



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



GENESIS 17 - 21

Genesis 17

17:1 - "Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless."

The time has come for the Lord to accomplish what He had previously promised to Abram years before. Before He fulfills what He had promised though, the Lord is first concerned to reconfirm with Abram the nature of their relationship. As if Abram does not already know Him, the Lord declares Himself once again to Abram. We should not hurry past this declaration assuming we understand any more than Abram did at this point. God wants to make sure that Abram grasps exactly Who He is. He is God Almighty! It will be necessary for Abram to hold the full implications of this Name of the Lord when He announces what He is about to do. The Lord is about to do something miraculous and hard to believe with a natural perspective. What is going to be done may be naturally unlikely or even impossible, but is not beyond the capacity of God Almighty.

Following the declaration of His Name, the Lord also declares something powerful and challenging regarding Abram also. He issues a call to Abram to "Walk before Me, and be blameless." This call is a command of the Lord that bears His full authority. Abram is given no option here or even a choice as to whether to accept the call. God has established a covenant between them and has given Abram many wonderful promises of what He will do for Abram. This call is what the Lord requires from Abram in return. This is instructive to us who enjoy a New Covenant relationship with God also. The call of God to enter into covenant with Him in salvation is a call of mercy and grace because none of us including Abram qualify for covenant blessing on the basis of our own works or goodness. But, once we are established in the covenant with God, He does not leave us the same as we were. He calls all who are in covenant with Him to walk before Him and be blameless! In reading that you might be concerned because of the awareness that you are not blameless in thought, word, and deed. We are meant to understand this as God's goal for our life. It parallels this passage from the New Testament, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (I Peter 1:15-16). To be in covenant with a Holy God makes growing in holiness our life goal so that we grow in the likeness of Him Who called us. The natural impossibility of our living blameless lives is surmounted by our position in relationship to Him. We, like Abram are to walk before the Lord. This is a subtle difference from walking with the Lord. The image is of a child learning to walk with the father walking right behind the child to catch him as he falls. Our progression in holiness is not perfect from the first step, but our assurance in growth is in the One before Whom we walk.

17:4-5 - ""As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations."

The Lord reaffirms the covenant with Abram. As He does, there is a new element introduced from when God first called Abram years before. Now, as an expression of what God is about to do through Abram, He changes his name from Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of a multitude). The name change retains the theme of fatherhood, but establishes an important difference in the purpose of Abram's fatherhood. The old original name was emphasized Abram's honor as a father. The new name God gives him emphasizes God's covenant purpose to build through His descendants. The shift in emphasis is from Abram as the focus, to the Lord as the honored One of Abraham's life.

The theme here applies to each of us that belong to the Lord in a similar powerful way. When God establishes us in His New Covenant we are given the blessing of a new name. We are called "saints" (holy ones) and "Christians" (Christ followers). The new name God gives us is not a mere label which fails to reflect the substance inside. The new name is the sign of the powerful grace of God at work within us which has already begun the spiritual transformation of our lives. Who we were before Christ does not limit or even hinder His commitment to conform us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). When God calls a person into covenant with Himself, He gives them a new identity which signals where He is taking them, not where they have been!

17:12 - "And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants."

God gives Abraham a sign of their covenant relationship. The sign is circumcision and requires a response of obedience by Abraham to fulfill the sign. The sign marks the one in covenant as belonging exclusively to the Lord. This sign served the Lord's purpose throughout the Old Covenant to identify the nation of Israel as exclusively His among all the nations. It had a practical and physical aspect, but the act of circumcision also carried a spiritual and symbolic meaning. These New Testament passages give us an explanation of the spiritual meaning that pointed forward toward the New Covenant in Christ. "and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;" (Colossians 2:11). "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." (Galatians 6:15-16).

The New Covenant also has a circumcision. It is called by Paul the circumcision of Christ. It refers to what Christ does in our hearts when we are saved. He surgically removes the flesh from our hearts when we are born again. Circumcision then is a symbol of the new birth and the spiritual removal of the old flesh from our hearts when we are made part of God's new creation in Christ. The timing of the Lord's requirement for when the rite of circumcision was to be done for children born to Abraham's line also points toward this New Covenant fulfillment. Doctors say that waiting until the eighth day after birth to circumcise serves a practical purpose for the child's health, but we should expect that the Lord also designed this timing with a symbolic meaning. The eighth day is also the first day of a new week of creation. When God made the first or original creation He completed it in a full week of seven days. The eighth day points forward to the New Creation that God establishes through Christ. Circumcised ones are therefore the people of the new creation symbolically!

