

ABRAHAM

Genesis 12; Hebrews 11:8-19

Intro: I think that it is wrong to say that some Bible characters are more important than others, that is, among the people of God. Of course, the one exception to that statement is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is important above all others, more important than all others combined. Without Him there would be no Bible. The Bible is all about Him, just as it is all about God, and all about the Holy Spirit. But God has seen fit to tell us more about some than He has told us about others. And yet all of God's people are important even though He may use us in different ways.

We have seen, for example, that very little is told us in Scripture about Enoch. But is said about him, as brief as it is, is more than can be said about many of the Lord's people who are mentioned in the Bible, and certainly far more than can be said about many of the Lord's people who have lived since the Bible was completed and up to this very hour. "Enoch walked with God." In fact, that statement was made twice in the few verses that are devoted to the life of Enoch in Genesis 5. Therefore, it must be that the Spirit of God wanted us to know that about Enoch. In Hebrews 11:5 it is said that "he pleased God." He pleased God by walking with Him!

Does this mean that Enoch never sinned, or that he never did anything that was displeasing to the Lord? The answer is "no" to both of those questions. He was a sinner just like you and I are. He needed a Savior just like you and I do. But so little space is given to Enoch that the Spirit of God obviously was giving us a statement of the outstanding characteristic of his life. He was a person of like passions with us. He had his weaknesses and his sins, but it did not fit into the purpose of God to say more than he led Moses to write about him.

The situation with men like Abraham and Moses and David, to name just a few whose lives and ministries are given in greater detail in the Bible, is completely different! We see, not only the ways in which they pleased God and were used by God, but we see some of their failures, some of their sins. Perhaps that is so we will not put them up on a pedestal and think "more highly" of them "than we ought to think," to borrow some words from the Apostle Paul. Cf. Rom. 12:3. Abraham, Moses, and David had distinctive places of importance as God taught them, and worked through them, but they were not perfect. Nobody is perfect. We

all stand in constant need of the Lord's restraining hand, or His discipline, of His rebuke, and often of His forgiveness, as well as of His encouragement, and His strengthening, and His teaching, of His love, and His grace.

As we study the OT let us remember what the Apostle Paul told the church at Rome about the OT, and keep our own study of the OT in focus with what he said. You will find his words in Romans 15:4. Let me read them for you:

4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

So the OT was written for our benefit spiritually, not primarily to satisfy our curiosity about what took place in ancient history. The Bible reminds us that history is *His story*, and it is the only totally reliable book on history that has ever been written. So if you want to understand history, the place to begin is with the Bible. There is a lot of history, of course, that is not in the Bible, more to be found out of the Bible than in the Bible, but it is the Bible which gets us started on the right foot, and it is the Bible that keeps us there. Note what Paul said in this verse. The OT was written for our learning. It is to teach us truth about the past that we can't learn anywhere else. And it is to teach us patience and to give us "comfort," or encouragement, that we might "have hope."

Look at the world today and you will have to admit that everything is in a big mess. Read the Bible, and you will find out why our world is the way it is. And you will also find out what the remedy is. The prominent idea today about the origin of the world is that everything just evolved this way. Those who believe this are wrong at the start, and so they can't possibly give us any hope. The Bible starts with God, and we see the hand of God all the way through human history. And yet today if anyone even mentions God or the Lord Jesus Christ as far as our government is concerned, he is considered a radical and he, or she, needs to be silenced. In Romans chapter 1 the Bible tells us what happens when any individual or any nation does not want to have anything to do with the true God, the only God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, Who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the last verses of Romans 1 sound like the alarming situation that we have in our country today, a situation that is going to destroy us if we don't wake up and turn back to God, back to the Bible, and back to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fourteenth chapter of Ezekiel (a book which very, very few even

among professing have even read) tells us that when God gets ready to bring judgment upon “the land” of Israel, that the only ones who can possibly be safe are Noah, Daniel, and Job. And they won’t be able to deliver any member of their families unless they are like Noah, Daniel, and Job. What does this tell us? It tell us that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we,” you and I today, “through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The fourteenth chapter of Ezekiel ought to make all of us take our Bibles and read about Noah, and Daniel, and Job, to find out what made them so special in the sight of God.

Among those about whom the Lord has said more than others, three OT men need to be mentioned: Abraham, Moses, and David. I don’t say that they are the only three, but they are three upon whom special emphasis is placed. As far as the book of Genesis is concerned, Joseph could also be mentioned. But taking the OT as a whole, the main focus seems to be on Abraham, Moses, and David. My Bible program on my computer tells me that Abraham is mentioned 285 times in the Bible; Moses, 848 times, and David 1,085 times.

