidence of rest in, dependence on, and obedience to Christ--of believing and then trusting in Him, then obeying His precepts so we can have faith and confidence in that faith. In addition, a continual warning is at hand against apostasy, so we take our responsibility of being a Christian seriously! Because we are full of sin, we are unable, on our own, to heed His call or receive His rest. So, we must get the point that we are to progress on to maturity and go deeper with God (Gen. 14; Psalm 110; Heb. 5:6).

**Chap. 15, Covenant With Abram,** look to the *stars*. God gave Abram a call and purpose, an improbable paradox, but without the goods to make it so, or as it seemed. So he had to learn, grow, trust and obey God before the fulfillment of this promise, to be a great nation and the 'seed' of faith for Jews and Christians. Problem? He had no children and his wife Sarai was barren. Yet, it is by faith that Abraham was honored and used to build nations; he obeyed and trusted in God when told to leave his homeland and venture to an alien land that became an inheritance to his descendants (Gal. 3:7-9, 29).

- **Credited as righteousness,** Abraham was saved by faith, not works, a prelude to God's grace before he was circumcised. As faith, not works, provides righteousness, faith, not ritual or religion, nor is it wages we earn that we can brag about (Gen 15:6; Gal. 3:11; Rom. 4:1-25; 7:18; James 2:21-26).
- **Chap 16, Hagar and Ishmael.** Hagar seeks to be faithful, and God reaches out to her. Sari becomes impatient and offers Abraham Hagar. Then, he used her to father a son, because he also ran out of patience. They had to learn that patience and faith go together. Hagar was wronged by Abraham and Sarah when she was forced out by Sarah, so she runs. In her desperation, God intercedes and she responds by saying, "the God who sees me." This expression shows how Hagar finds protection and provisions in the desert at the spring, Beer-lahai-roi. She addressed Yahweh with respect with this title, which means the God who opens our eyes. He has opened your eyes, but have you seen?

- **Ishmael** grows in stature and his betrayal turns into anger; resentment and bitterness leads to his life of vileness, and he and his descendents through today become the vile antagonists to Abraham's descendants. Conflict and strife will continue to the end of days.

**Chap, 17, The Covenant of Circumcision.** This was a practice to show their faith outwardly by having their male genitals cropped, which also prevented disease and made relations more pleasant. Conversely, we are to show our faith outwardly from having it inwardly.

- **Circumcision** is the removal of the foreskin of the male reproductive organ and was an ornamental seal of the righteousness of faith and became a sign, brand and tag to set apart and, even comfort, the Jews. Circumcision does not save, nor does baptism, as Abraham was justified before circumcision, so he can be the 'father' of all believers, both Jew and Christian. Thus circumcision is the 'symbol'--not the action--that creates and demonstrates faith. The 'promise' was not given to Abraham through the Law either, because the Levitical law was not established yet. Later, Moses and the prophets complained that the Jews were uncircumcised in their hearts by being hypocritical (Lev. 26:42; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26; Isa. 51:7).
- **Abraham.** God changes Abram's name (ironically meaning "exalted father") to Abraham, meaning "multitude"--the father of many nations, and Sarai (that meant "contentious") to Sarah, meaning "princess", mother of nations. Sarai had to learn God's providence, trust in His provision and to temper her anger.
- **Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness**, at least 14 years before he was circumcised; having taken place before Ishmael's birth, at which time he was 86 years old, and the other when Ishmael was 13 years of age, and Abraham 99 (Gen. 15:5, 6; 16; 16:1-3; 17:1; 10, 23-27; John 1:40-42; Acts 10:47; Rom. 2:25-29; 1 Cor. 7:18- 19; Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

**Chap 18-19.** God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; the cities convey the image of the embodiment of ultimate sin (Gen. 19; 32:32; Isa. 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer. 23:14; 50:40; Lam. 4:6; Ezek. 16:46; Zeph. 2:9).

- **Sodom and Gomorrah** became the symbol of the most horrifying judgment, 'fire and brimstone' ever seen in response to the sins of man having gone way out of control. Sodom rejected God's messengers, and this was far less than rejecting Christ and His followers. God will destroy those who are wicked! Justly and righteously, as He is God and Creator. As we look at church history and what goes on today, the man and the devil continue the work of evil and are persistent in assaulting the work of our Lord and what He calls us to be doing in the world!

**Chap 21-22, the Birth of Isaac**, the promise begins to be fulfilled! Isaac meant "laughter" of great joy. Then, the big test: God told Abram to do something unthinkable, as previously He changed his name to Abraham, meaning one who will have many children. He is called to offer up his son Isaac to God. Isaac grew up to love and honor God with confidence, because he knew what God was yet to do. His promise was secure. His son Jacob also lived a life of faith and kept the blessing of God flowing to his son Joseph, whose descendants would come back to inherit and take over the promise land. Each of these people demonstrated a life of faith lived out (John 8:56; Rom. 15:13).

- **Offered up Isaac.** This was the ultimate test of faith that models what God would do for us to come-offer His Son. Abraham waited a lifetime to have children and when he finally had one, God asked for him. As he was in the act of the sacrifice, God interrupted and intervened to save the son, just as He intervenes to offer His Son for us. He did this to see if Abraham's faith was real or just pretentious, and if his confidence was in God or just in what He had provided. Perhaps,

Abraham was confident that God would raise Isaac from the dead. God does not tempt us to see us fail; He seeks to see if we are real. This is why He is the prototypical man of faith for all to emulate. This place, 'Moriah,' becomes the place Solomon is to build the Temple and outside where Jesus teaches and is crucified (Gen. 15:2; 17:20-21; 22:1-18; 2 Chron. 3:1; John 3:16; Rom 8:32; Heb. 13:20).

- OT the promise was by faith and not of works. **This points us to a crucial Christian theological point: justification is by faith alone, by grace alone.** This is illustrated and even proved logically by using the example of Abraham.

**Key Takeaway:** This passage shows us the importance of our spiritual growth set in the context of the power of God and His Word and as heirs to the Promise. Let us look to the faith of Noah and Abraham and how we can be that faithful in the midst of cultural hatred toward us, and not buy into pride or prejudice! (Psalm 8; 1 Cor. 4:2; Gal. 26-29)

**The foreshadow of Jesus Christ?** Abraham is the 'seed' depicting how we belong and respond to Christ. He was an early example of faith by grace, that of God directly interceding and saving a person, not because of their worth, because we have none, but for His purpose and love (Psalm 89:15; Gal. 3:7-9, 29).

### Questions to Ponder

1. When God changed Abram's name to Abraham, it meant he was a great father, yet he had no children. How would you feel, what would you do if this happened to you?
2. How did Abraham's faith showed confidence in God, His provision, and promise?
3. What do these passages teach us about trusting in God's timing?
4. Why do you think that Sarah laughed at God's message that she would give birth? Why does she name her son Isaac, meaning laughter?
5. How would you explain Ishmael? Do you see the 4,000 year problem of the descendents of Abraham, now the Jew against the decedents of Ishmael, now Muslim?
6. What has God done to help craft your faith and reliance?
7. How would you contrast a faith that is real with one that is just pretentious?
8. How does confidence in God build your faith, trust and obedience even in dire times?
9. Why do you think God is more concerned with faith over works?
10. What does your church need to do to model a more righteousness, faith, not ritual or religion?
11. What do you need to do to take your responsibility of being a Christian seriously?
12. How does patience and faith go together? What do you need to learn in this?