17:17-18 - "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child? And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You! But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him."

After all that God has done and declared we see that Abraham is not yet a finished work. Even as God appears to him and speaks to him here, Abraham struggles with the natural impossibility of what God says He is about to do. Abraham laughs and questions in his own heart whether a child can really be born to him and Sarah at their advanced ages. Abraham is not mocking the Lord here, and does not even draw a rebuke from the Lord for questioning Him in his heart. Abraham has shown a willingness to believe God over and over before this. God understands his difficulty in grasping how this can happen to him and Sarah. When Abraham cries out for Ishmael, it is in the sense of offering back to the Lord an easier way for the Lord to fulfill His promised blessings. He is essentially offering for the Lord to simply bless the 13 year old son from Hagar and not have to do something as impossible as causing two ninety year olds to conceive a child.

God's answer to Abraham's "offer" is a direct and to the point, "No!" God has His own plan and purpose and He is fully capable of carrying out whatever He determines will be done. He does not need Abraham's help. The One Who created the universe does not need us to lighten His responsibilities at all. As an interesting emphasis, the Lord prophetically declares that the promised son will be named Isaac, which means laughter. God is going to turn Abraham's laughter of incredulity into a celebratory laughter when he soon fulfills His promise. When we read something in the Scriptures that God has declared He will accomplish in

us we would be wise to learn from Abraham's reaction and the Lord's response and trust that what God says He will do will be done.

Genesis 18

18:1-2 - "Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, and said, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by. Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said."

We know from the clear description in the text that one of these "three men" that visited Abraham was actually the Lord. We do not know whether Abraham recognized Him as the Lord right away or not. His greeting was a typical cultural greeting for any stranger that visited one's home. The significance of the visit is great whether Abraham knows it yet or not. This is another of the preincarnate appearances of the Lord Jesus in what is theologically identified as a theophany (appearance of God) or christophany (appearance of Christ). We are also not given the identity of the other two men who were with the Lord in this passage. The beginning of the next chapter confirms though what we might expect regarding who would be with the Lord as traveling companions. "Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom." (Genesis 19:1). The other two men were angels of the Lord.

The response of Abraham to the arrival of these three visitors is instructive for us in more one way. First, we should recognize a developing pattern in the way the Lord interacts with His people. He does not always come directly with an announcement of His presence and purpose. At times, like this one, the Lord is present without being fully aware that He is there, and is working out a hidden purpose without us yet knowing the details. Second, Abraham's hospitality provides a continuing pattern for us to emulate especially in our current culture that no longer values such hospitality. Abraham's response as an unplanned host is extravagant. He provides a feast and cares for their physical rest. Third, Abraham's attitude in this expression of hospitality was far from just meeting an unwanted social obligation. The descriptions of him include him rising from his own rest, running to meet their needs, bowing, appealing to them to allow him to meet their needs, planning with his wife for their provision, and then standing by as a servant would do as they are refreshed. His humble service to them reveals that his heart matches his actions. Finally, this situation was in view in this New Testament exhortation to all believers.

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2). It implies that God still works in such ways.

18:17-18 - "The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?"

As the Lord turns from His visit with Abraham, and leaves Abraham's camp in the direction of Sodom, Abraham walks with the three men for a while. This is a further expression of hospitality as the custom was for the host to accompany travelers a short distance from his home on the next part of their journey. Abraham does not yet know the Lord's purpose in heading toward Sodom. As they are walking together, the Lord chooses to inform Abraham of what He intends to do. The Lord gives Abraham a double blessing here. He gives Abraham knowledge of His plans for Sodom and His reason for what He is about to do. The Lord also declares to Abraham why He is sharing His plans with him. By sharing His plans for Sodom with Abraham, the Lord is confirming to him that he now enjoys covenant status with the Lord. He is now truly the "friend of God" (James 2:23), and is treated as His confidant.

