



The Life of Abraham: Seventeen Studies with Homilies

By Dr. Mark Barber

The Life of Abraham: Part 1: The Call

Genesis 12:1-9

Introduction

We begin today with the study of Abraham who is one of the most important persons who ever lived. He is revered by Islam, Judaism, and Christianity alike. The call of Abraham marks a huge development in God's plan of redemption of the earth from the curse which resulted from the fall of Adam and Eve,

The book of Genesis shows five blessings which God gave to the human race. He breathed life into them, a life which was made in the image of God. He gave Adam dominion over creation. He gave Adam and Eve land, a garden. He gave them fellowship with Him as well as human companionship. Finally, he gave them the means to create children to fill the land he had given them.. All of these were affected by the fall. But God chose to redeem rather than destroy. He gave Eve a promise of a special child who would come in Genesis 3:15. After this, Adam and Eve were cast from the land. They lost control over the earth in that briars, thorns, and hard work would be necessary. Life would be limited by death, God would not walk with them like before in the cool of the day, and human companionship would be marked by strife. Finally, the offspring would be under threat from harm. This threat would come from within, such as the murder of Abel by Cain, and from wild beasts and by storms and other phenomena.

The whole of the Bible can be seen as God working to redeem man from this fivefold curse to the fivefold blessing. This work as we shall see is demonstrated in the life of Abraham. The promises given to Abraham involve the next unfolding of God's great plan.

We might ask: "Why did God choose Abraham? Did he have more insight to the ways of God than his peers? Was he chosen because Abraham was a good man? Or did God choose Him because He knew in advance that Abraham would obey. Let us see.

Joshua 24:2 gives us an important clue to the “before” picture of Abraham. Joshua who was near death reminded Israel that Abraham and his ancestors worshiped other gods. This means that Abraham was an idolater when the LORD called him. Joshua emphasizes the mercy of God to Abraham as the reason Abraham was chosen. So God’s call was not a reward for Abraham’s good works. Instead, the call given to Abraham was solely by God’s unmerited favor which we call grace. All of God’s works proceed from grace. One can even say that even the fivefold blessing given to Adam and Eve was an act of grace. After all, they hadn’t done anything to deserve these as they did not even exist at this point to deserve either good or ill. They are also by grace because God foreknew that Adam and Eve would disobey.

The first mention of Abraham occurs in Genesis 11:26 when we are introduced to him by his original name of Abram which means “Father of the High Place” or perhaps “Exalted Father.” This means that he was a man of prominence in the city of Ur of the Caldees. Ur was near Babylon and is located in what is today called “Iraq”. It was a very advanced city for its time and gained great wealth through trade. The civilization there rivaled that of Egypt. There were magnificent pagan temples there, and some think that Abram was a priest of the moon goddess there, although we have no proof of this.

We also know that Abram married his half-sister Sarai who would later be called Sarah. It mentions in 11:30 that Sarai was barren and had no child. This is the first mention of a threat to Abraham’s posterity. He had no child. In verse 31, it says that Abram’s father for some reason left this magnificent city to a border town named Haran and took his family with him. Abram’s brother had died and left a son named Lot in his father’s and later Abram’s care. Lot would become Abram’s heir if He and Sarai continued childless. While Abram’s father lived at the border of Canaan in the town of Haran, he died, leaving Abram as head of the clan.

Exposition of the Text

Chapter 12 represents a sea change in Abram, Sarai, and Lot’s lives as well as for the entire human race. The voice of the LORD had been silent for a long time. The

human race after Noah had forgotten the LORD and were worshipping other gods. No one was expecting what happened next, most of all Abram and Sarai. The LORD came to Abram and called him to leave the land of Haran and to go to another land which He would show him. Here there is the promise given to Abram of a restored land and dominion over it. The promise came with few specifics. What kind of land was it? Where? Abram was summoned to follow the LORD on faith. If as I suspect Abram did not know the LORD or His voice prior to this point, this would have been quite a shock to Abram. He would gain title from a strange to a land he had not seen before and would have dominion and influence over the people there, wherever there was.

Some have speculated what Sarai might have said to Abram when he said to pack their bags. Perhaps she might have thought at first that they would be returning to Ur and civilization. Did they know that they would spend the rest of their lives as wanderers without any fixed citizenship? As Abram was now head of the clan, she had to submit to his authority as did Lot. So this special family of Abram, Sarai, and their adopted son, Lot with all their servants left for this mysterious land.

In verse six, the wanderings of Abraham came to a temporary pause near a place called Beth-El which means the “house of God”. The text mentions that the Canaanite was in the land which means that the land belonged to them. This would be a threat to the fulfilment of God’s promise of the land as it was in the possession of another. There the LORD appears to Abram once more and broadens the promise. He specifies that this was the land he promised Abraham. But He does not promise this to Abram directly. Instead it would become the possession of his “seed” after Him. In fact, the only part of this land he would ever own was the family burial plot in Hebron.

We also see another escalation of God’s promise to Abram in the mention of his seed. Abram and Sarai were barren. Would Lot become the heir to the land? This is the only “seed” that Abram and Sarai knew. Again, we would love to have been party to the dinner conversation that night. Here they were. It was their land and yet it wasn’t. Because the best land was occupied by the Canaanite merchants and farmers, Abram and Sarai would have to make a living as nomads raising sheep and cattle at the edge of the desert. What would you think if in response to your

boss that you went out to some “great opportunity” with the expectation of promotion and saw this instead? Abram and Sarai were human. Did they feel a sense of letdown? Had they made a mistake? Did the LORD really call them? Who was this LORD anyway?

We know from Abram and Sarai’s later actions that they had difficulties with God’s promises in the face of challenging circumstances. In this way, they were no different than us. We like to see the Old Testament saints as great heroes of the faith, but the bible emphasizes that they were human, just like us. James in his epistle reminds us that even the great Elijah who called fire down from heaven was a man of like passions. And we see this in 1 Kings that after the great Mt. Carmel experience that he retires in despair of his life running from Jezebel. Yet God’s grace shone brightly in the lives of Abraham, Sarah, David, Elijah, and others. In spite of our weaknesses, God’s grace can shine through us as well.

At first, Abram did not seem to take the news as a disappointment. He pitched his tent. He understood that his family would be wanderers. He built an altar to the LORD and called upon His name. From there, he drifted farther south to a place we know today as the Negev which was dry, barren wilderness. This land was a difficult place to eke out a living as a shepherd even in good times. Those green pastures of the shepherd we imagine when we hear the 23rd Psalm are vastly different than the reality that Palestinian shepherds face in the twisted, torturous land they had to raise sheep. The green pastures were occasional shoots caused by infrequent rain. Flash floods were a concern there as well as finding water for the livestock. Instead of a land flowing with milk and honey, Abram and Sarai came to a land which on the surface suffered double from the curse of the land pronounced by on the land, a land of briers and thorns and hard labor.

So we leave off here today with Abram and Sarai trying to make the best of a situation which did not seem all that promising. But perhaps by their hard work, they could make something of it. They had received a promise of land which wasn’t all that promising. They had a promise of influence and dominion, but their lack of influence in the land relegated them to have influence over jackals, hyenas, and other wild animals in the wilderness. They had been promised an heir, but the

only option at this point was their nephew, someone who we shall later see would be a poor choice of an heir. How long will they be able to keep up a brave front?

Homily

Today, we are surrounded by a name it and claim it theology. This so-called gospel promises your best life now. The proponents of this gospel go about saying that Jesus has already redeemed us fully from the curse. Therefore, we are to experience the fivefold blessing of life, fellowship with God and man", land and possessions, influence, and children. If your life does not measure up to these standards, it is because you lack faith in God's promises. The answer to receiving these blessings is to work up faith in the middle of your briar patch. The emphasis is on what you need to do.

However, I would like to ask: Were Abram and Sarai stuck out in the middle of the wilderness because they were out of the will of God, because they lacked faith? The Bible seems to indicate that they were right where God needed them at this time. In fact, the real troubles in the life of Abram and Sarai seemed to occur when they took matters into their own hands. Things might not seem so rosy for you right now and you may be mightily shaken in your situation. But does this mean that God is punishing you for your lack of faith? We should not come to any hasty conclusions based upon our standing in life whether good or ill. It just may be that you are exactly where the LORD wants you right now.

The life of faith is one where God leads you into the promises of a restored creation and blessing. But we must see these promises at a distance. Meanwhile, we must persevere in this land as pilgrims and strangers. We may never receive these promises in this life. Like so many other pilgrims have had to strike their earthly tabernacle here and be planted in the ground which is their only and last possession in this life. But those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus know that the full promise will someday be theirs. This causes us to look forward to that city.

The Life of Abraham, Part 2: The Egyptian Detour

Genesis 12:10-20

Introduction

In the last episode we saw Abram and Sarai on the backside of the wilderness trying to scratch out a meager living and I think wondering about they had understood God correctly. When Moses wrote down this account of Abram, he was in the wilderness outside the same Promised Land. Like Abram, he knew he would never get to possess it, but Moses also hoped in the promise of God that it would belong to those who came after him. Abraham would spend the last hundred years wandering around the edges of the land just had Moses had spent the last eighty years of his life chasing the same promise. But at least Moses felt the nearness of the fulfillment at the end.

Abraham shares many similar experiences with the wilderness generation who had spent 40 years in the Negev in meager surroundings. All of the generation who came out with Moses except Caleb and Joshua would die there in the wilderness. The knowledge of Abraham would have encouraged that nation to keep pressing on towards receiving God's promises for them.

Exposition of the Text

In this lesson we are told that famine had come to the land. Abram and Sarai who lived on the margins of the desert would have been the first to feel its effects. Grazing was scarce and so was water. The family was facing starvation if they stayed. This presented a real crisis of faith. Their lives were threatened. Family harmony was threatened. Lot, who at that time appeared to be the promised seed was threatened. Abram in increasing poverty was losing power among the people. Finally, their ability to stay in the land was threatened.

At some point, Abram took his family to Egypt, a journey that would be repeated by his grandson Jacob's family. Egypt would have probably been known by Abram

when he was living in Ur. Like Ur, Egypt had an advanced civilization. And even if he hadn't the Canaanites who were merchants could have told him about it. Most of the pyramids had been built by this time. The regular yearly flood of the Nile ensured a stable and abundant food supply. Perhaps Abram had misunderstood the Lord, he thought. Instead of going south into the wilderness, he should have gone southwest. This is the same kind of adjustments we make in our own lives when we feel we have missed God's blessing.

How inspiring Egypt must have appeared to the poor and hungry family as they eyed Egypt on the horizon. Here was a land with abundant food to sustain life and the opportunity for better company than sheep and wolves. But Abram already sensed a threat. He was going to be a stranger in a foreign land who happened to have a beautiful sixty-five year old wife. He feared that he would be killed and his wife taken.

So the scheme Abram now hatches is an attempt to save him from death as well as to gain influence in the land. He tells Sarai to tell the Egyptians that they were brother and sister, which was a half-truth. She must have been extremely good-looking because word of her beauty got the Pharaoh who summoned her for the harem. And just as Abram plotted, Pharaoh who wanted to woo Sarai treated Abram very well. Abram gained in property and status. There was only one large problem with the scheme. God had promised Abraham children and by this he meant more than Lot or one of Abram's servants. Being someone else's wife was surely a threat to the promised seed, and God acted quickly before such a union was consummated. He sent plagues among the Egyptians and allowed Pharaoh to make the association between the plagues and his taking of Sarai. The truth that Abram and Sarai were man and wife was also made known to him. He summoned them and confronted Abram with the truth. Then he expelled them from Egypt and had his men escort them out with all of their possessions.

We must take a moment and reflect on this story. In it we see the story of the Exodus generation all over again, except this was four hundred years in advance. Hunger drove Jacob to Egypt. Israel through Joseph was raised to high authority in Egypt. They had land in Goshen. They had for some time a good life in Egypt. Their seed multiplied greatly. Then they fell from Pharaoh's favor. God sent

plagues. Pharaoh summons Moses and expels Israel from Egypt and all they had. One should immediately see that this trip of Abram to Egypt was part of the greater plan for the children of Israel. By reading the story of Abram, the generation of the wilderness who was about to enter into Canaan would see their lives tied up in that of their ancestor Abraham. This is one of the many patterns we see in the bible which helps us discern God's plan.

We see this in the New Testament book of Hebrews. Many in the congregation had suffered persecution which apparently led to imprisonment of some of them and confiscation of their goods. They were cast out of the cities into the waste places where other Christians took the risk of housing and feeding them. The writer of Hebrews encourages them in the faith to look at all the examples from the Old Testament as well as the firm resolve of the early leaders and apostles.

Homily

The life of Abraham is also a meant by which we can interpret our own journey today. Like Abraham, we too are pilgrims on this earth. If we are true to Christ, then we have to face the reality of the loss of our early blessings. There are many Christians who are in fear of their lives due to persecution. Their families are threatened. In some cases their children are taken away from them by the state. There is pressure to push Christ out of the public arena, even in this country which claims to tolerate religion and guarantee religious rights. Instead of having privilege and dominion, we are having to get used to the opposite. It is hard to see this land anymore as being a Christian country. If things continue, Christians will have to flee to the back side of some desert.

In other words, the world we live in looks increasingly cursed. The world tempts us that it provides the blessings only God can give. They promise life even as millions of infants are being killed like the Egyptians tried to do with the Israelite babies. They promise fellowship and dominion, but just how much control do the Justin Bieber's of this world really have? Their own lives are spinning out of control. They claim community, but what a cursed community. They promise wealth to those who will follow their ways, but just how many people are really finding it?

We look at the glitz and glitter promised us by Tinseltown, but how empty are the promises.

If we think that if we are undergoing difficulty right now, we must not think that we are out of the will of God. After all, the Scripture promises that all who would live godly lives in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. We may think that Egypt looks promising as though advanced technology and standards of living equals true prosperity. We must instead look to God who gives us life, eternal life. We must look for the land that God has promised us, the New Jerusalem. We must rest in God's promise that he has made us priests and a kingdom as well. We must see in the church that we belong to a large family and enjoy each other's fellowship as well as that of God. All of the five blessings bestowed upon Adam at creation belong to us in Jesus Christ.

We are at the edge of the wilderness which means we are also at the edge of the Land of Promise. We should live every day in the expectation that today might be the day the Lord returns and we take full possession. This is the hope that sustains us, our manna from heaven. We must be like Abraham who looked for a city, whose builder and maker is God. This is the land in which we shall find rest from our labor.

The Bible tells us that the people we call heroes in the Old Testament are recorded as examples for us to follow. This of course does not mean we should follow them into error. But we like them are prone to wander and leave the God we love. We will find ourselves in Egypt, having been lured there by the siren song of the world. When we do find ourselves there, let us remember that it is God who is the true hero. He came to the rescue of his all too human saints, and He will do the same for us. His promise depends upon His faithfulness and not ours. We will see again and again through our study of Abraham how the faithful Lord of the covenant extricates Abram from his mistakes and blesses him.

Abram and his family have been expelled from Egypt and all they had. They were headed back to the wilderness. God will be there to meet them.

The Life of Abraham, Part 3: Lot is not the Heir

Genesis 13:1-18

Introduction

In the last lesson, we left Abram heading back to the desert, having been expelled from Egypt with all he possessed. And we can see from the beginning of the text today that Abram managed to spoil the Egyptians in much the same way that the Children of Israel under Moses would later do. We know that the gold of Egypt became a snare to the wilderness generation. Eventually they would make a golden calf out of it and bow down to it rather than God. And God punished them severely for their idolatry. The idol was ground up and the people made to eat the bitterness of their sin. Many died as a result. Did Abraham and his family fare any better with the wealth of Egypt? Let us see.