This decision of the Lord to inform Abraham of His hidden purpose and the awesome implications of their friendship is a spiritual hint of God's eternal purpose and what He has planned for all who are in covenant relationship with Him. When God originally made Adam in the garden it was for face to face fellowship. Then when man sinned, fell, and was driven from the Garden of the Lord the relationship between God and humanity deteriorated to the point where that kind of fellowship no longer existed. Here we see that in covenant, the fellowship we were created and designed to share with God can be restored. The quality and depth of this special covenant relationship makes Abraham something more than only the servant of God. In Christ, we share full covenant status and are identified by God as His friends forever!

18:19 - "For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

As He is announcing for Abraham's sake why He has chosen to inform him of His plans, the Lord identifies one of Abraham's covenant responsibilities. It is described in a way that should tell us that this is more than simply a covenant chore to accomplish. This is a true priority covenant responsibility. When a covenant is formed between two parties there is a both a sharing of blessings and a mutual commitment to certain relational responsibilities. An example of this pattern would be in a marriage ceremony, which is a social covenant ceremony.

When the couple exchanges their vows, they are publicly committing to covenant responsibilities toward their covenant partner. Here, the Lord informs Abraham that one of his priority covenant responsibilities is his children and household. His responsibility toward them extends beyond providing for the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter.

Abraham is given by the Lord the spiritual responsibility to "command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord..." This includes the following three elements. He is first to always follow the Lord himself and be a godly example in his behavior worthy to be followed. He cannot lead them where he is not going himself. Second, he is to teach, train, and disciple his children and household to know and follow the way of the Lord like he does. He cannot assume that his children will understand without clear instruction, and he is not to presume and delegate this critical teaching responsibility to anyone else. Third, Abraham dare not be soft or lax in this responsibility, but must command those for whom he is responsible to the Lord. The need for command implies a natural resistance in his children to walk in the way of the Lord. It is Abraham's responsibility to overcome that natural resistance and lead them where they need to go with authority.

18:20-26 - "And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account."

This conversation between the Lord and Abraham regarding the future of Sodom provides a classic mystery in the Lord's interaction with His covenant partner Abraham. The mystery is in the Lord's apparent uncertainty of Sodom's true condition and in why the Lord would allow this negotiation with Abraham if He has already planned what to do. The Lord declares that He is already aware of deep corruption in Sodom and Gomorrah which we can readily understand, but then He goes on to state that He will visit the city in order to confirm whether things are really that bad. Some modern "theologians" have latched onto this account and use it to claim that God must not know all things in the present and future. They propose an openness to God in which He learns as history develops much like we do. Such an assertion only exposes their ignorance of the true nature of the God Who knows all things. "Remember the former things long past,

for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure';" (Isaiah 46:9-10). What is really going on here with Abraham, is that the Lord is not professing His ignorance, but rather declaring His thoroughness in justice. His personal visit to confirm the condition of Sodom before passing final judgment will reveal to everyone in the cities' treatment of the angels just how much they deserve the judgment they receive.

The Lord engaging Abraham in a negotiation regarding the boundaries of His mercy and judgment is the first example of what will become a pattern for those in covenant with God. We see here God training Abraham is the business of God's kingdom. At first glance this scene may look like Abraham is the mercifully inclined and God is the harsh judge. But a closer examination shows that the Lord never told Abraham before the negotiation started what exactly He was going to do with Sodom and Gomorrah. This negotiation is the basis of our spiritual ministry in prayer of intercession. We, like Abraham, are called to stand in the presence of the Lord and appeal to Him on behalf of others. We need to see, though, what Abraham was still learning. This negotiation was not about Abraham convincing a reluctant judge to show more mercy. Instead it was about God, Who is both just and merciful, subtly leading Abraham to ask Him exactly what He had already planned to do. We are trained in the process of intercession in how the Lord thinks, not just what He decides.

Questions from Genesis 17:

Question: Gen 17:20 - "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation." Is there any correlation between the various sects of the Muslim faith and this verse (i.e. the Shai, Sunni, etc.)?

Answer: No, not directly. There is a difference between the modern Muslim sects such as the Sunnis and the Shiia, and ancestral tribal origins. Since Islam is a belief system it is not limited to a specific tribal group. There are many Indonesian Muslims for instance. It is true that the Arabic people as a tribal group can trace their ancestry all the way back to Ishmael. It is also true that Muhammad who began Islam as a religion was of Arabic descent. You can trace the tribal origins of Islam to the people that descended from Ishmael, but moving forward in history, Islam is no longer a strictly Arabic religion. Islam did not begin until the 600s AD and the division of the main sects of Sunni and Shiia took place shortly after Muhammad's death in the power struggle among his chief followers to determine who would succeed him.

Genesis 19

19:4-7 - "Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them." But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly."

Lot responds to the arrival in town of the two strangers with genuine hospitality. There is no hint at this point in the story that he understood that they were actually angels sent by God to judge the city. Normal social standards of hospitality are guiding his actions. In the cultures of that time hospitality was a serious responsibility for the righteous. Lot's commitment to the full responsibilities of hospitality in part explains his reaction to the demand of the wicked men of Sodom. The demand of the mob hints that other strangers passing through the city have previously been mistreated. We know from Peter's testimony in the New Testament that Lot was well aware of the lawless record of the men of the city and was deeply troubled by it. "for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds" (II Peter 2:8).

When the men of the city surround the house Lot takes the risk of going outside alone in order to protect the guests under his roof. Lot's actions up to this point are both honorable and courageous. Lot appeals to the mob to not pursue this course of action, but in his appeal Lot's personal weakness begins to be exposed to our view. Earlier we saw an indication of a character flaw in his choice to move to Sodom. Now, while he urges the men not to act wickedly, he at the same time inappropriately identifies with them as "my brothers." Perhaps Lot referred to these wicked men as brothers in an attempt at gaining their sympathy by portraying himself as being "one of you." Whatever his reason, "brother" communicates connection and close association. This New Testament exhortation stands in sharp contrast; "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE." Therefore, "COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; and I will welcome you." (II Corinthians 6:14-17)

19:8-11 - "Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof. But they said, "Stand aside." Furthermore, they said, "This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them." So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door. But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. They struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway."

Lot's character flaw is now further exposed to the point of a glaring spiritual inconsistency. When he makes the offer to the mob of turning his two virgin daughters over to them, our sensibilities are meant to be shocked. Up until this point in the story Lot has always been seen as a good man. Now he does something that we have difficulty imagining any good man could ever do. The inconsistency is in his continuing attempt to protect his guests from horrible abuse by the mob (good and honorable), while at the same time offering his own vulnerable daughters as a kind of unholy sacrifice to appease the mob's lust. Lot commits a serious violation of one spiritual principle of leadership for the sake of another principle. He was spiritually responsible for both his guests and his daughters as the head of the household and as a righteous man. Under the pressure of the circumstance, Lot sees no good solution and chooses to offer a compromise with evil to provide for him the least painful solution to the problem. His solution exposes the shallowness of his love for his own daughters and even worse, his willingness to "make a deal with the devil".

What should Lot have done instead? He should have cried out to the Lord for help, and then spoken with strength, wisdom, and courage to the mob with the commitment to protect all who were under his responsibility including both his daughters and his guests. Lot never does turn to the Lord in his most desperate moment. Yet, the Lord intervenes in spite of Lot's weakness. The actions of the two angels in pulling him inside and then blinding the mob is the hand of the Lord directing His messengers in this rescue. The angel's actions are a sharp contrast with Lot's. He may be willing to compromise with the wicked, but the Lord is not.

19:12-16 - "Then the two men said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it." Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy the city." But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting. When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city." But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city."

The actions of the men of the city have confirmed their deserved doom. The angels announce their intention to destroy the city, but they also declare that they had been sent to the city for that purpose. This confirms that the Lord had already decided to destroy the city when He first sent the angels. Their investigation of the city did not represent the Lord's uncertainty about what it deserved, but instead was the Lord bringing to the light exactly why He is just to bring judgment upon it. The angels mercifully give Lot a brief opportunity overnight to gather his entire family circle and flee the city. There is no indication here that the remainder of Lot's family deserves to be rescued, only that their connection to Lot gains them favor with the Lord for Lot's sake. His sons-in-law do not heed his warning and choose Sodom over salvation.