Exposition of the Text

The text says that Abram went back to the last place where God had spoken to him. This is always a good idea after one has gotten off the track. When one is lost, don't go forward in the hopes of finding the way out. Go back to common ground. And this is just what Abraham did. He went back to Bethel which means "House of God", a place where his grandson Jacob who was fleeing home to go to a strange land to him met God and saw the ladder of angels going between earth and heaven. Bethel was a very special place for Abraham and his family. There he pitched his tent of wandering again, having left the houses of Egypt. There it says that Abram called again on the name of Yahweh.

The text does not say that God immediately answered Abram's prayer. Instead it focuses on just how wealthy both Abram and his nephew and supposed heir Lot had become. They had been blessed with the wealth of Egypt to the point of pain. One of the blessings of God which was fellowship with God and family was again to be put to a severe test.

Strife broke out within the family. Abram's and Lot's servant fought for possession of the limited water supply. There was not enough grazing and water for their huge herds. They had suffered the curse of affluenza. Affluenza is a curse to today's society as much as it has been a curse throughout history. It has even been recently used as an excuse for murder. The fight over family possessions has caused grievous hurt to heirs and has resulted in brothers and sisters fighting one another in courts. For the blessing of Egypt, families have failed to see the true treasure they share as family.

We can think of the farmer Jesus talks about in Luke who had such a great harvest that he felt the need to tear down his barns to build bigger ones. Then he was going to live the easy life, or so he thought. He did not know that he had an appointment that very day with death, a death doubly cursed as it is implied that there would be strife among the heirs, who would be the heir.

The combined wealth of Egypt which Abram and Lot had gained in Egypt was about to become a great snare with tragic results. If they had only realized that God's blessing of family is greater than the promises of worldly wealth, they could have given away the excess to the Canaanites if necessary. They would have been far better off with less. They would still have had each other as well as enough to live comfortably on. But before we get to judgmental, we might want to consider ourselves in relation to all the wealth we grasp for.

Abram had not heard back from God, so he relied on a practical solution to the matter. Abram and Lot would have to split up. The matter seemed agreeable to Lot as well. We must remember at this point that Lot would have been the heir to all Abram had including the promises. But Lot saw things like Esau and despised the blessing of God which was rightfully his for what was no better than a cup of soup in relation. He was no Jacob who would cling on and on with the angel until he received the desired blessing.

So Abram also erred in putting the promise of God up to the choice of Lot. The way things were done in the Ancient Near East was that the more powerful of the two would allow the lesser to make the choice, knowing well that the lesser who understood the rules would take the lesser part. But Lot lifted his eyes up and saw

the well watered plain of Jordan. In those days, the area around Sodom was more lush than in our time, and archaeology points this out as well. To Lot, the land seemed like what he had heard about the Garden of Eden. Surely, this was the Promised Land, he thought.

So against the convention of that day, Lot chose what he thought was the best portion. But this was not the Promised Land. That land was the land upon which Abram was standing. So Lot took his inheritance early and wasted it in a strange land that would become a tragic snare for him and his family. In the end, they would be no better off than the Prodigal Son who found himself desiring pig slop. Unlike the Prodigal, however, there was no return trip. He would die in that land, living in fear with his daughters and sons by incest in a cave. So Lot chose the wrong inheritance and went to Sodom. He was no longer heir to Abram. What he lusted after in this world had become his undoing.

In verse 14, we have Abraham and Sarai alone in what appeared to be a much poorer land than the one Lot had taken. But it is at this point that the LORD makes his appearance. I don't know if Abram had felt betrayed by his nephew or not; it does not matter. What matters is that the promises of God always will turn out to be for the best despite current appearances. God now further defines the promise he first gave to Abram. Look as far in every direction as you can. All this land is yours and will belong to your offspring, an offspring as great as the dust of the earth.

From this promise, we have confirmation that Lot was not to be the heir. Abram and Sarai, even though they were now alone, old, and childless in a foreign land which was theirs and not yet theirs, were going to be blessed with seed. This promise would soon come under a test of its own. Nothing had materially changed for them since the initial call other than a little bit more definition from God as to the vast extent. They could look in every direction to a land which was barren in the places no one lived and controlled by others in places which were desirable. In other words, the lands they could freely possess were barren and unfruitful and the places that they might desire was beyond their means of attainment.

Homily

It is easy to identify with Abram. And we can understand the choice Lot made as well. How many children try to escape the poverty of rural areas to find their way in the large cities?. And how great a cost they pay. They separate from family and community and thing gold and silver can replace it. And so often they make these kinds of choices with our blessing in the same way that Lot left with Abram's blessing. Have we failed to realize what true riches are and that all true blessing does not come from the hand of man, but from God. And great tragedy is the result of our actions.

We must know from where our true riches and value come from. We sing the song that "We have a home in glory land that outshines the sun...way beyond the blue." But this promise seems to us to be just that—way beyond the blue. We want to make the promises of God happen in the here and now. We try to find the Promised Land in the here and now. Perhaps it is Atlanta or for the Clampetts, Beverly Hills, but "blue heaven is a place on earth." Lot thought he had found the Garden of Eden, but all he found there was snakes that he could not charm.

We must wait on the Lord and call upon him like Abram did. And we need to keep on calling until we hear from him and not think that "God's work must truly be our own". It takes a great deal of patience to wait on God, but God's promises are sure and worth the wait. We need not settle for the second hand promises of the world who reached out to the Prodigal as long as he had resources to suck dry. But where were the friends when the Prodigal ran out of his inheritance? We can know that unlike the world that Jesus loves us, and we know this because the bible tells us so. He so loved us that he laid down His life on Calvary so that if anyone would believe God's promises would have eternal life with Him.

Let us follow the words of Martin Luther in "A Mighty Fortress is Our God: "Let goods and kindred go. This mortal life also. The body they may kill. God's truth abideth still. His kingdom is for ever." Don't let a world filled with devils steal the blessing from God which is yours. As Luther also say in the hymn: "God hath willed His truth to triumph through us." Luther had to be sure of his faith as his life was in constant jeopardy and wrote this mighty hymn to bolster our faith in

times of trouble Luther rested in Jesus promise; “Fear not little flock, for it is God’s will to give you the kingdom. Amen.

The Life of Abraham, Part 4: Abraham Meets Melchizedek

Genesis 14:1-24

Introduction

In the last lesson, we were met with the ominous words that the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked before the LORD. Yet Lot chose to live in a house there rather than pitch his tent on the backside of the desert. If one were to pick up clues from the narrative, one would conclude that trouble was coming to Lot. And that turns out to be a correct assumption. Lot had chosen his inheritance among wicked men rather than the inheritance of God through Abram. He went down to Sodom thinking he could live the easy life. He had no clue how wrong he was. He was about to find out.

Exposition of the Text

The trouble started when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and their confederates refused to pay tribute to a group of stronger states in the Middle East. Am-Raphel and four other kings went down to Sodom to collect their tribute by force. In the battle that ensued, the confederation led by Sodom lost and their cities were plundered of their valuables. This episode would have little importance in a Middle East which for centuries before and since had suffered through squabbles like this one except for the fact that Lot was taken prisoner to serve as a slave and his goods were taken from him. All of the riches which had caused strife with Abram's household were gone.

Abraham got wind of this and immediately sought a military alliance with some of his neighbors and marched against the five kings. By this time, we get an idea of Abram's riches in that he could equip 318 of his servants for war and his influence was at the point in the community that he could enlist help. Abram and his men ambushed these five kings on their way back home by night near Damascus and soundly defeated them. He was able to recover all of the goods and those who had

been taken to be slaves. Among these captives was his nephew Lot who is now called a brother rather than a nephew.

The king of Sodom came out from the slime pit that he had been mired in to meet Abraham. By the laws of convention in the Middle East, Abram was entitled to all the spoil but had to return the citizens. If Abram had wished, he could have made himself exceedingly rich. But perhaps Abram had started to learn the trouble that possessions can bring, especially when in great excess of what one needed to live. It had caused strife in his family, and Lot was lost as a result. So when the king of Sodom reminded him of the rules, that he could keep the stuff but had to return the captives, Abram flatly refused to take as much as a dime. He did not want it known that the king of Sodom had made Abram rich. However, the obligation he put on himself not to take any plunder was not binding on his confederates. His choice could not bind their rights to the spoil. So he allows Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre their share of the spoil as agreed with Abram beforehand. This might have been a sizable chunk of the goods of Sodom. Abram though refused his share and returned it. Part of the plunder included Lot's goods, so Lot could go home again to Sodom with at least a portion of his former estate.

Lot got to go the home he had chosen. However, his troubles were just starting. The city was still extremely wicked before the LORD. A greater king would come later to spoil them forever.

What makes the passage significant, however, is not the king of Sodom, but another king. The text says in verse 18 that a king named Melchizedek met Abram who was the king of Salem. The king's name means "king of righteousness" and He was the king of Salem or Jerusalem which means "peace". Who was this King of Righteousness and King of Peace? Theologians have speculated for centuries over this king's identity.

Before going further in speculating over this man, let us see what is recorded about him. It says that he brought bread and wine with him. As bread and wine were staples of the diet in the Middle East, it could mean no more than that he brought lunch. And it says that this king was also a priest to the Most High God, the Lord of Heaven and Earth. As a priest, he pronounced a blessing on Abram for

belonging to God as well as blessed God for His deliverance of Abram from his enemies. Abram responded by paying tithes of all his goods.

Christian interpreters have always been fascinated by the parallels between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ. They see the bread and wine as being the elements of communion and pointing to Jesus' provision of bread and wine representing His body and blood. They also see that what Jesus did was the deliverance of the children of Abraham from the enemies of Satan, sin, and death. Jesus is the prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6-7 in which He is called "Prince of Peace". He is the rightful King of the New Jerusalem. He alone is the "King of Righteousness".

The writer of the Book of Hebrews takes special notice of the comparison. He makes notice that there is no mention of Melchizedek's birth or death. He was without beginning or end. He also notices the translation of his name and of the city he was king over. He also noticed the payment of tithes which shows that all of Abraham's children including Levi paid tithes to this priest who is greater than the later one of Aaron. He notices that Melchizedek was superior to Abraham in his pronouncement of blessing on Abraham.

Some see Melchizedek as a type of Christ, a pointer in the Old Testament to the coming Christ. This view sees Melchizedek as a man pointing to a greater fulfillment. However, others see Melchizedek as an Old Testament appearance of Christ. No mere human being, however great, has a right to the titles and privilege Melchizedek has. His superiority to Abraham is pointed out in Hebrews in that the lesser is always blessed by the greater. But Melchizedek also blesses God. Is Melchizedek by that logic greater than the Most High God? This would seem to be a major flaw in Hebrew's argument except that it would not be a problem if Melchizedek was Christ. We know Him as being equal with the Father and the Spirit. If he can swear by His own name because there is none greater. Then He can bless himself as well.

Jesus records in the Gospel of John that Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day, did see it and was glad. How could this be, the Jews replied to that assertion seeing Abraham has been dead a long time and you are not yet fifty years old? But if this was an Old Testament appearance of Christ, then what Jesus said to the Jews

would make sense. Jesus, who is Prophet, Priest, and King revealed himself to Abraham.

We have talked in this study about the fivefold blessing of life, fellowship, land, seed, and dominion being lost in the fall. This was as Milton noted was Paradise Lost. The rest of the Bible talks about the God who seeks to redeem and rescue humankind from the consequences of this fall. Here in this passage we see the rescue of Lot from the consequences of his decision to go to Sodom. Lot did not learn his lesson and returned to Sodom. God would have to deliverer him again, but this time as through fire. Lot would lose everything but his daughters. If Melchizedek is an Old Testament appearance of Jesus, then we see a greater fellowship of Abraham with God and a promise that the inheritance of this great King would be Abraham's inheritance as well. Because Abraham belonged to the Most High God, he was blessed, which means he is a partaker in the dominion or Kingdom of God.

There will be many more twists and turns in the story of Abraham. He still will show his human weakness even though he has been so abundantly blessed. But it is God who will keep him on the journey and not Abraham's ingenuity.

Homily

What can we apply from this passage in the life of Abraham to our situation today? First of all, we must understand that because we are Christians, we are partakers of the same promise that Abraham was given. We are blessed and restored in Jesus Christ. Like Abraham at this point of his journey of faith, we too have a way to travel before the completeness of the promises are ours in the Kingdom of Heaven. Like Abraham would make some very foolish mistakes in the future, we too will make wrong turns in our life. As much as we would like to think that our sinning is a thing of the past, we have to face every day that we are not yet perfect, even though the price of our redemption has been fully paid for.

So let us not lose heart on our journey. We may even find ourselves like Lot in a bad situation of our own making. Lot too was delivered in the end as one who had

lost all reward. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians to take care how we build on the only foundation for our lives, which is Jesus Christ. Although Paul refers this to himself and Apollos, it also refers to us and our work of ministry. We need to completely trust that God who has begun a good work in us will continue it until the day of Jesus Christ. Abraham serves as a better model than Lot, but it isn't about Abraham or Lot. It is about the Lord who has redeemed us unto himself. We are not blessed because we are good people. As His children, we should reflect His glory by resembling Him in our good conduct. However, what makes us blessed is that we belong to Him. We are His possession and He is our inheritance. Let us always be thankful and glorify God for the great things He has done.

The Life of Abraham, Part 5: You're Going to be a Dad

Genesis 15:1-6

Introduction

In the last lesson, God had given a great victory over those who had captured his nephew Lot. In this episode, Abraham had met this shadowy person named Melchizedek, one greater than Abraham who blessed him for his belonging to the Most High God, the Possessor of Heaven and Earth. Lot returned to Sodom for a short while and Abraham returned home.

The journey of Abraham is part of God's great and unfolding drama of the redemption of creation and the human beings he had created in His image. The final conclusion of this redemption will occur in the kingdom of God, a land God has reserved for his people. Here they will have eternal life, a life marked by its quality as much as its unending duration. We will then have fellowship in strife less love with each other and with God. We shall realize the fullness of being the children of the most influential Being in the universe.

Exposition of the Text.

In this lesson, we shall see further development of God's promise to Abraham. Yahweh appears to Abram in a vision and promises to protect Abraham's life as well as reminding Abram that God was his great reward. His reward was to be far greater than the stuff that human beings lust after. This is more than material blessing, even though God had blessed Him in that way.

Abram recognizes who has appeared to him and instead of addressing Him by His name Yahweh, but rather by His title as Lord God. It is almost the response of a child about to ask his father for something. He emphasizes the relationship he has with his father. In this case, Abram addresses God as his superior and himself as God's client. This implies a contractual obligation between benefactor and client. The benefactor was honored in return for his obligation to take care of his client.

So this tells us that Abraham is reminding God of His promises to Abraham. He had heard the promise of his having children and was asking God after many years when he might expect this to happen. This is understandable because Abraham was in his eighties at this point and Sarai his wife past seventy. 'he reminds God of the obvious. He had no heir, not even Lot who had left. Was he going to have to leave all his goods and promises to a foreigner, his servant Eliezer of Damascus? Surely God meant more than that.

God answers Abraham's inquiry by giving Abram more clarity on the promise. Neither Lot nor Eliezer was the heir. God says that Abraham would physically become a father and not an adopter of an heir. Here is the first direct promise of a physical descendant. And this seed would become himself the father of many. He led Abraham outside and asks Abraham to count the stars if he could. He had earlier compared Abraham's descendants as being more than the dust of the earth. I don't know how many stars there are. I surely cannot count them. But God did not just make a little promise to Abraham. What Abraham was asked to believe was simply staggering. From Abraham's current situation it would seem impossible.