The next morning, the Lord's appointed time for judgment requires that they now leave the city. Amazingly, after all the wickedness Lot has seen, and knowing that judgment is coming, when the moment of truth arrives, "he hesitated." The word translated "hesitated" describes more than a moment's hesitation. It indicates a lingering. We can interpret this no other way than Lot just really did not want to leave Sodom. It is a strange thing how even true believers can become so attached to things and places that they know in their hearts are not worth it. The Lord again intervenes with compassion for Lot like He did the night before. This time the Lord has the angels grab the hands of Lot, his wife and daughters and lead them to safety outside the city. I am very glad that the Lord will at times step in a rescue us simply out of compassion for us when we may linger in the midst of evil, but we should learn to listen and obey the Lord's warnings and commands.

19:24-26 - "Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But his wife, from behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt."

There are two significant elements in these verse to notice. First, when the moment for judgment arrives we have an interesting and somewhat mysterious mention of two Lords. The Lord rained judgment upon the cities from the Lord out of heaven. The inference is that one Lord is on earth directing the judgment from the other Lord in heaven. For those who deny the Trinity, this description remains an irresolvable mystery. What is happening is the preincarnate Lord Jesus is the Lord on earth that had come to visit Abraham in chapter 18. He now directs the rain of fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah from the Lord in heaven (His Heavenly Father).

The second element is the famous story of the final moments of Lot's wife. We are meant to learn from her example. It's not a good example, but the Bible teaches us that we can learn both from those that provide a good example and from those who represent a bad example. What we learn from the bad examples is, of course, what not to do or be like. Jesus chose her as an object lesson in His own warning to the believers living in Jerusalem in the days just prior to its destruction. He warned them to, "Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it." (Luke 17:32). We can discern from His warning that her look back at Sodom was not a quick glance of curiosity. She looked back even as God was destroying the city regretting the loss of her life that she loved there. We don't know the details of what it was about her life in Sodom that she could not bear to lose. However, the lesson for us is clear. When God finds no redeeming value in a thing, neither should we. Lot's wife valued what the Lord despised.

19:30-38 - "Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed in the mountains, and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; and he stayed in a cave, he and his two daughters. Then the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth. "Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him that we may preserve our family through our father." So they made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. On the following day, the firstborn said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve our family through our father." So they made their father drink wine that night also, and the younger arose and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. As for the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the sons of Ammon to this day."

This is the last appearance of Lot in the Bible. His name is mentioned after this, but we never see him again after these nights in this cave. The story represents a tragic and pathetic end for the life of a believer. The Lord exposes the full story in all its shameful details. Lot is a warning here to all believers of how far a good man can deteriorate if he does not grow beyond his character flaws. The daughters are not excused in their choices and behavior here, but their part should be interpreted as an inappropriate following of their father's lead. His willingness to give them to the mob in Sodom has taught them the wrong standard of what is appropriate and acceptable. His part in what develops in the cave is not excused because of the wine and his drunkenness either. Lot's entire life has just been turned inside out. He has lost his wife, his sons-in-law, his home, and his livelihood. He knew all of this was fallout due to the judgment of God and his foolish decision to lead his family to Sodom in the first place. With all of this, Lot should have been leading his daughters in prayer in this cave. Instead, he abdicates any last leadership he has by getting drunk two nights in row. He is probably trying to "drown his sorrows," but does so when he most desperately needs to be seeking the Lord.

There is an interesting series of parallels between Lot and Noah that we should notice. Both men were lone righteous exceptions in the midst of a corrupt society. God announced and carried out a devastating judgment in both cases. Both men are saved from the judgment by the Lord's intervention. However, Noah's righteous leadership preserves his entire family also, while Lot's compromises result in some of his own family being swept away in the judgment. Both men let down their guard after the judgment and their drunkenness leads to generations long complications. In Lot's case, the sons born will grow into nations that will trouble Israel.

Genesis 20

20:1-2 - "Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar. Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister. So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah."