How does Abraham respond to this promise? It says that Abraham believed God. And it says that God counted this belief for righteousness. The New Testament brings out the staggering implications of this verse. In particular, Paul in both Roman's and Galatians make much of this statement.

Homily

Paul saw this verse as the very foundation of his argument that we are justified by faith alone and not by works. This promise was seen as a gift to Abraham from God and not a reward for Abraham's good works. Abram is declared righteous in this passage simply on his believing the promise God had given to him. We can see from Abram's life so far that he was not perfect. And we shall see down the road that he was not perfect then either. The promise Abram received was God's free gift to Abram which is called grace.

It is important to understand exactly what grace means. If a person works hard for an employer, he receives his paycheck as a contractual obligation. One earns a paycheck. In no way can a person who has worked for the paycheck be seen as having been “graced” with a paycheck. If we were to use this language to describe one’s receiving a paycheck it would be saying that the man God paid anyway, even though he was lazy and did not really earn it. Paul takes pains to tell us that our salvation in Jesus Christ is a gift of God and not of works. This is one of the most revolutionary ideas that has ever come down to us. It is a staggering promise which is just as staggering as the promise given to Abraham that he would be the father of countless descendants despite his age.

Paul encourages us not to waver in faith but simply believe that God has promised great things for us despite all appearances, in spite of our wickedness and rebellion against God. We should have no expectation of God favoring us so. In fact, there is nothing we could ever do to earn God’s favor and we know it. How many people have thrown themselves against the rocks of despair trying to earn salvation?

Paul was one such person. He belonged at one time to the sect of the Pharisees who tried to rigorously apply the principles of the Law, Writings, and the Prophets to his life. Not only this, but he was the strictest of the strict. If any man could have earned salvation, it was Paul. In fact, he called his conduct blameless as a Pharisee. There was only one problem, and it was a big one. He had become in his zeal one who actively fought against what God had been doing in Christ. Far from being righteous and deserving, he had become the chief of sinners. In fact, instead of deserving salvation, he had become the least qualified to earn it. But Paul recounting his salvation experience dismisses his former life with the word, “but”. “But God, who is rich in mercy” came to him and saved him anyway. It is all by God’s grace and not by our works at all that we are saved. We have no reason to boast.

Martin Luther, the great reformer of the faith was used by God to bring back the message of salvation by grace through faith alone. The church had lost the message of Christ in that it started to emphasize meritorious works. There was still grace, but it was mixed with works. The church became the mediator of grace as though it were managing a bank account. The saints because they did far more good works

than was necessary for their own salvation could deposit these extra works into the church's bank account, making a loan of grace available to those whose works were insufficient. The church had made quite a bit of profit over the trafficking of grace.

Luther entered a monastery with the hopes of earning his salvation. But the harder he tried, the worse a sinner he felt himself. He would go to confession several times a day and felt guilty over whether he was sincere with his confession. He beat himself with whips, fasted, slept naked outside in the snow, and scrubbed the entire monastery with a toothbrush in the attempt to earn favor with God. It was only when he realized that righteousness was a gift from God through faith that Luther felt the weight of the world fall off his shoulder.

The promise of God seems too good to be true. Surely God wants something in return. We have a hard time to simply put forth our hands and receive God's staggering promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. God reckons our faith for the righteousness that we are incapable of. He accepts it as payment in full. No saint earned this. Christ paid for it all in His own blood on the cross. He bore all of our unrighteousness and suffered the wrath of God for our sins. This costly gift of God is offered free of charge. And even the necessary faith to receive this promise is God's gift of grace.

The staggering promise of God to Abraham is a type of God's staggering promise to us in Jesus Christ. Believe this promise and you will be reckoned as righteous in the presence of God. We also learn from God's promise to Abraham that it was also fulfilled in Jesus Christ. According to Paul in the Book of Galatians, Isaac was not the promised seed in the ultimate sense, but Christ. Through Abraham's line, a Son was born by the name of Jesus Christ in a manger in Bethlehem. He was the seed through whom all of the nations would be blessed. We can say that some of Abraham's physical descendants have in some way been a blessing to humankind in various ways. But there has also been a lot of strife between the children of Abraham as well. Only in Jesus Christ is this promise fulfilled to Abraham.

The New Testament tells us that this promise to Abraham was even more stupendous than the promise of a son, as great as that was. It was through Abraham

that the completion of God's plan of redemption would be fulfilled. Adam and Eve lost a garden plot, but we have the promise of the city of God. Adam and Eve lost the privilege of walking with God in the cool of the day, but to us the promise of being with the Lord forever in one eternal day. Adam and Eve ruled over the animals, but we shall judge angels and rule and reign over the entire universe with Jesus Christ. We shall be a part of God's family that outnumbers the stars of heaven and the dust of the earth. We shall know life without end and limits. It is in Jesus that we have this hope.

So I would encourage us all to remind ourselves of God's great promises that He has made and not waver in faith. God has gifted us greatly in Jesus Christ. We sing "Not the labors of our hands, can fulfill thy Law's demands". No amount of zeal can save us. We must simply "to the fountain fly". We need to be washed by the Savior. What a great promise God has given us. Let us simply believe what God has promised like Abraham did, and all is ours. For God will reckon our faith into righteousness so that we might be "faultless to stand before His throne". What a great God we serve! Let us give thanks for his marvelous promise. Amen.

The Life of Abraham, Part 6: The Covenant is Cut

Genesis 15:7-21

Introduction

In the last lesson, we came across one of the most important verses in Scripture. Abram that had pleaded with the Lord about having a child and reminding Him of his age. He had already waited a long time for God's promise of a child to come to fruition and he would have to wait a lot longer. But God again promised Abram that He was good for His word. Abram believed this promise and this was reckoned on the balance sheet of life as righteousness. This balance sheet could not be paid by ordinary human obedience. We find out in the New Testament that it only can be paid by the perfect obedience of a man who could also negotiate as God as well. This is none other than Jesus Christ.

We will pick up on the conversation between Abram and God in verse 7 this morning.

Exposition of the Text

In verse seven, God gives Abram new information about his plan for Abram. When we started in chapter 12 with the call of the LORD to Abram to leave his country, he had already left Ur of the Caldees with his father and his family and had removed to Haran. But in verse 8, we see this more from Ur to Haran was also by the hand of God, even though Abram was then unaware of it. He went to Haran in obedience to his father. But the hand of God was preparing Abram for his call even before he was aware of the LORD. This can be seen in our lives also as the preparatory grace that works in us before we even know it. However, after coming to faith we can see the hand of God in the events leading up to our conversion. Wesley called this grace "prevenient grace" in case you have heard this term before (so did Augustin).

Abram, of whom it had just been stated that he believed God's stupendous promise now asks for a pledge from the LORD. As a client of a benefactor, he was entitled to a outward token that the benefactor was acting in good faith, that it was a bona fide offer (good faith). He wanted to see his title clear to a land in which he was then a stranger.

The fact that the LORD does not chide Abram for unbelief but rather agrees to provide proof that He is acting in good faith should encourage us when we believe God that it is wrong to ask for proof of his promises to us. Our faith is not a blind leap into the dark but a walking in the light. God agrees to prove His fidelity by "cutting" a covenant with Abram according to the rites of covenant making between benefactor (suzerain) and client (vassal) that was common in the Middle East of Abram's day. He was instructed to make a trench and to divide a bullock in half, a she goat in half, a ram in half, and then a turtledove and pigeon not divided but one placed on each side of the trench. The blood of these animals would fill the trench with blood. The parties to the covenant would then walk in the blood filled trench together and by this swore their mutual fidelity to the covenant. If either party was faithless, then they were to be cut in half just like the animals.

The text then says that Abram kept watch over the site to keep birds of prey away from the slaughtered animals while waiting for the LORD to appear to walk with Abram. It must have been a long wait, just like the wait for the promises of the LORD to land and an heir had been so long. Abram became weary and fell into a deep sleep waiting on God. Just like the wearied disciples of Jesus on the night of His arrest, Abram could not stay awake.

The next thing the text said was a great dread fell upon Abram as he slept. It is hard to be certain, but I feel the dread Abram felt was related to the covenant He was about to make with the LORD. It would require Abram to be perfectly obedient to all the stipulations of the covenant or face the wrath of God in breaking the covenant. Who could possibly enter into a covenant of perfect obedience to the LORD without a flaw? Just like Adam, to break the covenant was a death sentence. Since this was the case, I could not blame Abram for feeling horror. Abram had asked proof, and now the covenant would be his undoing. It would be a covenant of good works which Abram and no human being could keep. If God's promises of

life, land, dominion, seed, and fellowship with God is dependent on perfect obedience, then who could attain it? All we could attain in our own merit was the covenant curses.

The text then offers another horror. The promised descendants would not even own this land. It would be more than 400 years before the promise of the land would be given to this seed. Not only this, but his descendants would suffer horrible affliction. What kind of promise is this? Many parents are willing to endure great affliction in order to make life better for their descendants. But not only would Abram not receive the title to the land, but his descendants would not for hundreds of years.

We must note here that Moses recorded the incident of Abram at the end of this 400 year period. God was about to ultimately fulfill the promise he made so long with Abram. But there was a covenant made with the Exodus generation as well which would require their perfect obedience or else they would be vomited out of that land like the inhabitants of the land before them. If we were to follow that story, they did not live up to their requirement for obedience. God was long suffering and was not willing to nullify His promise to Israel for its transgression of the covenant, but sent prophets with the message of repentance. Yet in the end, they lost title to the land. No one can make a covenant with the LORD based upon perfect obedience and not be dashed to pieces.

Abram was only promised that he would live to a good old age and have the honor of burial. His tomb would be his only title of the land he was promised. God told Abram that the iniquity of the inhabitants was not yet full, which to me says that God was still trying to get them to repent. Abram's descendants would have to wait their turn.

So far, I would find it hard to find anything promising to the offer the LORD made to Abram. The promise of affliction to his descendants with a long off hope of gaining title to a land which they would in turn sin themselves out of because it required perfect obedience to the covenant is more of a curse than a blessing. But we must read verse 17. When the sun went down, it does not say that Abram walked the walk in the trench of blood with the LORD. A substitute for Abram

walked through the blood. Abram was not required to swear his perfect obedience which in no part was he capable of. Abram was thus spared the curses of a covenant that he and his descendants would surely break,

It says that smoking firepot and a flaming torch went through the trench together. God would have been represented symbolically by one of these. But who walked the walk in Abram's place? As the covenant had to be made between God and man, then the second object had to represent Abram. Upon this man would fall the curses for being faithless to the covenant. We know that this is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Only Jesus who was perfectly obedient to the Father could walk through the blood in covenant with the Father and live. Abram who represents the believer could not do it. By God's grace, he was spared from keeping an impossible covenant of works. The substitute who walked through the blood would shed his own blood for our disobedience. He would take the wrath of the broken covenant upon himself so that we could be seen by God as righteous.

Homily

The good news for Abram is our good news as well. Most of us would fall far short of the faith and walk of Abram. If Abram who was a very good man as humans account goodness was not capable of keeping the stipulations of a covenant which required him to be perfect before God. Instead, as we learned in the last lesson, he was justified by faith in God's promises which God reckoned as righteousness. In other words, our faith in the promises of God is seen as the perfect obedience that God requires. Jesus paid the price for us all for our transgressions. Only Jesus who as God the Son and also the perfectly obedient Son of Man could negotiate this perfect covenant. He passed through the blood in our place.

How should we respond to this? We no longer should be in dread of God caused by impossible requirements. We don't need to live in fear any more. Instead, we should be thankful that Jesus has paid our debt in full. The life we now live, we live in Christ and His covering righteousness. We read the Scripture that "Perfect love casts out all fear." Jesus' perfect love for us has removed the fear that separates us from God. Love and fear cannot coexist. The reverse of the Scripture

is “Perfect fear casts out all love.” We see this in the life of Martin Luther. His attempt to make things perfect with God by his own obedience made him to hate God and fear Him rather than finding hope and love. When he realized by the grace of God that salvation is the free gift of God’s love for us and demonstrated by the cross of Christ, then he found he could now love and serve God from this love. It would do us good to learn this lesson as well.

God is good for His promises. We may now have to suffer in the meanwhile, and if the Lord delays His coming, our descendants as well. The Scripture indeed promises that we shall rule with Him IF we also suffer with Him. The Scripture also says that “All those who would live godly lives in Christ Jesus SHALL suffer persecution. We may not have the best of lives now, but God has promised. Dare we to believe Him. Ask Him to prove His fidelity to the promise. Ask for the confirmation of the Holy Spirit within you which is the guarantor of our inheritance. In fact, the Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance until the day “we can read our title clear”.

The Life of Abram, Part 7: The Ishmael Project

Genesis 16:1-15

Introduction

In the last lesson, Abram asked the LORD for a pledge of his promise of the land. The answer he had gotten seems discouraging, especially for one whose worldview does not extend past this life. For someone with a “Live your best life now” it was no promise at all. Abram would never have title to the land, and it would be more than 400 years before his descendants would. The promise of having children was there, but they would be in hard bondage for four generations. All Abram received as far as a promise for him personally was that he would live a long life and be buried. He had already lived a long life, so how much longer this meant was unknown. He would live ninety more years and would have clear title to a cemetery plot.

However, we also learned, the promise God offered Abram was in reality far greater than any piece of real estate on this earth. Even in its most fertile areas, Palestine is no match for the fertility of our Great Plains in America. Nor were the mountains lush like we see here in Tennessee. We will see this promise to Abram become clearer as we continue through the study and what it means for us.

The covenant that Abram was to make with the LORD was an impossible one, so the LORD offered Himself in Abram’s place as surety for the covenant. Abram did not have to walk through the trench filled with blood. One day, the Lord Jesus would walk through the blood, not of animals, but of himself.

Exposition of the Text

In chapter 16, we go back to the promise of the seed from the promise of the land. It mentions that Abram and Sarai had been ten years in the land of Canaan and yet they had no children. This seems like an awful long time to wait, and I am sure we would have been equally if not more anxious than they. Usually after ten years of

infertility, and we must realize that Abram and Sarai had suffered through not having a child long before entering into Canaan, a couple today would seek means of fertility. Many expensive options such as hormone shots and in-vitro fertilization are tried to get pregnant. If these fail, then things like donor eggs and sperm and even surrogate mothers are resorted to. None of these options were available to Sarai and Abram.

What Hagar suggested was the way it could be done in their time. Sarai had a menial servant, an Egyptian by the name of Hagar. As her mistress, Hagar had to subject herself to the will of Sarai her master. Sarai who felt along with Abram that surely the LORD had another arrangement for them to have a child. By this time, Sarai had probably had gone through menopause. But Hagar was young, and old men can still father children. She could order Hagar into Abraham's bed with the intention of her conceiving a child who would belong to Sarai because Hagar belonged to her. So this was a kind of surrogate motherhood. This method causes plenty of trouble when used today, so we should not expect the results to be any better than..

She talks Abram into the plan and the deed is done. The eighty five year old Abram gets Hagar pregnant. So far, it looks like Sarai was right. Abram would get his promised seed from the LORD, and Sarai would be the child's mother by right of ownership. But then, a revolting development happens. A woman's status in society was lifted when she had a child. Hagar who had been a menial handmaiden to Sarai now had status that Sarai did not have. She forgot her place in society as a slave and got what we call here in South Tennessee, "uppity". She no longer respected Sarai, and Sarai became quite jealous of Hagar. So Sarai comes storming to Abram with her complaint. She seems to blame Abram for the whole idea, even though the idea had originally come from her. She considered herself wronged by the arrangement and asked the LORD to judge between her and Abram.