If this story seems a bit familiar to you, it should. It is all too similar to Abraham's journey to Egypt in Genesis 12. In that situation, Abraham left the land in which God had directed him to settle because of the pressure of a famine. He sought the security of food over the greater security that can only come from following the Lord's direction and obeying Him. Then Abraham compounded his problem by lying to Pharaoh about the nature of his relationship with his wife Sarah. Now, years later, we see Abraham repeat this same pattern again. The main difference this time is that he has even less of an excuse to wander from the Lord's direction for him. There is no famine in the land to provide a rational justification for leaving the Promised Land this time. Plus, Abraham has the benefit of the wisdom gained from his spiritual growth of the last several years. The Lord has also recently confirmed His covenant with him which should have anchored Abraham's heart in the place where he belonged.

Yet, in spite of all this, we see Abraham wander off to settle in a region outside of the land of God's provision. We are not told why he chose to leave, and the fact that his motives are unmentioned implies that he had no good reason to leave even in his own perspective. Once he leaves the place where he belongs, his heart is immediately vulnerable to the temptation to fear that will then lead to the need to protect himself. The lesson here for all believers is in the domino effect of disobedience. One stubborn, rebellious, disobedient choice can set in motion a series of sins as we attempt to make up the difference in the Lord's blessing upon us. As long as he remained where he belonged Abraham could be confident that the Lord would watch over him and protect him. He was not 100% certain that the Lord would protect him in the same way in Gerar. When his fear for his own safety was inflamed again, Abraham resorted to an old pattern of lying to protect himself from the perceived danger. Once again, he places his own wife in an inappropriate and spiritually dangerous position for his own benefit. Abraham has walked with the Lord for over 24 years by this point. He is past the time to be still struggling with such blatant compromises of righteousness.

20:3-6 - " But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married." Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a nation, even though blameless? "Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her."

God comes to Abimelech, who has taken Sarah to add to his harem, in his dream and declares that he is under His judgment because of Sarah. "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married." God pronounces a death penalty for Abimelech. There are two significant spiritual principles illustrated for us here and a third element that is not critical but interesting to notice. The interesting thing is that Abraham and Abimelech both considered Sarah very attractive at her age. Remember from Genesis 17:17 that Sarah is 90 years old now. Even taking into account the extended life spans of that ancient time, for Sarah to be youthful enough to attract Abimelech's attention, the Lord has blessed her as well as Abraham. The first principle to draw from this event is the sovereignty of God over all the nations. It is true that God has formed a covenant with Abraham and that the nation that will grow from Abraham's descendants will be the special focus of God's attention. The concerns of God's rule is not limited to His covenant people however. Here God judges a nation that has no special covenant with Him. He holds them accountable to His standards according to the measure of understanding He has given them.

The second principle to notice here is connected to the first. The reason why God pronounces a death penalty upon Abimelech is because of the nature of the violation. The emphasis God makes in His communication with Abimelech is on Sarah's status as a married woman. The danger is that he will violate the sanctity of her marriage to Abraham and commit adultery with her in his ignorance. This affirms God's standard regarding marriage and adultery hundreds of years before the Law of Moses is written. It also tells us that the preservation of marriage is God's serious concern, not just for people in covenant, but all people of every nation. How serious God is about adultery is measured for us by the severity of the punishment. Death penalty offences are the highest level of violation of God's righteous standards. While Abimelech's ignorance is no valid excuse, because his motives were honorable, God takes that into account. God reveals to Abimelech that He had already been working in his heart to restrain him from crossing the actual line of adultery. If our heart is inclined to do what is right before the Lord we can be confident of the influence of His restraining grace within us.

20:7 - "Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

In spite of Abraham having been the cause of this entire issue, the Lord now directs Abimelech's attention to Abraham. He declares that Abraham will pray for him. We see the Lord choosing to work through an imperfect representative (Abraham) because of His calling upon them. It is interesting that the Lord does not simply tell Abimelech to pray, and instead directs him to Abraham as an intercessor for him. The principle here is that God does not listen the same to the prayers of everyone in the world. It is not politically correct to say so, but God listens to the prayers of some people and He ignores the prayers of others. God will not listen because we want Him to, or because we deserve it, or because we prayed using the right spiritual technique. He listens to those who are in covenant with Him. Abraham's behavior is worse than Abimelech's in this circumstance, but Abraham is in covenant with God and Abimelech is not.

The parallel New Testament principle is that we are heard by God because we are in covenant with Him through Christ. "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:6)

20:9-13 - "Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?" Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife; and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'"

Abimelech sends for Abraham to get the situation resolved. Before having him intercede for him, Abimelech confronts Abraham and demands an explanation for his behavior. Abraham's response to Abimelech is revealing and exposes his remaining character flaws that God intends to address in his life. The pattern of the confrontation here is a bit reminiscent of the Lord confronting Adam in the garden of Eden after he sinned. Rather than owning up to his sin and accepting full responsibility for his actions, Adam attempts to deflect the responsibility both to his wife Eve and to the Lord by blaming the Lord for having given him Eve in the first place. Abimelech's righteous indignation here is the pressure which squeezes out of Abraham's heart what was there all along.

First, Abraham makes an excuse for his decision to lie to Abimelech. He essentially tells him that he thought they were all ungodly and dangerous and

that he had to lie. The implication of his excuse is that if they had been better people he would have treated them better. In other words it was their fault he lied to him. Then, he adds to this excuse a justification. His justification is that Sarah really is his sister. Since Sarah is technically Abraham's half-sister, his point is that his lie was really only a half lie, and therefore only half bad. Finally, Abraham pulls out of his bag of tricks the ultimate trick to evade responsibility by actually blaming God for his situation. "...God caused me to wander from my father's house..." The wording is intentional and implies that had God not made him leave home to begin with none of this trouble would have happened. So, it really is all God's fault and not his. This trio of tricks to dodge responsibility is as old as fallen human nature. Excuses, self-justification, and blaming God are tendencies we must learn to recognize in ourselves. If we indulge in them we might avoid a moment's discomfort, but by embracing our responsibility when we sin we will grow through the pain and embarrassment our sin has caused.

20:17-18 - "Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children. For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife."

There is one final lesson from the Lord for Abraham in this circumstance. The big picture is more than what has just happened. The big picture is all about where God is taking him and what He has planned for him. God had promised Abraham a son. The long term test of his faith was in the delay of years between the promise given and the promise fulfilled. This situation with Abimelech occurs just before the birth of Isaac and the fulfillment of God's promise. The Lord is about to "open the womb" of Sarah, but before He does, the Lord has Abraham intercede for all the household of Abimelech. If the Lord does so for the women of Abimelech's household, surely He can and will for Sarah. It's another lesson of faith. It reminds us that when we are in the delay between promise and fulfillment that God is teaching us lessons that we still need to learn.

Genesis 21

21:1-2 - "Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him."

This is the time of fulfillment for what the Lord had promised Abraham twenty five years before (Genesis 12:4). The time between the original promise and the time of fulfillment was longer than Abraham had imagined and was itself a long term test of his faith, but now that faith is rewarded. At the time of fulfillment, the explanation given to us for the Lord's actions is a clue for us of the real issue at

stake. While Abraham's faith had been tested for the sake of his growth and development as a man of God, the reason why Isaac was now going to be born was not because Abraham believed long enough or hard enough. As strong as Abraham's faith was, it was still an imperfect faith and were the fulfillment of the promise based entirely on his faith it would be an imperfect fulfillment. Thankfully, the Lord never wavers like at times Abraham's faith wavered. This is really where the modern Christian movement called the Faith movement has really done the body of Christ a disservice. The so called Faith teachers place all the emphasis on the strength and quality of the faith of the believer in determining what will happen to them. What they ignore is that every believer's faith is imperfect like Abraham's was.

The real issue in the fulfillment of God's promises is God's faithfulness to His own promises! When God declares He will do something, He is faithful to do it. He may take longer to fulfill it than we would prefer, but He has never once failed to follow through on one of His promises. The description in these verses emphasizes the Lord's faithfulness with a three-fold declaration. 1) He "took note of Sarah as He had said". 2) He "did for Sarah as He had promised" 3) He did so "at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him." The bigger lesson here is in the absolute integrity of God and His Word. What God has ever spoken He will forever be faithful to fulfill! We can place all of our trust in all of the promises of God that apply to our lives throughout God's Word.

21:9-12 - "Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named."