Abram is now caught in the unenviable position of having to decide between his wife and his concubine who was pregnant. He tells Sarai that Hagar belongs to her and is her problem. So Sarai treats her maidservant Hagar so harshly that she runs away. A runaway slave woman was in a very precarious position. She could have been hunted down by Sarai and killed or severely punished. However, it seems that

Sarai was only too glad to see her go. But who would take a pregnant slave woman in. She was facing ostracism from society and a life of either prostitution or starvation. However, the LORD intervened in her behalf at a well. It seems that a lot of important transactions in Old Testament history happens at wells. She was about to go into the wilderness when the LORD confronts her with “Where have you come from and where do you think you are going?” Hagar lets the LORD know of the treatment she has received.

The LORD gives Hagar a gracious promise. She is going to have a son and would be the mother of a great race of people. He told her to name the son Ishmael and that he would be a warrior. Here, a no-count runaway slave woman receives grace from none other than the LORD of the Universe. God takes notice of those of lowly estate. She had not asked to be put into this position. She had disobeyed in that she ran away from her mistress. She was told to go back and submit herself to Sarai. Hagar responded by naming the place “The well of the One who lives has seen and regarded me.”

Hagar returns and gives birth to Ishmael. Abram now has a son. Would this son be the promised heir? So far we see the progression of what we believe to be the heir of Abraham progress from Lot to Eliezer, to Ishmael, a natural born son. It seems that the promise had been fulfilled. Had not the LORD promised Hagar that she would be the mother of numerous descendants? Does that not sound like the promise God gave to Abram. Was Sarai now rejected as being the mother of the promised seed? We shall find out as the story of Abram unfolds.

Ishmael would grow up and become the patriarch of several Arab tribes. The Muslims today consider Ishmael to be the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.

Homily

What do we learn here from this lesson? I think the first thing we learn is that we really cannot force God’s hand and make things happen in our own strength. When we do, the unexpected and often undesired happens. The result is being entangled

in snares. But we also learn that God is gracious even in our disobedience. We may have to live with the consequences of our actions, but God does not forsake us.

God showed great mercy to Hagar when He confronted her. By confronting her, He asked her to rethink the situation. Rethinking one's situation is the first step in repentance. The second step is to return to the right way, even though it is difficult. Hagar was returning to an abusive mistress and would have to trust the LORD's promise for her safety. The Prodigal Son rethought his miserable situation and returned home without any hope than to be received as a household slave. We can ask God to forgive our trespasses and He will. But forgiveness is not escape for the consequences for our action. If we have wronged someone, we must willingly face the music. If we have broken the law, we must be willing to return and face whatever happens. Repentance is not necessarily the ticket to an easy life as it requires confession to God as well as to our neighbors.

In the Old Testament Law, this idea of repentance is tied together with restitution. If a man stole something and then felt remorse, he had to return the stolen item and pay double the value back as proof of repentance. It was more than a "Sorry old fellow for stealing your goods, forgive me." Yet, all too often, this is the attitude people have. They repent towards God thinking this is all they have to do. But even John the Baptist warns us to produce fruit worthy of repentance. We must never take God and His forgiveness for granted.

Be it sufficient to say that God forgives us of our iniquity through Jesus Christ. We could never repay the debt we owe to God because what we owe is perfect obedience. Once we lose this, we cannot of ourselves bring it back. For this we need Christ's free and gracious forgiveness. We must also realize what great price He has paid for our rebellion against God and be grateful. But God also expects us that within our power to make restitution for what we owe other people. It is a great witness for the Lord when we do. It might even lead them to Christ.

We also show our gratitude for being forgiven by forgiving others their debt against us. We who owed the unpayable debt to God which Jesus paid in our behalf need to reflect this in our forgiving others their debts to us. We don't know how great the reception was for Hagar when she got home, but she managed to get by

for a while. God must have softened Sarai's heart a little bit, considering that she could have had Hagar put to death or at least severely punished.

Let us out of love for the Lord consider these lessons today and resolve to follow more perfectly in the Lord's footsteps.

The Life of Abraham, Part 8: Thirteen Years Later

Genesis 17:1-27

Introduction

In the last lesson, it finally looked from Abram's point of view that God had satisfied Abram's long awaited promise of a son named Ishmael. At the age of eighty-six, Abram was a dad in his own right. Hagar had acted as a surrogate mother in her mistress's Sarai's stead. There were big problems in the family which had caused Hagar to leave. But the LORD had intervened and seems to have sorted everything out. Hagar returned home and bore Ishmael to Abram. But the story of Abram and Sarai was about to take a new twist.

Exposition of the Text

Fast forward thirteen years from the end of the last chapter and we come to chapter 17. Abram is 99 years old, and his son Ishmael is 12. Things seem to be going on autopilot. Ishmael was at the age of becoming a man in legal standing. There isn't any mention of the conflict between Sarai and Hagar. But a sea change is about to happen in Abram and Sarai's life. It starts simply by saying, "The LORD appeared to Abram." By now we should be tipped off that the LORD was about to do something both great and unexpected in the life of Abram.

The LORD revealed himself as the Almighty God or "El-Shaddai". This was a revelation of a new title for the LORD to Abram which expresses the idea that God is able to make anything happen. God reveals Himself by many names or titles in the Bible simply because no single title can express who God is. The LORD then asks Abram to walk before Him and be perfect. I don't know how Abram reacted to that, but I do know when Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount tells us His followers to be perfect, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect, I shudder. How can this be? Certainly I am not perfect, nor can I say that my walk before God is anything close to perfect on God's terms. If this is to be so, it must be the work of God. Perhaps

this is what El-Shaddai reminds us also that nothing is impossible with Almighty God.

The LORD tells Abram that he is making a covenant between Himself and Abram. At this point we must remind ourselves that in Chapter 15, God cut a covenant with Abram which was based solely on God walking through the bloody trench. It was a covenant of grace as Abram could not make a covenant with the LORD and keep it. So now we have a second covenant which is being cut, one that has Abram personally involved and requires Him to walk perfectly before the LORD. So the natural question to ask at this point is, "What gives?"

This covenant to be made between the LORD and Abraham stipulated the covenant promises God will make to Abram. He is going to multiply Abram exceedingly. Abram responds to this by prostrating Himself before the Almighty God in a posture of worship. God continues with the promise that Abram would be the father of not just one but many nations. As the first sign of the covenant to Abram, the LORD changes Abram's name which had meant "exalted father" to Abraham which means "father of many nations". In other words, Abraham's new name is descriptive of what God is going to do in blessing Abraham.

As we have gone along in this study, we have referred to the five ways God originally blessed Adam, life, fellowship, land, seed, and dominion. The work of God's redemption was to restore these to humankind who had lost the fullness of these blessings because of Adam and Eve's disobedience. These restorations are evident in the life of Abraham as part of the plan of redemption which would be fully realized in Jesus Christ. In this passage, we see again the promise of seed, that is descendant(s), and here dominion in verse 6 in that he would be the father of kings. The promise of the covenant was to be everlasting in scope which concerns the restoration of life. The fact that God was talking with Abraham was the restoration of fellowship with God. And in verse eight is the promise of land. So here we see the promises of the fivefold restoration of blessing.

However, in verse nine comes the stipulation that Abraham and his descendants would have to keep in order to keep the covenant in effect. Basically, Abraham was in the same position of Adam in the Garden of Eden and Sarah in the position of

Eve. This is a promise of a new humanity from within a sea of wickedness. Abram and his descendants were to be perfectly obedient.

The token of this obedience was to be circumcision. The covenant that was established in chapter 15 involved the cutting of animals whose blood filled the trench. Here the cutting was to be made in the flesh and blood of Abraham, his descendants, and even his servants. Anyone who was not circumcised on the eighth day was to be cut off from the people of God. This seems to be an impossible demand. I will answer this later, but let it be sufficient for now for us to clearly notice the priority of the covenant of chapter 15 and the one here in chapter 17.

The next bombshell in this appearance of God to Abram comes in verse 15. Sarai's name is changed to Sarah which means "princess". The LORD goes on to say that Sarah will become a mother of her own son. She will be the mother with Abraham of nations and kings. Abraham bowed down before the LORD in worship as was to be expected. But the external bowing did not cover the internal doubts he had. The text says that Abraham said to himself in laughter how a hundred year old man and a ninety year old woman would have a child. So Abraham tells the LORD that the promised child Ishmael who was 12 was sufficient. God did not have to prove Himself further. God had worked within the possible realm. Eighty Six year old men can father children of a woman in her youth. But a hundred year old man and his ninety year old wife would be a physical impossibility. We often blame Sarah for unbelief and her laughter at this announcement, but we would do well to see that Abraham laughed first.

The Almighty God reiterated His promise that this miracle was indeed going to happen. The totally impossible was about to happen. Sarah was going to conceive and God was going to make an everlasting covenant with her seed and the seed after him. We will later come to appreciate this as a fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. We will find out later that God was talking about His Son Jesus Christ as the promised seed. For this point in the story, we now see that the promised seed was not going to come through Ishmael any more than through Lot of Eliezer of Damascus. The LORD named the child to be born "Isaac" which means "laughter" because Abraham laughed.

The LORD also tells Abraham that he would bless his son Ishmael as well. But he would not be the one with whom God would make a covenant. He would make this covenant through the descendant of Isaac. He would be the father of twelve tribes and would become a great nation, but he is not the line of promise. This would be reckoned through Sarah. She would become a mother in one year. Keep this time in mind as it will be important in understanding the incident with Abimelech later.

Abraham did as the LORD had commanded him and circumcised himself, Ishmael and all the male servants of his household. He apparently did this even before telling his wife Sarah what the LORD has said concerning her.

Homily

We have been introduced not to two covenants, one made unilaterally by God and now one which required perfect obedience. The first covenant was cut into animals who bled in which the LORD passed through the blood in behalf of both parties which means that if either party broke the covenant that it would be required of God. We learned that Jesus as a result paid the price for our breaking of the covenant.

Now how do we understand the later covenant which was cut into the flesh of Abraham and his descendants and required perfect obedience for its promises. This would be a covenant of works and would prove impossible to keep. The fivefold promises of blessing would become the fivefold curse if the descendants of Abraham proved in any way unfaithful. We know full well of the failures of the covenant of works. We too have groaned under its oppression. The Law could express the perfect will of God, but as we learn through the Book of Hebrews, this perfectly revealed will of God was unable to make the imperfect perfect. Paul says that sin took advantage of our imperfection and made God's good and perfect will the means of our own fall. This is why Jesus had to come and die in our place.

We must find our hope not in the second covenant made with Abraham based on human works and blood of cutting. Our only hope lies in the first covenant in Genesis 15 which God makes by grace. We are used to thinking that the covenant

we live under is the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus. However, what we know as the New Covenant is actually older than what we call the covenant of works which is Genesis 17. The covenant God made in chapter 15 cannot be disannulled by chapter 17.

Paul tells us that the covenant of works of the Law acted as a schoolmaster until the time of Christ who is the promised seed of Abraham and Sarah. Even though the chapter 15 covenant happened before the chapter 17 covenant, the stipulations of what the covenant in chapter 15 did not become clear until the time that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, who offered a life of perfect obedience that we could not offer God, by which the chapter 17 covenant was perfectly kept. This allows us to experience the fivefold blessing promised by the chapter 17 covenant. It wasn't the blood from severed foreskins but the blood of Cavalry. Jesus is the one who walked perfectly before God in our place so that now He has become our necessary righteousness by which we can enter in the presence of God, in whom is not one speck of darkness. The covenant of chapter 15 based on believing the promise of God which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ is the covenant for us. The one in chapter 17 is the one Christ kept for us by which we obtain eternal blessings of life, fellowship, land, family, and dominion. Thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ for His gift.

The Life of Abraham, Part 9: The Visit of the Three Angels

Genesis 18:1-15

Introduction

In the last chapter the LORD promised Abraham what humans even today would consider impossible. Sarah was going to be a mother of a son named Isaac in twelve months. Abraham laughed at the idea, but the LORD told him it would be so. To remind Abraham that he laughed, the LORD said the boy's name would be Isaac, which means "laughter". The LORD changed the name of Abram to Abraham to reflect that he would be the father of many nations of people. He also named Sarai "Sarah" which means princess. So in chapter 17, the LORD appears to Abraham by a new name of God Almighty (El-Shaddai), gives new names to Abram and Sarai to reflect the new reality as well as to give a name to the coming son of Sarah. The names reflect a new reality in the lives of Abraham and Sarah.

The LORD also made a second covenant with Abraham of circumcision which was to be done to every male as a sign of the covenant. We discussed at length the implications of this covenant. The rest of the chapter talks about the covenant marked by circumcision and the circumcision. But nowhere does Abraham break the good news to Sarah about being a mother. That situation is about to be remedied.

Exposition of the Text

Chapter 18 begins with another appearance of the LORD to Abraham while he was sitting in a tent, the reminder that he was a wandering nomad in a land that his descendants would eventually call their own and build houses. It says he was startled by the appearance of three men. It says that he rose and bowed before them. This could be taken as a form of hospitality which was the expectation in the Middle East. Abraham's actions were similar to the saying "My house is your house". But when the appearance of the three men is linked to an appearance of the LORD, more is suggested. These weren't mere men. Whether Abraham knew this

and bowed before the chief of them is debated, but Moses wants us to know from the start that it was the angel of the LORD and two other angels. Many see the chief angel as an Old Testament appearance of Christ. Many of the church fathers held to this view. Some even held to the idea that the three men were the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I would hold the idea of an Old Testament appearance of Christ to be a good possibility. But I do not think it was the Holy Trinity.

Abraham made haste to greet and show hospitality to the guests. For since the New Testament warns us to show hospitality to strangers because some entertained angels unawares hints that Abraham did not know at first who they were. Just like the Lord Jesus hid his identity from the Emmaus disciples, the LORD held his identity from Abraham. Abraham insisted that these three men get out of the heat, drink some water, and that he would straightway go and get them food. The Middle East can get unbearably hot at midday which could be life-threatening. If they would rest and refresh themselves, they could go on their way when it was a little cooler.

The hospitality offered was extravagant. Sarah was ordered to quickly prepare three loaves of bread for the guests and his servants were ordered to prepare the fatted calf reserved for the appearance of a special dignitary. He had it brought to the three men who were under the shade of a tree for them to eat, which they did.

In verse nine, Abraham should have become aware of the real identity of the visitors. They asked Abraham where Sarah was. Only the LORD and Abraham knew of the new name. So by hearing the name of Sarah, the LORD was revealed to Abraham. The chief of the three, the Angel of the LORD, spoke to Abraham and said that He would fulfill the promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a Son the next spring. It is a rather difficult statement in that it says the LORD would personally return to them as though He were a stork delivering a baby.

The LORD knew that Sarah was listening and was perfectly aware of her own situation. She was an old woman, far beyond menopause and the loss of libido. Her reaction was almost identical to the reaction of Abraham to the announcement. She laughed within herself and thought how impossible the

situation. Abraham was too old to father a child and Sarah far too old to conceive one.

The LORD asked Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh?” He again said that this thing would happen the next spring. Sarah denied laughing, but the LORD who knows the heart told her different. So both Abraham and Sarah laughed at the news that they would be parents of a child. The gentle rebuke of Sarah by the LORD also was one of Abraham as well.

The LORD and the two angels had another purpose for the journey, a one of mourning and not laughter which we shall see in the next lesson.

Homily

What do we take away from this passage? I previously mentioned about Hebrews 13:2 about showing hospitality to strangers because that stranger might turn out to be an angel, or even the LORD. In the time the sermon to the Hebrews was written, many Christians had been evicted from their homes and had their name on the roll of citizens of the cities and towns they lived in removed. Anyone who received these people in their houses ran the risk of having the same thing happen if they were caught showing hospitality to them. These pilgrims and wanderers who no longer had any earthly city to belong to had to wander in the wilderness. Christians were to receive these refugees as if they were the Lord Jesus.

Jesus himself alludes to this in Matthew 25 when those who demonstrated their faith by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and prisoners, or even giving a cup of cold water would not lose their reward. The one who does this for the least of the Christians has done these things to the Lord Himself. So we cannot be sure that when someone comes knocking suddenly at the door that it isn't the Lord asking in. Even if it isn't, we show hospitality to the Lord by showing hospitality to others. Paul says that the one who refuses to help a fellow Christian brother or sister in genuine need is worse than an unbeliever. So the idea of showing hospitality is not an option.

When this hospitality is shown, it is demonstrated not only in grudgingly offering the least possible help. Instead, the hospitality is to be the most generous. When Abraham killed the fatted calf for the celebration, we are reminded of the reception the father gave for his unworthy prodigal son. This dirty broken young man was greeted by a father who ran to him and hugged his dirty ragged body in public. This would be considered as John MacArthur reminds us was a most shameful act on the part of the father. He ran to show hospitality just like Abraham ran to show hospitality. The killing of the calf was like inviting the Emperor to dinner. But it was his broken and totally underserving son.

There is quite a reversal in the New Testament in that the hospitality of Abraham to the LORD is reversed. Abraham was quite right, even if he acted better than he knew to give the very best to the LORD. But here, the Lord Himself prepares lavishly not for a great dignitary, but rather to publicans, sinners, prostitutes and other people considered the rabble of society. If you will notice in Luke, every time a sinner is received, a great banquet is thrown. There is more joy in Heaven over a repentant sinner.

We now know that the ultimate fulfillment of the LORD's promise to Abraham and Sarah was not in Isaac but one of Isaac's distant descendants, the Lord Jesus Christ. He would come to Jerusalem in the spring of the year and offer his life for the life of the world. The LORD told Abraham and Sarah that he would return in the spring with the gift of life, a son. As we noted, it is an odd statement. But it is nothing compared with Jesus, the Son of God laying his life down for us in a far off spring to the one the LORD told to Abraham and Sarah. This promise to us who were dead in trespasses and sins would be visited by the LORD of life who has raised us from spiritual death and will one day change or raise our mortal bodies.

For since we are called to be imitators of Christ as His dear children, let us follow Him in offering true hospitality and words of hope and life to a dying world. Christ has offered the very best to us. He did not offer the required staples of bread and wine, but His body and blood. Nothing gives Jesus more joy than to see his children walking in the truth.

The Life of Abraham, Part 10: The Great Intercession

Genesis 18:16-33

Introduction

In the last lesson, Abraham had met three men or what he perceived as men show up at his tent of pilgrimage in the hottest part of the day. Abraham showed great hospitality to them and even killed the fatted calf for them, This act of extravagant hospitality of treating what he probably thought were ordinary men on a journey is a reflection of the great act of hospitality that is shown to us in Jesus Christ who had given us the royal treatment at great cost to Himself. In fact, he had come to earth as a pilgrim. John even says that the Word tabernacled among humanity. He too lived among us in the tent of human flesh. Like these men, he ate with us and drank with us. John talks about beholding Jesus and writes about it in the Gospel of John as well as 1 John.

We learned of the first purpose of the visit to Abraham. The LORD reaffirmed the promise that He had just made with Abraham and did so in the earshot of Sarah. Perhaps Abraham had not even told her about the incident. They both needed to hear together of the staggering promise that God Almighty was going to do for them in giving them a son,

Exposition of the Text

In this lesson, we learn of a second reason the LORD had come for. In verse sixteen, we hear that the LORD said presumably to the other two “men” with Him some indication that not everything was well. He seemed to wonder whether to tell Abraham of the other purpose of His coming. We find it hard to understand why God would have to deliberate at all, no less speak of this deliberation. But the LORD here was clothed in human flesh of a man. This is a preview of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. He was in every way human. He grew in knowledge and grace and truth as is desirable for all human beings. Yet Jesus was also fully God the Son.

We must accept full divinity and full humanity without trying to understand how this could be. Both statements are equally true.

I see this appearance as being an Old Testament appearance of Christ in human form. After all, He had eaten Abraham's food, so He wasn't just an appearance as an angel or a vision. John does say that Abraham saw Jesus' day and was glad. Does this mean that He saw Jesus? This would be staggering in its implications. Most are unwilling to go this far in their thinking. This is not to say that Abraham knew fully of all the details of Christ's incarnation just because he may have seen Jesus. A child can see his or her parents and know who they are. But this is not to say that they know everything about their parents. They know their identity and some facts about them, but they will come to learn more as they go along. In the same way, if Abraham met Jesus here, he was only seeing in part. More would be revealed later to Abraham, his descendants, and the world in a fuller sense. But the identity is there.

In the New Testament, we have a fuller picture of Jesus, one that Abraham and the prophets of the Old Testament saw in much lesser part and like us still long to know more about Jesus. Jesus is equated in the New Testament to the person of Yahweh in the Old Testament in clear and unmistakable fashion. So when it says that Yahweh asks whether He should tell Abraham, is this Jesus?

The LORD continues to deliberate by reminding himself of the promises He had already made to Abraham and His expectations of Abraham and His seed. To the original readers that Moses recorded these words for who were at the verge of fulfilling the promise to enter into the Promised Land, it would serve as a challenge for them to remember who they are and live up to the expectation that the LORD had for them.

The LORD stops His deliberation with Himself and to the other two men that were with Him and tells Abraham outright of the other reason He had come. Again, what He says, He says from a human point of view. He had heard the outcry from the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and was greatly disturbed. He had to go down and see for Himself. It is almost as though God who must truly know what is going on so wants it to be different. He would rather be wrong than to have to destroy

Sodom and Gomorrah. This tells us a little of the heart of God. Again, it is impossible for us humans and our limited understanding to comprehend this. God who is all-seeing, all-knowing, all perfect, all powerful, and unchangeable cannot be understood alongside the presentation of God in human terms here. The mystery of the Incarnation is in all the Bible, not just the New Testament. We must apprehend both pictures of God as true on faith. God must be both to us if He is to have any meaningful and redemptive relation with His creatures.

In verse 22, it states that the LORD stayed behind with Abraham while the two human figures went on to their mission to Sodom and Gomorrah. God had just made a new and special revelation of Himself to Abraham as the God who does not wish that any would perish but come to life. Luther talks about the two hands of God. One is the God of judgment, justice, and holiness who needs to punish sin and rebellion. This Luther called the strange hand. He also saw the other hand of mercy and grace which is the desirable hand. God is indeed a complex personality to say the least, far more complex than we can fathom.

The LORD uses this opportunity to reveal His desire for grace, but He wants His covenant child Abraham to understand that the LORD expects the same out of His children. Like parents, like child is most desirable when the parents are good. Abraham seems to have grasped this to a degree. He shows concern for the justice or condemning the just with the unjust. Should the just be destroyed with the wicked? Abraham sets up several hypothetical examples. "Suppose there were as few as 50 just people in the city", he asks. He is then bold to tell God how unfair it would be to treat the godly and ungodly in the same way. Abraham tells the LORD "God forbid you should do this! Will not the God of all the earth do what is right?"

Abraham shows a boldness only a child of God could ever show. He is like the child of the CEO of a great company. The secretary guards access to the CEO. The CEO calls his underlings to give account. They come in fear and trembling into the CEO's office knowing that they could be subject to the judgment of firing and shame. But the child can boldly enter the CEO's office and speak plainly with the CEO because the relationship is one of parent and child.

The LORD goes beyond what Abraham asked for. He would spare everyone in the city, good and bad together if He could find fifty there. Abraham is still concerned and tries to reduce the number. Really should even a single righteous person be judged along with the wicked? Abraham stops at ten. He is unaware that One righteous man would stand in for all the wicked and die in their place that if they would only believe, they would be spared judgment.

Moses who wrote this account for the children of Israel was an interceder also. Israel had committed sin as evil as that of Sodom and Gomorrah in the wilderness. God had wanted to destroy them and start all over with Moses and His descendants. Moses acted in the same way as Abraham did. In this, he uses Abraham and this incident as a reminder that they were entering the Promised Land by grace. The presence of a single righteous man and his intercession had saved them all.

Homily

Abraham was not righteous enough, not nearly to stand in our place so that we might be saved. He too, needed God's grace in a great way. Though he might be very godly in comparison to others, he cannot help us. The same is true of Moses whose sin kept him out of the Promised Land. Only one who was truly righteous could intercede for us to save us. This person is Jesus Christ who took the wrath and judgment of God upon Himself. He paid the satisfaction that the justice of God demanded for sin and rebellion, what Luther calls the strange hand so that the hand of grace and friendship could be offered to us. God so wanted things to be different than what He knew to be the case that He sent His Son to live among us, to die and to rise again. This is the lesson we must take away. We are sinners saved by God's grace. This is too wonderful to understand. It is indeed orders of magnitude more staggering a promise than that a 100 year old man and a ninety year old woman would have a child. We must do what Abraham did. We must believe on this promise that our faith in "the" Promise of God might be reckoned into the righteousness we need to enter into the presence of God.

Let us continue to encourage one another in the promise of God. We know that we are sinners and unworthy. This is why we must pray and petition the LORD for grace and have faith that it is God's will to save us. This is proven by the cross of Christ. We can continue our journey in faith and love and not fear because we can quote God's promise to us revealed in Scripture.

Let us also remember that we are called to be like our Heavenly Father. We must be intercessors. Not only do we pray for our own infirmity and sin, but we also pray for our families, friends, and neighbors. Some of them might be good people as this world counts goodness, but they still live in Sodom and Gomorrah and need gracious rescue. We must then go beyond this and pray for the utterly wicked and reprobate inhabitants of the city of man. God was willing to spare the wicked if He could find one righteous. Jesus is that righteous One by which we can now offer God's grace to the undeserving.

The Life of Abraham, Part 11: Sodom and Gomorrah

Genesis 19:1-38

Introduction

In the last lesson the desire of the LORD to find reason to spare the wicked was revealed to Abraham. Abraham's concern to the LORD's message that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah was that the righteousness not be swept away with the wicked. This has been a problem throughout all of human history. Indeed, the good have suffered along with the evil. It seems to rain good on the evil and bad on the good. If anything, it looks as though the righteous have suffered evil far more than the sufferings of the evil they have brought upon themselves. To say this has been a problem is actually a dramatic understatement. One of the Psalms laments that he observed that the wicked prospered while the good suffered.

Ultimately, this problem has no earthly solution. It is sufficient to say on God's part that because there is not a single righteous person that judgment on all people is justified. There is a promise that justice not meted out in this life will be meted out at the judgment seat of God. Truly on the basis of our righteousness, none of us would be spared. If we are to be spared, it is entirely by God's grace. Abraham's intercession, as much as it reflects his good character is futile in that no righteous person can be found in any city, no less Sodom and Gomorrah.

We now know that a perfect person who could stand for us in the city of man who came from the City of God makes it possible that the wicked could be spared because a righteous man had indeed been found. Jesus Christ opens the way of faith that through the gift of faith made possible by God's grace might be given that we might be spared from the judgment. The Day of the LORD of Psalm 118 in which the rejected stone dies in our place and rose again to be put at the apex of the new kingdom, a day in which the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus Christ that we could be spared from the condemnation at the great white throne judgment.

Because we have already died with Christ on His cross, our Day of the LORD has already passed. But it remains in the future for those who do not believe.

Exposition of the Text

In some ways, chapter 19 is a detour from the life of Abraham. In fact, he is not mentioned until verse 27 in which he saw the smoke rising from the destroyed cities. He had gone to the same spot he had seen the LORD the day before. He did not know of Lot, his nephew's fate, but we do. We know Lot and his daughters had been spared from destruction.

The chapter begins with the arrival of the two "men" that had accompanied the LORD and gone on before Him. Lot was sitting at the gate which means he had gained some influence in the city of man. To sit in the gate was not only to be admitted as a citizen of the city, but also that he had influence there. Perhaps he had gained it because of Abraham's deliverance of the city from the confederacy of the five kings, but nevertheless, he was one of the politicians of the city.

Anyone who is a Christian and enters politics in the secular realm has to feel the terrible struggle between his heavenly citizenship and the demands of the city of man. The New Testament tells of the struggle of the righteous Lot in Sodom and how he was torn in two by the wickedness of the place. The politician feels this in a special way, but we should also be reminded that all Christians feel this awful pull and how to remain true to God as witnesses in the wicked city of man without compromise. And in a democracy in which constitutional power is invested in the choices of the people, this makes us all politicians as well.

When Lot sees them come, he remembers from his youth the law of hospitality. He greets the men with the same offer of hospitality that Abraham had offered. He asked them to come into his house, his fixed abode, in the same way Abraham invited the men to the shade of his tent door. But unlike Abraham who wanted to protect the strangers from the potentially deadly noonday heat, Lot felt the need to protect them from the hateful wrath of the inhabitants of the city. He is alarmed

that the men wanted to spend the night in the town square. He knew the men of Sodom and what would happen to them.

Lot urges them to accept the hospitality of his house. Perhaps no one had seen them and he could hide them and not have to deal with the men of Sodom. The men finally allow themselves to be taken into Lot's house where like Abraham, Lot prepares a feast for them. And like with Abraham, the men ate what was eaten. There is one small difference. There was not time for the bread to rise, so they had to eat it unleavened. What seems here like an inconsequential detail would ring in the Exodus generation's ear. On the night they left Egypt, they had no time for the bread to rise. On the night they would be liberated from Egypt on the night of the Passover, they did as Lot had done on the night of his deliverance by the grace of the LORD.

The text goes on in verse four that before they could rest in sleep that trouble came knocking at the door. The inhabitants had discovered that Lot had strangers in his house to whom they had not opportunity to "greet". They had a terribly perverted idea of hospitality which involved what was essentially rape of strangers. They demanded that Lot send them out to receive their "hospitality". Lot knew the inhabitants well and what this would mean.

Lot knew the trouble he was in probably from the time he received the strangers, but he knew the God given rules of hospitality to protect strangers. So at first, he begs them not to treat strangers that way. He tells them of his understanding of hospitality and his obligation to protect strangers in his house. He even makes an outlandish offer of his two engaged but virgin daughters to substitute for the two men. To us, these seems dreadful, He was offering a substitute, but not himself. What horrors his daughters would have suffered under the hands of an angry and lustful mob is beyond imagination.

This rebuke of course as well as the offer of his daughters drew the ire of the inhabitants of the city who reminded Lot that he had come as a foreigner also. Perhaps for reason of influence or Abraham and Lot's riches, he and his family had been subjected to the usual reception of strangers. But the crowd shouted back that they were going to make up for their oversight and treat Lot even worse than they

had intended to do with the strangers. Lot would be the substitute, not his daughters.

When the strangers started to beat down the door to Lot's house, he was in mortal danger. He was facing being savaged by the mob as well as all those who were in the house, a savaging which would probably entail their death under the most horrific circumstances. Lot tried his best to protect his guests, but his efforts were going to be fruitless. It turned out to be a great blessing that the two men did not need Lot's protection. It is even a greater blessing that they could also deliver Lot.