On the surface, this is a very sad story of the disintegration of a family and the permanent separation of a father and son. If we look beneath the surface, there are two important spiritual principles in action here. First, this is an expensive lesson for Abraham in the long term consequence of a foolish decision. Years before, in the weakness of his own trust in the Lord and his failure to lead his wife in that trust, Abraham compromised by giving in to her suggestion for a surrogate mother to gain the child that the Lord apparently was not going to give them. That decision of Abraham's led to the birth of Ishmael, and now years later as Ishmael is in his teens, he is causing trouble in the family. The real responsibility for this trouble is with Abraham even more than it is with Ishmael. The trick for us is to be able to anticipate the consequences down the road that we set in motion by our decisions that compromise God's direction and standards. If we saw how much trouble we are creating for ourselves later, we might choose more wisely at the moment of decision.

The second important spiritual principle in motion here is the sovereign purpose of God to use this event for symbolic teaching purposes for later generations. Paul refers to this moment as he was teaching Gentile believers in Christ about the differences between the Old and New Covenants. "Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND." And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN." So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman." (Galatians 4:21-31). Paul reveals that this development in Abraham's family was designed by God to portray the spiritual distinction between having a fleshly connection to the covenant of God and a true spiritual connection based upon the promise of God in Christ.

21:15-20 - "When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept. God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink. God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer."

Even though God had a greater spiritual purpose in separating Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham and Isaac, this account clarifies that it is not a story of their abandonment leading to their inevitable death. Because God intended the separation, He shows His compassion to both Hagar and Ishmael and provides for them in the wilderness. It is interesting though that the Lord allowed Hagar to reach the limit of her strength before He intervened and revealed Himself to her. The Lord was trained her heart also to trust in Him and not in Abraham, not in herself, and not in her circumstances. The Lord's first communication to her is

almost amusing other than the incredible strain of her situation. The angel asks her a question that she is not expected or even allowed to answer. The question is meant to jolt her heart into a deeper awareness of the Lord's presence and protection. The question is, "What is the matter with you, Hagar?" I am certain the Lord has asked me once or twice over the years, "What's the matter with you?!?"

The Lord's answer to her in her moment of greatest need is a beautiful bifocaled provision. I call it bifocaled because the Lord provides both for their immediate need for survival, and their long range need by declaring His purpose for Ishmael. He opens her eyes to the well of water that was apparently there all along and meets their most pressing immediate need. But, before He gave them a drink, while they were still thirsty He declares His purpose for the boy's life. The order of what God provided was significant. The lesson is that God's purpose comes before our personal needs and that He will meet our real needs as we are properly focused on His purpose for our lives. This follows the kingdom principle, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33)

21:22-23 - "Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do; now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned."

The final event of this chapter is yet another lesson for Abraham in long range consequences of previous foolish decisions. We should expect the Lord to deal with us as He does with Abraham here. When the Lord is working to train our hearts in critical kingdom lessons He will not necessarily limit His examples to a single circumstance in our lives. He may show us the same lesson through two or three different developments that all make the same point. Here, the circumstance begins with a concern expressed by Abimelech toward Abraham. Remember, Abimelech is the king who was deceived by Abraham into believing Sarah was his sister and not his wife. Now, it should not surprise Abraham that Abimelech approaches him with a concern that Abraham might "deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity." Abraham's previous deception has gained him a reputation with Abimelech and it is not a good one. What is particularly bad about this is that Abraham represents the Lord to Abimelech. Abraham's poor character reflects in the wrong way on the Lord. Abraham is responsible for this, but it is going to cost him to repair his reputation in the eyes of Abimelech. The cost, while significant economically, is a small price to pay to restore his reputation. "A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold." (Proverbs 22:1)

Questions from Genesis 20:

Question: Genesis 2:2 - The description of Lot and his behavior does not seem that much "worse" than Abraham's. Lot offered his two daughters, Abraham offered his wife twice (which the Kings took him up on it). Can you expound further why Abraham and Lot are viewed so differently?

Answer: Well, the difference in what Abraham and Lot did in these situations is one of degree. You are correct to identify their actions as similar, because in both cases they offer the more vulnerable women of their household who they were responsible to protect as shields for themselves. They both displayed a weak faith and a selfish leadership character flaw in doing so. However, Lot offered his daughters to a mob knowing that he would be exposing them to severe abuse and possible death. Abraham's actions cannot be justified at all, but the two situations with Pharaoh and Abimelech would result in Sarah being made a part of their harem. It was not a physically dangerous or abusive circumstance in either case.