The men dragged Lot into the safety of the house and struck the men with blindness from the youngest to the oldest. It says they still wore themselves out trying to find the door. They were undeterred in their passion even when they had been struck blind. Rather than repenting of their sin and what they intended to do to Lot and those inside the house, they blindly and vainly pressed on into sin.

Meanwhile, the men who were obviously more than men inquired of Lot's family. Did he have any in-laws or other family in the city? The idea here is that anyone who believed in God's promise to utterly destroy the place and would come under the shelter of Lot's house would be saved. This lesson would have been useful to the wilderness generation when it came to the conquest of Jericho, a city proscribed by God to utter destruction. There would be found a single believer in Jericho, the harlot Rahab. As part of her act in protecting the spies in faith in God's promise concerning Jericho, she had asked for the grace of deliverance from destruction. A single woman of questionable occupation was to be saved by her faith. She was told to put a red ribbon in the window of her house and to gather all her family there. Anyone who was in the house was to be saved. A woman who was made like Abraham was made righteous by her faith became the means of deliverance to her family and anyone who sought shelter in her house.

So we can see that the lesson of Lot would have especial meaning to the generation getting ready to enter the Promised Land. The threat of total annihilation of the inhabitants had a side of grace. Anyone who would believe the promise God made to Israel and would repent would find shelter. The Gibeonites were also going to be saved by their faith, even though they were as deceitful as Jacob. They believed in

God's promise and rightly acted on it. In like manner, anyone who believed was to be spared from the judgment of Sodom. But they had to come under Lot's roof.

Lot believed what the LORD had said through the angels and urged his in-laws to seek shelter. But they refused to believe. Their fate was sealed. Others may have heard Lot's plea as well, but they failed to believe the promise of judgment and utter destruction of the city. They thought Lot was mocking them. How blind are the effects of sin and rebellion that people who are in desperate need of the grace of God refuse to hear and think God is mocking them.

Lot had been at home in the city for too long. He had become accustomed to city life. He did not want to go back to the life of wandering he had known with Abraham. It is hard to go back to a tent after living in houses. The children of Israel despite all the troubles of living in Egypt lived in houses. When things got difficult in the wilderness, they thought about the "good old days" in Egypt. The fate of Lot would serve as a warning that the only way to real life is that of a stranger and pilgrim. The security of house living is a false security. The truth of this would be demonstrated in the morning.

The angels had to drag Lot, his wife, and daughters out of the city in spite of the fact they knew the coming fate of the city. It was a rescue of grace which was totally undeserved on Lot's part. And even as they were forcibly escorted from the city, Lot was still dreading the life of wandering and begged to live in at least a small town. The LORD in his mercy allowed this and hastened to remove Lot and his family. He warned them not to look back. But Lot's wife did so and turned into a pillar of salt. Just because we are saved by grace and faith, we are still to walk in the way of obedience. This is called in the New Testament, "the obedience of faith". Lot's wife becomes a reminder of Jesus not to look back to the former way of life. A pilgrim's life is towards the promised City of God.

Things ended badly in this life for Lot. He was unwilling after what had happened to even enter the little town of Zoar which was God's chosen city of refuge to Lot. Instead he took refuge in a cave with his daughters, too afraid to go out into the world. He had sons by drunken incest with his own daughters.. He had been delivered as Paul would later say, as through fire. He could have had it some better

had he moved to Zoar. I am not saying that Lot was not eternally saved. This may very well be. But if so, it was by grace alone and without reward.

Homily

Even though Abraham is scarcely mentioned in this passage, this passage of Scripture provides us with an important lesson. We must believe of God's intention to judge the earth which will be like that of Sodom and Gomorrah in depth but worldwide in breadth. We need to be begging others to find refuge in the place the lord has set aside, the church. They must believe the promise of judgment and the offer of grace in Jesus Christ. They must repent of their blindness that they might see the true light.

We need to act on this promise and go into the highways and byways and compel people with the message of the gospel and urge men and women to escape the wrath which is to come. This is true even when they think we are mocking and they in turn mock us. We must be in all seriousness and not just feasting in the house. Trouble is knocking at the door of the church. There are people who want in. They might want in for the worst of intentions in which we will need God's protection. But they do need to come into the house of God through the door of Jesus Christ, on His terms and not theirs.

We must realize that we are strangers and pilgrims here. We should not worry about the safety of our houses in the storms of life but instead seek our security in the coming city of God. Let us not look back but forward.

The Life of Abraham, Part 12: Abraham's Witness to Abimelech

Genesis 20:1-18

Introduction

Last week we learned of the terrible destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their gross wickedness. From the destruction, the LORD graciously delivered Lot and his two daughters. The tragedy was compounded when Lot was too afraid to go to the small town or Zoar he had bargained with the LORD to go to. Lot had been a witness for the LORD in the most difficult of places, and he nearly paid for it with his life. He could have settled down at Zoar and been a witness there. But instead of going there, he shut himself up with his two daughters in a cave, hoping to find the sanctuary of a monastery. However, you cannot run from evil by escape. His daughters had gotten him drunk for the purpose that their own father would sleep with them and produce offspring. We can see in the attempt of Abraham and Sarah to have children by Hagar that this family had some odd ways to bring about having children. Before we try to compare Abraham to Lot as though Abraham was a strong man who made good choices and was blessed for his goodness by God and Lot who was weak in faith was punished for making bad choices, we will not have to look at the passage in today's lesson. We shall soon learn that Abraham was not blessed for his merit but made choices as foolish as Lot's.

Exposition of the Text

Abraham and Sarah were promised by God that they would be parents of a boy named Isaac in twelve months. We need to keep this thought in mind as we look at the happenings here. Abraham for whatever reason headed to the desert area from where he was. As the Negev was pretty hostile and dry, we might wonder why he did so. Perhaps after he had seen the flames and smoke come up from Sodom and Gomorrah, he wanted to get away from city life as far as possible. Perhaps this was an escape.

However, on the way there, he stopped at a small town named Gerar. When asked about her he told the king or the crown prince as Abimelech means “My Father (is) king. We must not think of kings in the Old Testament in the same light as we do in the great monarchs of history. They were more like clan leaders of mostly small groups. Perhaps the comparison here could be made to a small town mayor. Abimelech must have asked about Sarah, Abraham’s ninety year old wife and responded was told by Abraham that Sarah was his sister. Hearing this, he summoned Sarah to his harem.

Another detail we should not miss is that Sarah was an old worn out woman. Something must have happened to her to restore her youth and beauty. Usually, a prince or a king looks for pretty young women for a harem. Without saying it directly. God had restored Sarah’s youth and also her fertility. Her clock had been set back.

Old man Abraham had reverted to the same old lie he had told Pharaoh. And like the first lie, it became a source of stumbling. Abraham and Sarah were to become parents in one year, presumably conceiving a child in the normal way nine months earlier. If one looks at the math, one would discover a serious problem. Sarah was in another man’s harem, and the time to conceive Isaac was near. God was going to have to work fast.

God did so directly by coming to Abimelech in a dream and telling him that he was as good as dead for taking someone else’s wife. This is not the news you want to be awakened to hear. But Abimelech had been honorable and not yet slept with Sarah. Abimelech strangely answers the LORD with the same concern Abraham had for Sodom when Abraham told the LORD it was not right to slay the innocent with the guilty. Abimelech knew immediately when God came to him in the dream that Abraham had lied. And he protests his innocence to God, that he had taken Sarah based on false information.

We should note the generic term “God” is used in talking to Abimelech and not Yahweh. Also he does not address God by the name either but uses Adon, which is Lord, not LORD. The relationship that Abimelech has is not the same as that of Abraham. If the favor of being in covenant relationship was based upon works

rather than grace, the more honorable pagan Abimelech was more deserving of being in covenant with Yahweh. This was a lesson that should have been learned by the wilderness generation who was reminded by Moses that they were not chosen because they were great and honorable but simply by God's free choice and election. After all, the story of Abraham was recorded by Moses in the first five books of the bible just before his death.

God responds to Abimelech that he is aware of the situation and it was by his grace that He prevented Abimelech from consummating the relationship. God orders Abimelech to restore Sarah to Abraham right away or his entire clan would die.

Morning could not have happened soon enough for Abimelech. He calls in Abraham and severely rebukes Abraham's dishonesty. He asks why on earth Abraham would subject him to such a threat. Abraham's answer was that he felt no one feared God in the place. He was afraid for his life the same way he had been afraid in Egypt. So he now tells the truth. Technically, Sarah was his half-sister. He also relates that God had caused him to leave his settled life and wander in Canaan, he had made a pact with her that she would show her loyalty to him by only claiming to be a brother and not mentioning that she was his wife. We can see that Abraham was as mixed up in life as Lot was. He was no better than his nephew. He wasn't even as good as some of the Canaanites who were to eventually be removed from the land for their wickedness.

Abimelech also showed more understanding of making a guilt offering, even though Abraham was far guiltier than he. He made a great restitution for his theft of Abraham's wife. The Law of Moses commanded restitution for theft, but Abimelech was extravagant. In the Law that came more than 400 years after Abraham, the thief was to restore at most fourfold. But Abimelech gave Abraham a king's ransom. He gave 1,000 pieces of silver plus sheep, cattle, servants, and maidservants. It is quite ironic that Abraham had refused great riches from the evil king of Sodom because he did not want it known that that king made him rich. But here, he as really the guilty party takes the riches of a man who was more righteous than he.

Abraham then prayed for the healing of the women. The NET Bible says that the women were unable to conceive while Sarah was in harem. However, when one considers the time element in Abraham and Sarah's life, I think the KJV says it better in suggesting the pregnant women were unable to go into labor. It would take some time to realize that no women were conceiving. And the fact that Abraham and Sarah needed to be together so that Isaac could be conceived and on one could claim Abimelech as father, I greatly prefer the King James at this point.

So in the end, Abraham and Sarah were where they needed to be for the next step in their great journey. Abraham had acted without faith that the LORD would protect him. The LORD did indeed protect him, but at what cost to himself. What kind of witness did Abraham bear to the Pagan world? Later on Paul would remind us by quoting another Old Testament passage that God's name was blasphemed every day among the nations because of the actions of the Israelites. Abraham's poor witness seems to have passed down to his posterity.

Homily

Abraham had shown himself most unworthy to be a covenant partner with God based upon his works. We tend to treat him and others like Jacob, Gideon, Samson, and David as being Old Testament heroes whose faith we should follow. Rather, we should see God as the hero who showed tremendous grace to unworthy. Abraham received a great blessing because a more worthy man accepted what should have been Abraham's guilt as his own and paid a great ransom. In even a greater fashion, Jesus paid the cost and assumed the guilt that rightly was ours. We who deserved the severest punishment for our sin instead walk away enriched by the blessings of the eternal covenant made in Jesus' blood. In this we should be abundantly and joyously thankful.

We must also remember that we are His children. Children can bring honor or disgrace to his or her parents. How many parents cringe when their child throws a tantrum in a restaurant? The parents will feel that every eye is staring at them. They don't blame the child as much as the parents. Why should we want to cause the Lord Jesus who has given His all for us shame because of our sub-Christian

conduct? Why should it be said that the unbelievers act in more moral a fashion than the children of God.

If we are going to have an effective witness for Jesus Christ, we must do all that is within our power to act in a manner that is honoring to him. Abraham had made an excuse to Abimelech for lying and not an apology. He should have at least confessed his guilt in the manner. And when we sin, we should be fast to confess. If the Pagan Abimelech made more than generous restitution to protect his earthly reputation, how much better would it be to suffer loss if need be than to bring reproach to Christ. Paul talks about such an incident in 1 Corinthians where one Christian was suing another in court, and that before unbelievers. He says it would have better to have been defrauded personally than to make such a spectacle before unbelievers.

We are on a pilgrimage of faith and are soon to enter the Promised Land where there are streets of gold and gates of pearl? We don't need all the material stuff the world lusts after anyway. When we realize that we have the pearly of great price which we gladly exchanged all of our worldly goods, we can gladly live in our humble tents in the meanwhile. The good thing is that we can share the treasure with others when we share the gospel and be the richer rather than the poorer for it. Let us be above all reproach from the world. We cannot like Lot hide in a cave. We have to bear witness in the world. Just let that be the best witness that honors Jesus. Let us trust Him, because the Lord we are in covenant will rescue us from all danger. Even if we lose all our possessions or even our lives, we belong to Him.

The Life of Abraham, Part 13: A Son is Born!

Genesis 21:1-7

Introduction

In the last lesson, we saw a serious breach of faith in Abraham. He had failed to trust in Yahweh to protect him among the inhabitants of Gerar and rather trusted in his own wisdom. Had not the LORD intervened as his covenant partner and promise maker and remained faithful to the covenant promises He had made, the road to Christ would have hit a dead end. Abraham should have continued to have believed in Yahweh's lovingkindness. The Hebrew word "hesed" of which lovingkindness and mercy are some of its English translations describes the action of a superior covenant partner coming to the aid of a weaker one. Abraham felt helpless in this new situation, and the actions he took on his own initiative made the situation worse and not better.

Exposition of the Text

The long awaited promise of God to Abraham and Sarah had become a reality. What a day of absolute joy it must have been to them. It arrived right on time, that is God's time, and the promise was fulfilled in God's way as well. This can only be seen as an act of "hesed" as well. Abraham and Sarah were totally unable to have children, so their superior covenant partner who was more than any earthly covenant partner had intervened in their behalf. This was the work of a gracious God alone. I am assuming that Abraham and Sarah conceived the child in the normal way, but only after the LORD had turned back their biological clocks.

Abraham obeyed the LORD and named his son "Isaac". The laughter of unbelief had become the laughter of belief and joy. He also obeyed the LORD in circumcising Isaac on the eighth day as commanded for all males born into his household as a sign of the covenant. This sign which was made only on the foreskins of males by the shedding of their own blood is replaced in the church today by the covenant sign of baptism in which we remember the shed blood of the

Lord Jesus in our own behalf and is for boys, girls, men, and women who are born into the New covenant.

Sarah's great joy is expressed in a song of praise unto the LORD. She said that the LORD had caused her to laugh in joy, considering the circumstances. It isn't as elaborate as the psalms of thanksgiving of either Hannah at the birth of Samuel or Mary about the coming birth of her son Jesus but it must have been just as heartfelt as either of these. It was a great reproach for a woman to be barren in the ancient Near East. It was seen as the curse of God. It is fascinating how the Lord has used "cursed" women throughout the Scripture. Rebekah was barren for many years until she gave birth to twins. We can think of Samson's mother, of Ruth, of Hannah, and of Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist as examples.

God created the world out of nothing and gave it form and purpose. In the case of these barren births, it is in a sense a repetition of creation. This miracle of the birth of Isaac to a long barren woman is in a sense then a new creation. The turning back of her clock was as if she had never grown old in the first place. It was symbolically a return to Eden. She had become a type of Eve. In return, Sarah becomes a type of God's act of ushering in the fullness of the New Creation. The child she bore becomes a type of the one who would come from the descendants of Abraham, the true promised seed, Jesus Christ who would undo the fivefold curse and will complete the recreation at His return. This promised Jesus would be blessed with seed that will fill the earth. He has an eternal inheritance which he will joyously share with his children. As the new Adam, He has been given dominion over not just the earth but the universe. Through Him we shall have all our relationships healed as if the effects of sin had never happened and with Him shall live eternally in that happy land. This blessed birth of Isaac is another signpost along the way of what the LORD intended to do.

The children of Israel in the wilderness approaching the Jordan would have been the first to have heard this story told from writing, although some of the material Moses used may have come from written sources. But to the readers of the Torah, the sweetness of this birth must have given courage to them. Even though the promise had been long offered, and through their unbelief delayed forty years, the time of claiming the land Promised to them as the descendants of Abraham was at

hand. In a sense, they already had title to it. Soon they would cross the Jordan under Joshua whose name in Greek would be “Jesus “ and make their de jure title de facto.

Homily

We too live at the verge of the final fulfillment of God’s promise in Jesus Christ. We stand at the brink of Jordan. Instead of having to cross with Jordan to fight the enemies on the other side, the New Joshua, Jesus Christ, has gone into the heavenlies to make Holy War against our greatest enemy, Satan. If the Children of Israel were unable to overcome fully the Canaanite enemies, what hope would the church have against the principalities and cosmic powers set against us? Our Joshua has gone on ahead, and when the way is fully clear, at the time and means of His own choosing will bring us to birth in the Promised Land that truly is the restored Eden of God. The land of Canaan that the first Joshua and the children of Israel entered pales in comparison.

We have been waiting a long time for this promise to be fulfilled. We as humans have a more mortal way at looking at promises. We expect them to be fulfilled within our allotted fourscore and ten. Even in Peter’s time, scoffers had come against the church with the accusation that the Lord is delaying his coming. These scoffers have not let up over the nearly 2,000 years since Peter either. We know that the Lord Jesus is incredibly patient and unwilling any should perish. He knows the fullness of the number of those appointed to eternal life. Just like with Abraham and Sarah, we must wait patiently on our covenant partner to show His hesed. We cannot make this promise happen in our own initiative.

We may fault Abraham and Sarah for their lack of faith, and their attempts at self-deliverance through their own ingenuity as well as their attempts to make God’s will happen. But they are not the only ones who have tried to shortcut the process. The church has made its own “crusades” over the years as though it was our responsibility to make God’s kingdom a reality. The result has been just as unsatisfying as that of Abraham and Sarah. The Children of Israel who had wandered in the wilderness as a result of unbelief in the promise of God tried to

force God's hand by attempting to enter the Promised Land anyway. The result was a stinging defeat. The children of the Exodus generation would get to the Promised Land, on God's timing and in the way He ordained.

We must learn to rest on the promise of God and wait patiently on Him to complete the work he had returned to the Father to do. He is busy preparing a place for us. The suffering of waiting is part of God's plan for us. His discipline is to make us most joyful and thankful for His grace when the promise arrives. The joy we shall have at that heavenly banquet will be as heartfelt in depth as the joy of Sarah and infinitely wider in breadth. In the meanwhile, as we anticipate that day, we receive down payments of the life to come. Just like Israel had its feasts in the wilderness, God sets His table before us as well. The church fellowship supper or love feast should be a joyous down payment of the future reality. We already have the title by law (*de jure*). We now await for it to come in fact (*de facto*).

There is another type of feast that is a down payment to our future reality as well. When we come to Christ, a banquet is held in heaven. There is great joy in heaven over the birth of a new Christian. Our births are joyously recorded in heaven. The Lord takes great joys in His new children. We can be assured of his lovingkindness. Of course, children have to be disciplined. They have all the privileges reserved to them as a right of birth. But even though these privileges are a birthright, the attainment of these promises has to come with maturity. We must be patient with the Lord working his promise in us as well. The joy of birth is past, but the joy of marriage is ahead.

The Life of Abraham, Part 14: Isaac Shall Be Heir

Genesis 21:8-21

Introduction

The birth of Isaac was a time of great joy. But the birth of Isaac also would have important implications. I would suppose that Hagar and Ishmael rejoiced in the birth as well, at least outwardly. But it would not be long before their standing in Abraham's household will be challenged.

Exposition of the Text

It took a couple of years for the conflict to break out. But Isaac had reached an important milestone in his life. He was no longer dependent upon his mother's milk. He had made the first step of a long journey unto adulthood. So Abraham prepared a great feast for all his household to rejoice. At this time Ishmael was about fifteen and would have been considered as an adult in that society or very nearly so. There was no great rejoicing recorded for Ishmael for his having achieved an important milestone in his life.

At the feast, it is said that Ishmael was either joking with the young lad or more likely mocking him. Sibling rivalries seem to be the rule and not the exception in human society. We also know that older children have trouble adjusting to not being the only child any longer. They tend to feel neglected as more attention has to be focused upon a totally dependent child. All of this would ring true enough for Ishmael, but there was even a deeper rift felt by the boy. He was the son of a slave woman. Even though he was the older son, Isaac was the one who had higher legal status in the family. The son of a slave woman was still a slave, no matter who his father was. Ishmael may have felt this deeply. The prophecy given to Hagar was that the boy was going to struggle with everyone. His hand would be against them and theirs against his.

There could be another way to look at this in that Ishmael may only have been playing with Isaac. In that case, it was a problem with Sarah and not Ishmael. The NET Bible text indicates the possibility that Sarah took the slave boy's playing with Isaac as making Ishmael a child of equal or even superior status which threatened her son inheriting fully the estate and the promise. The context makes either of these a possibility, so one should be careful not to jump to conclusions as to who was blameworthy. The important detail is that the conflict over who would be Abraham's heir had come to the surface, and it had to be resolved.

Sarah seems to have been a woman of some temper, especially when her interests were crossed. She stormed to Abraham and demanded that the slave woman and her son be banished from Abraham's household. She did not care how precarious it made their situation in society. Where would they go and how they might make a living was irrelevant. The only thing that mattered is that all rivals to her son's inheritance be removed.

Abraham naturally hotly resisted the idea. After all, even though Ishmael was not Sarah's son, he was Abraham's son. Abraham was concerned for his welfare. He may have had an idea that the banishment of Ishmael was a death sentence, and it very nearly was. A rift was developing between Abraham and Sarah over this which threatened the unity of the household.

God spoke to Abraham and told him to listen to his wife's demands. Why is says God rather than the covenant name Yahweh seems puzzling. I would have expected to see LORD here and not God. Nevertheless, God told Abraham that He would take responsibility for the young man's care and his mother by implication. He was not the covenant heir, but Isaac. He did promise to make a great nation of Ishmael simply because he was Abraham's child. Isaac was to be sole heir to the promise.

So Abraham obeyed God's voice and prepared to send Ishmael away. He provided food and water for them, as much as they could carry and dismissed them into the care of the LORD, his superior covenant partner. What we see here from a strictly human perspective seems cruel and heartless. But Abraham had learned from experience that it was better to trust the LORD than in his own devices. If God says he will take care of them, he will.

It is interesting that at this point that the narrator take the point of view of Hagar and not Ishmael. The only indication that Ishmael ever spoke was in his cry in the desert. It says that Hagar had no clue where she was going. After all, she did not have any place to go. She wandered aimlessly just like the children of Israel would and in much the same area. They got thirsty and hungry and were at the point of death. Hagar had to distance herself from Ishmael out of grief as he was dying. She did what she could. She got him out of the sun and into what little shade she could find. The food and drink Hagar and Ishmael had taken on their bizarre Exodus was spent. It was up to God to provide for them in the wilderness just as he would have to provide manna and water for the wandering Israelites.

Again it says an angel of God and not the angel of Yahweh called to Hagar. Is this an indication of a different status? Was He but God to Ishmael and not the covenant LORD of Isaac? Again, this is a possibility, but God seems to act in a very personal way with Hagar. God asks what seems to be the obvious. The angel sent by God asks what the matter was and shows that he fully knows the answer by saying that God had heard the boy's cry and had sent an angel to help. The angel showed her where a well was and provided life giving water to Ishmael. I would assume that food was provided as well.

The text goes on to say that God was with Ishmael who grew up in the wilderness. He became an archer and married an Egyptian wife which his mother found. There is probably something significant about his wife coming from Egypt whereas Isaac's would come from what is known as Syria from among Abraham's kinfolk.

The story of Ishmael ends here, He makes a cameo appearance at the burial of Abraham and Genesis later records that he had twelve sons which was the fulfillment of God's promise to Hagar. He became great in this world from humble beginnings which fulfilled God's promise to Abraham.

Homily

This story would of course resonate with the wanderings of the Children of Israel. They too were provided for in a miraculous way. What is different is the special

relationship they were offered. They were protected by the LORD and not just an angel of God. What they had been promised was greater than that of Ishmael. But nevertheless, when they worshiped the golden calf, the LORD threatened to disinherit them or even destroy them and make a great nation out of Moses. Moses intercedes for them the same way Abraham had for Sodom. When the LORD agreed to send an angel rather than Himself to guide them into the Promised Land, Moses again objected. And the LORD listened to the voice of Moses. Their special covenant relationship was preserved by God's grace, at least for the season.

Paul uses this passage in a stunning allegory in the Book of Galatians. There a group of Jewish "believers?" had troubles the Gentiles in the church by saying that they had to come to Jesus through circumcision and the covenant of Sinai in order to have either full or even membership at all in the church. This was causing a great deal of disunity within the church and threatened to fracture the family of God as much as the problem of Ishmael's status had threatened Abraham's household. Would these Gentiles be reduced to second-class slave status in the church? Would they become like the Gibeonites in the Book of Joshua who were allowed to live and not die but were reduced to menial slaves. Paul, like Sarah had a temper too. But Paul now puts a strange twist on the story. When he says throw out the bondwoman and her son, he is referring to those who tried to force Judaism upon the Gentiles.

Paul talks about the two sons of Abraham representing two covenants. He then compares the Sinai covenant to Ishmael the son of the slave woman who is in bondage with her children. The fact that Ishmael had twelve sons could have been exploited but wasn't picked up by Paul. The second son Isaac who was free born and represents the Christian covenant which is based upon the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Why should a free man become a slave to a covenant made by shedding their own blood and they could not keep? There are curses imputed upon a covenant partner who is faithless. And as far as all flesh, Jew, Gentile, moral or immoral as people reckon morality, no one is able to keep the covenant of Sinai and would come under the curse of death.

A few weeks ago we looked at the two covenants of Abraham. The first was based upon faith which was reckoned to Abraham. This was a covenant of grace. Then in

chapter 17, we are introduced to the second covenant cut into human flesh. This covenant is that of Sinai. Then in the last times the New Covenant came in its fullness in Jesus Christ who fulfilled the Covenant of Genesis 17 and of Sinai perfectly and bore the penalty for us having broken them as if he had done it. He took the curse for us. This is the true freedom.

The covenant structures make for an interesting pattern called a chiasm. A chiasm is an A-B-B'-A' arrangement. The chiastic pattern for A is the Genesis 15 covenant of grace through faith. B is the chapter 17 covenant of works marked by circumcision. The Sinai covenant when improperly applied as it was in Judaism is also if works and is B'. Finally the Covenant of Grace through faith in Jesus Christ corresponds to A' There is an idea of descent followed by ascent. God's work being by grace through faith and ends in grace and faith. Abraham was justified by faith even as we are justified by faith. Abraham only saw the promise in type, but we see it in its fullness.

I just want to end this on a note that the Sinai Covenant itself was not a covenant of works. It begins with an indicative that the Children of Israel were already a redeemed people and that entirely of grace. The Ten Commandments do not begin with "Thou shalt not" but rather I AM the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. It was the fact that this covenant was misused to make salvation and redemption dependent upon man's obedience. So as Paul notes, the Law is good and holy of itself and is based upon grace. It is our corruption of what God made for good that made it an occasion for curse and death. The Sinai covenant as the Genesis 17 covenant was meant to be kept perfectly by Abraham's promised seed, and that seed it Jesus Christ.

So when we see commands for Christian conduct in the New Testament, we must understand that there is an indicative which precedes the call to the holy life of obedience. And like Judaism, we tend to fall into the traps of legalism. We act as if the Book of Ephesians began with chapter 4 and not with the indicative of telling of God's great eternal plan for our salvation which is totally based upon grace through faith. We must be careful not to misuse the Bible as it were a rulebook. Instead, we respond in love to a God who has redeemed us and wants our sanctification for our good. To fall into legalism is bondage and misery. And

despite the claims that it keeps us from falling into sin, legalism actually is antinomian. Let us never forget the basis of our standing with God.

The Life of Abraham, Part 15: The Way of the Philistines

Genesis 21:22-34

Introduction

In the last lesson we saw the expulsion of Ishmael and his mother from Abraham's family and their harrowing exodus into the wilderness which nearly proved fatal. As the boy was dying, God heard the boy's cries and sent an angel to show his mother a well at Beer Sheba which being translated means "well of the oath". There God had saved Ishmael and fulfilled His oath to his covenant partner Abraham to care for the boy and his mother. We also noted that the story now leaves them behind, other than an occasional glimpse that God remained faithful to His promises both to Hagar and to Abraham.

We also learned of the ingenious allegory Paul made of this story to show the superiority of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ to that of Sinai, although the Sinai covenant was based on grace in reality. Judaism had distorted the Sinai covenant into one of salvation by human efforts and works rather than its true centering in the grace and working of the LORD to Israel. We learned that Sinai's commands came after the grace shown to Israel and was never the means of obtaining the covenant. In like manner, we learned that the New Testament imperatives of how we should live are based upon what Christ has done for us. We were warned not to slip into the same legalism as Judaism lest we be ensnared and lose our freedom. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Even this faith is a gift of God.

Exposition of the Text

In many ways, today's text seems to be an anticlimax. It seems like a recording of a covenant between Abimelech and Abraham concerning use of the land and water. But if we look into the context of the writing of the Book of Genesis which was at the end of Moses' life, we begin to see a little light in this text. The children of Israel were forbidden to make any treaties with any of the nations of Canaan but to

thoroughly exterminate them. Yet they would make one with the Gibeonites who had tricked them. Later on, they would make others with city states that proved too powerful for them. These treaties became snares to them and caused them nothing but trouble. They became the means of temptation to go after other gods and to engage in immoral and even murderous practices in worshiping these strange gods.

In this text, the LORD has already promised Abraham that his descendants will eventually possess the land. He also promised to look after Abraham and his safety. So with what we have studied so far, we are now presented with an offer on the part of Abimelech and his chief general Phicol to make a covenant treaty. The text seems to call them Philistines. The Philistines of Moses' day were sea people who had recently settled on the coast of Palestine related in some way to the Greeks. But there does not seem to have been any settlement of them in the time of Abraham. And this area of Israel was towards the wilderness, not the coast. However, the meanings of words in a language change over time. Over the more than 400 years between the time of Abraham and Moses, the descriptive names may have changed reference.

Whatever, the origin of his clan, Abimelech was head of one of the tribes of the land which would have been slated for destruction when their iniquity was full. We have already met Abimelech before in the narrative in the last detour Abraham took before the birth of Isaac. Abimelech, even though he was a pagan in the land turned out to be more honorable than Abraham. He expresses the desire to cut a covenant. He had been previously deceived by Abraham and wanted assurances that Abraham would not deceive him again. He expected honorable conduct from Abraham at the same level as his conduct to Abraham. Abraham said he was willing to do this.

But first Abraham lodges a complaint. He had dug a well at Beer Sheba, the same well apparently that the angel of God had revealed to Hagar which saved their lives. Abimelech's men had seized it. As this was a very dry land with frequent droughts, water rights were jealously guarded. Abimelech told Abraham that this was the first he had heard of it. This time Abraham who was the wronged party in this case provided the trespass offering as a witness. He did not provide the king's ransom that Abimelech had paid over the taking of Sarah into his harem but offered

him seven ewes. He gave them as proof of Abraham's ownership of the well and insisted that Abimelech take them. There the two of them made an oath concerning the well and named it Beer Sheba, the well of the oath. Interestingly enough, this would be the second oath made there. As we mentioned before, the angel of God promised Hagar that the boy would live and showed her this very well.

It then says that Abimelech returned home with Philcol. He then planted a tamarisk tree there as a sign of ownership and then followed this up by worshiping the LORD the eternal God. This is the first time God is referred to as the Eternal God. The word "olam" in Hebrew had been used to describe an everlasting covenant or an everlasting possession, but this is the first time that it is applied to Yahweh. So this title serves as another revelation to Abraham of the attributes of the LORD. Of course, only one who is everlasting can make a covenant that is everlasting. And an everlasting covenant has further implications for Abraham as well. Jesus would later refer to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being the God of the living and not of the dead.

The text then says that Abraham stayed in the area for quite some time.

Homily

We like Abraham live as pilgrims in the land. The iniquity of this world is not yet full. It is not yet the time in which the earth will be purged in the judgment of fire and recreated in its final perfect and redeemed form. We are called by Jesus in his High Priestly prayer in John 17 not to escape the world, but rather he asks for the Father's protection of His people in this world. So what kind of treaties can and should we make with the inhabitants of the land to get along? This is certainly a difficult and thorny question.

I think that one thing for sure is while we give to Caesar that which rightfully belongs to Caesar, we must not give him anything that is exclusively reserved for God. Because the government is of God and accountable to God, whatever we give to Caesar is actually given to God. This is why we must pay taxes, live blameless lives, and give honor to whom honor is due. In this we are actually honoring God

in what we do. But there is a dividing line. The second part of what Jesus says is that what belongs to God directly is not to be given to anyone else. In the days of the early Christians, the Caesars demanded more than their rightful honor and respect, they wanted more than taxes. They wanted to be worshiped as lord and god. We must respectfully decline such demands, even if it means our lives. For many of the early Christians, this was exactly the case. And as more Christians were martyred in the last hundred years than ever before, we must realize that this possibility exists even today for us who live in the land called the USA.

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at the well. In some religions of Abraham's day, the tree itself would be worshiped. It was OK for Abraham to plant a tree which served as a shelter from the heat of the sun for the purpose of worshiping the LORD, so long as the church building itself was not worshiped. This can become a form of idolatry on our part, when we worship the works of our own hands. When we make a god out of our church building or we start worshiping our worship, we have committed idolatry as severe as the ancients. Maybe this is why the LORD prohibited family altars to be made of dressed stone. They had to be made of unworked stone, found exactly as God made them. When tools are formed and polished temples raised, then the urge to worship the work of human hands are too great a temptation.

This certainly became a snare to Israel in both Solomon's time and especially in the time of Jesus. The Temple was known as Herod's Temple as though it belonged to him. Judaism so worshiped the Temple in Jerusalem that they murdered Jesus who is the true Temple. The Lord soon had the Romans remove the snare when the second temple was destroyed just a few years after the long renovation started under Herod was finished.

The Lord desires worship that flows simply from the heart. This sincerity of worship is far more important than pompous ritual. Let us simply out of gratitude and praise worship the Lord with a pure conscience and worry less about the building and form.

The Life of Abraham, Part 16: Isaac is not the Sacrifice

Genesis 22:1-14

Introduction

In the life of Abraham, the LORD seems to break into Abraham's life in a most unexpected way. Sometimes when we read the Bible, we get the impression that God spoke to his prophets all the time. We forget that the Book of Hebrews say that God spoke to the fathers and prophets at various times and in diverse manners. History tends to compress time by highlighting the big events and discarding the ordinary. Although in the last lesson we got a glimpse of the ordinary, we still tend to focus on the big events. We must understand that at the time of today's lesson, Abraham had been about fifty years in the land of Canaan. During these fifty years, the LORD appeared to Abraham less than ten times. The rest of the time was occupied with the affairs of everyday life.

Exposition of the Text

Chapter 22 the final words of the LORD directed to Abraham. After this event, Abraham would live some fifty years longer. He would have to make arrangements for purchasing a burial plot for Sarah his beloved wife which would become Abraham and Sarah's only deed to the Promised Land He would arrange for Isaac's marriage to a believing wife. Strangely enough, he would marry a foreigner and have six more children. And finally he would die as the LORD had promised at a ripe old age and was buried. After the events of the chapter, the scene slowly turns from Abraham to Isaac.

Things had been quite ordinary for Abraham for some time. He had settled in the land for several years, long enough for Isaac to grow up. We don't know how old Isaac was at this point other than he was mature enough to carry a substantial load of wood up a steep hill and less than 37 which he was when his mother died. But he must have been a pretty strong lad. My best guess is that it was closer to the end of Sarah's life which would have made Isaac in his early thirties or about the age

Jesus was when he was crucified. At a minimum, it had been at least ten years since the LORD had last spoken to Abraham.

So out of the blue, the LORD calls out to Abraham who had been enjoying seeing his promised son Isaac grow up into sturdy manhood. Everything was going well. The words of the LORD must have been most disturbing. The LORD told Abraham to take his unique son, the son of the promise, and offer him as a burnt offering in the land of Moriah. The LORD would show Abraham exactly what mountain when he got there.

The land of Moriah was in the general area which included what is now Jerusalem. It must have been a confusing night for Abraham. We do know that the Phoenicians in the time of Moses and later sacrificed children by fire as a means of inducing their God Baal (or Molech) as a means of trying to bring fertility and rain to the land and to have many children. We do not know if this happened in the time of Abraham, but we do know what the LORD thought about burning of children as a sacrifice. Abraham loved the boy, and this news must have been troubling.

But Abraham knew the voice of the LORD and that he must trust and obey the LORD. He saddles the donkey, took Isaac and servants, and the wood and other things he would need to offer the sacrifice. On the third day he became aware of the mountain upon which he was to offer his son, He leaves his servants at the bottom of the hill with the donkey and tells them that he and the young man went up to worship and to return,

Abraham fastened the wood for the sacrifice on the back of his son Isaac who carried it to the top of the mountain. He himself carried the knife and the wood. Together they walked to the place the sacrifice was to be made. Isaac was a bright child and knew something was wrong. They brought up everything except the sacrifice. He did not know at this point that he was the sacrifice. Abraham then tells the boy that God would provide himself as a lamb for the offering. Abraham built an altar there, perhaps with the help of Isaac and put the wood on the altar.

Now he tied up his son and put him on the altar and raised the knife to slay him. It was at this point the Angel of the LORD called out from heaven for Abraham to stop. "Do not harm the lad". The LORD then knew of Abraham's absolute

covenant loyalty in that he did not even withhold his special son from the LORD. The LORD then provided a ram caught in the thicket to offer in the place of Isaac. Abraham called the place Yahweh-Yireh which means “In the mountain of the LORD provision will be made,

So far I have simply related the story in a historical matter. But if we will look at the details carefully we will see amazing parallels to the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary. Let us take a look. The first parallel is that the place of sacrifice was reached on the third day. This of itself is probably by itself not significant, but it does remind us of resurrection on the third day. On the third day, so to speak Isaac was saved from death. Then the next clue was a mountain in the land of Moriah which included Jerusalem. The question to be asked is “Where did Jesus die in our place?”—at Golgotha in Jerusalem near the Temple mount. Then there is Abraham’s statement to the servants that the two of them would return which is another resurrection theme. Then it says that Abraham the father tied the wood on the back of his unique son of promise and had him carry it up the mount. We can think of Jesus, the Father’s unique son carrying the cross tied to his back up the mount. We remember that Isaac was a strong young man who was 100 years younger than his father. If he was going to be tied to the altar, he would have to offer himself willingly. In allowing himself to be bound, he was absolutely obedient even to the point of death to his father. As Jesus in the garden was aware of his upcoming sacrifice questioned his having to drink the cup, Isaac had questioned Abraham about the offering.

Isaac was not the special promised seed who would willingly offer himself in sacrifice to the LORD. Abraham’s promised seed was far off. The LORD did indeed provide Himself as the sacrificial Lamb. The ram in the story which was the substitute for Isaac pointed forward to a far greater sacrifice which would be made at Calvary some 1800 years later.

Homily

We can see by comparing accounts of Calvary and this passage that the LORD announces His work in advance. When it later happens, it is a proof. The Old

Testament is full of clues of God's intention to bring Christ into the world as a sacrifice for sin. Some of them like Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 are more obvious as would a careful reading of this text in Genesis. But these are not the only ones by a long shot. The New Testament reveals many other Old Testament texts as pointing to the coming of Jesus. Micah predicted the place of Jesus' birth as being Bethlehem is just one example of this.

Jesus after his resurrection opened the eyes of His disciples to all of the Old Testament Scriptures which pointed to Him. Once we see the events of Jesus' life and His and the apostle's teaching, the texts stand out. It does require in a sense that our eyes and understanding be opened. Without faith in Jesus and the resurrection, many "scholars" today claim they can hardly find any evidence about the coming of Jesus and his work in the Old Testament. In other words they fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah which says that they would claim sight but truly be blind and thinking that they can hear are deaf to the Spirit.

Jesus told the unbelieving Pharisees that they vainly searched the Scripture for evidence for eternal life. He told them they could only find eternal life on the Old Testament if they understood that the Old Testament spoke about Him. Jesus on the Emmaus Road spent a couple of hours relating the Old Testament scriptures that prophesied the resurrection. Their eyes were opened. If we will only open the eyes of faith, we too will see Jesus in the Old Testament as well as the new.

As we are in the last days before the advent of Jesus Christ, that is the second coming, we must realize that there is plenty of Scripture which points forward to this event. We may not understand this fully, but we should understand enough to be ready for that day. The LORD does not do anything without first revealing it to His prophets. We do know the day of the complete possession of the promise is at hand. Let us continue to walk as Abraham did. Many days may seem mundane like the work of servants whose master is on a long journey. In these things we must remain faithful. At some times the Lord's voice will be heard by the ears of faith, either in prayer, or preaching, or Bible study, or other means. But the true test of faith is to be found faithful to our assigned tasks when the Lord appears.

The Life of Abraham, Part 17: The LORD's final Words to Abraham

Genesis 22:15-19

Introduction

In the last passage we were left on the mountaintop, spellbound by the rapid turn of events. What had looked like an awful death for Isaac turned out to be supreme joy when the LORD intervened with the promise that He would himself be the sacrifice. Here some 1800 years before Christ is a stunning preview of what would happen at Calvary. No one could do enough to earn the Lord's favor, not even sacrificing your child, or in the case of Isaac, giving your body to be burned. The saving love would have to be from God Himself. Only His sacrifice would do. When we realize that the LORD of the Old Testament is revealed as Jesus in the New, we must remember that it was the Son of God who called down from heaven. He would one day become flesh and walk among us as Jesus Christ.

Exposition of the Text

The text we are studying today are the last recorded words that the LORD would speak to Abraham. As we noted, Abraham would live 50 more years or so. But in a way, these world are the culmination of the life of Abraham.

Our study began with the calling of Abraham. He had lived some seventy five years before this time in which God worked behind the scenes to prepare him for the journey of faith including the moving from Ur to Haran. This call came out of the blue, and Abraham believed and followed on this impressive journey. The first call was short on details. Abraham was to go to a place where God had prepared. He knew nothing of the land. He had no children, and his nephew Lot was heir. Bit by bit, the LORD revealed more and more of the picture. Jesus tells us that Abraham saw Christ's day, which is the ultimate destination of the promise. This does not mean he fully understood this, but then again, even we who have a much clearer picture are far from knowing everything either. We learned that the LORD

takes His time and that His ways and thoughts are not ours. We learned that when Abraham trusted in himself that trouble occurred that the LORD had to rescue him from. When Abraham trusted in the LORD, even the impossible became possible.

This text picks up on the mount. It says that the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven. In it the LORD swore by His own name as He could not swear by any greater. His oath was in response to Abraham's covenant loyalty and obedience to His word. Because he had withheld nothing from the LORD, not even His precious son, the LORD was going to bless Abraham and his descendants in an unbelievable manner. His descendants would be so great as to be countless. The LORD had already told Abraham of this earlier, so this is basically reminding Abraham. So is the rest of the promise which the LORD gives Abraham. His descendants would tear down the strongholds and all nations would bless each other using the name of his descendants. With these words, the LORD speaks to Abraham the last words we have in Scripture

We remember that these words were written down by Moses just before his death and the crossing the Jordan River of the children of Israel. They would face great fortified cities and chariots of iron. This would be a reminder of the LORD's oath to Abraham meant that the LORD would also be with them in the conquest. They were the seed, they were about to possess the land, the New Eden, they were promised life. The presence of God would go before them so that they would have fellowship. They also would have influential dominion over the nations. This would be because of Abraham's loyalty.

Homily

However, a strange twist happens to the story. Israel would not be faithful to the covenant. What looked like the approach of fulfillment of the promise to Abraham was fulfilled only in part. It would soon become evident that these promises to Abraham were farther off than the first Canaan.

Most translations of the text see descendants (seed) as being plural as though this is a promise to Israel. But Paul takes the promise of seed to be singular and not

plural. And this seed he sees to be Christ. Isaac and the miracle of his birth was only a pointer to an even greater and more miraculous birth, that of Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus Christ that nations would bless one another. It is the spiritual descendants born of the seed of the spirit which would be like the sand of the sea and the stars of the skies. The physical descendants have always been a small minority in comparison to the world. Even today, they are a few million among billions. The failures of the first nation of Israel show that the promise to Abraham is actually fulfilled in Christ.

The Book of Hebrews lifts up the faith of Abraham as a man who looked for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. This city was a heavenly one. No man could make a city like it. If there was any city like it on earth, Abraham could have gone to it or even back to the advanced city of Ur in his day. We must believe that he saw beyond Canaan to a better land of promise. This was the true goal of the Old Testament saints as well. The writer of Hebrews used the examples of faith of those in the Old Testament to encourage his flock which was undergoing their own wandering from cities from which they had been expelled and their citizenship revoked.

Abraham serves as the model pilgrim who spends his life down here as an alien because he is a citizen of a far greater city. He is a model for us who have to realize that as the gospel song says are “kind of homesick for a country where we have never been before. We have to trust that it will exceed our wildest expectations. We must be willing to wait patiently for it to come.

We began this study of Abraham with God’s promise, and we end it here with God’s sworn promise, a promise which is as much for us as it was for Abraham. We realize that Jesus has gone before us and is in the finishing stages of preparing the heavenly Jerusalem on the new Mt. Zion. The effects of the fall have been reversed by the work of Christ. We are just waiting in pregnant expectation of its arrival. Soon the final pains will be over. This time it won’t be a dashed hope. What was before revealed in types and shadows will have become reality in full. What we have received as a down payment of the Spirit will be without limit.

The story of the Bible is so much bigger than we often make of it. It is far more than just getting along in this world or a book about morality and philosophy. It is an invitation to belong to God's grand symphony, something so much greater than ourselves, so much greater than our perceived needs.

The journey that Abraham was called to was one of faith. This is the same faith we are called to. We are called to believe the stupendous promises of God which seem beyond all possibility of our attaining. But believing this promise is what we must do if we are to partake in the promise. Those who refuse to believe will not partake of it at all.

We are going to something greater than even Eden. We are going to live life far greater than that Adam and Eve. We will rule and reign a vaster territory than even earth itself. All of the curses will be reversed. We will be part of a great family which will fill the heavens. And we will have eternal life with Jesus Christ our Lord. Onward Christian pilgrims!