In Genesis we meet Abraham, or Abram as he was originally named, in chapter 11, and we read about his death and burial in chapter 25, verses 7 through 10. To Abraham was given the first detailed promise of salvation which would eventually include Gentiles as well as Jews. And the story of Abraham in the book of Genesis tells about his faith, how his faith was tested, times when he did not trust the Lord as he should have, but ultimately how God was faithful to the promise that he made to Abraham. It is a story rich in its lessons even for us today who are seeking by God’s grace to live a life of faith.

The Lord Jesus had a lot to say about Abraham. Peter spoke of Abraham. Stephen, the first martyr, spoke of Abraham. Paul wrote about Abraham extensively in Romans and Galatians. In the book of Hebrews Abraham is mentioned ten times. James mentioned Abraham in his epistle twice, and Peter once in his first epistle in connection with marriage. It was actually more about Sarah than Abraham. In Genesis 15:6 it is said that Abraham “believed in the Lord; and He,” that is, the Lord, “counted it to him,” that is, Abraham, “for righteousness.” Abraham was declared righteous by faith, and faith alone, in the promise of God. This statement is quoted, or referred to, five times in the NT: three times in Romans (4:3, 9, 22); once in Gal. 3:6; once in James 2:23.

We could easily spend several Sundays on the life of Abraham, like I did when I taught Genesis years ago to the freshman class at the Multnomah School of the Bible, as it was called in those days. But basically using Hebrews 11:8-19 as my guide, I am going to call your attention to three events in Abraham's life:

- 1) His call from God.
- 2) The birth of his son, Isaac.
- 3) God's command to sacrifice Isaac.

The story of Abraham is a wonderful story of faith, not a consistently growing faith, but often a faltering faith. And yet it was a genuine faith which the Lord tested over many years, and which is remembered in Scripture as a triumphant faith. But let us remember a truth which we are taught in the Scripture, that faith comes from God. It is a gift from God. But God tested Abraham's faith, not to destroy it, but to strengthen it, and to make it really Abraham's faith.

I have planned to speak just one Sunday on Abraham, but I may not make it. But let's see how far we can go.

Now let us think about:

I. GOD'S CALL TO ABRAHAM.

We read of this in the latter part of Genesis 11, the early part of Genesis 12, and in Hebrews 11:8. And, as I mentioned earlier, Stephen spoke of Abraham's call in the message recorded for us in Acts 7 where he made it very clear that Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees, in Mesopotamia, the part of the world that is now southeastern Iraq.

The Bible hardly ever gives us all of the details that we would like to know, but it gives us all that we need to know, and that is what we need to be satisfied with. *Somehow*, even in those days, as many years before Christ as we are living after Christ, that is, around 2000 years B.C., the Gospel had made its way into that part of the world. It was not a Moslem area because Mohammed was not born until about 1500 years after Abraham lived. But it was a pagan area, an area of idolatry and false gods. But God in His sovereignty had reached Abram, as he was known then. He had been saved, had been brought into a living relationship with the eternal, but unseen, God. That had to be or it could not be written in our Bibles that "by faith Abraham, when he was called to go out ..., went out,

not knowing whither he went.”

There are a lot of *somehows* in the Biblical record of Abraham’s early life. Somehow he was saved, and somehow God communicated with him, and somehow God promised to guide him, and to provide for him, *but God did not tell Abraham where he was to go*. There is no evidence that God led Abraham and his family like He did the children of Israel when they went from Egypt to Canaan, but somehow all of this took place. It seems from the Genesis 11 account that Abraham’s father, Terah, was the responsible leader in this move, but we are to understand that God was the One Who was working out His own purposes in Abraham’s life.

It might be that Abraham himself did not know as much as we might think that he did, but what we do know that he left his home in Ur, and did not know where he was going except for the fact that he knew that God was leading him, and Abraham went (regardless of why the others left), Abraham left “by faith.”

They moved to Haran, north of the promised land, and stayed there until Abraham’s father died, and then they moved on down into Canaan where the Lord revealed to him that his new home was to be.

Just imagine, he left his native home, did not know where he was going except that God had told him to go, *and that he was not coming back!* It sounds like a wild adventure that Abraham had concocted in his own mind.

Now the Lord does not always lead the same way. In fact, He rarely leads in the same way in the same person’s life. But I think the lesson that we are to learn from this event in Abraham’s life, and God’s way with him, that regardless of how God may indicate His will to us, even though it may not make sense to other people, yet it is always the safest and surest way to go, to trust the Lord. Abraham was not going as blindly as we may think.

But in this connection we see Abraham’s first mistake. When he got into the land, he found a famine. And so, instead of waiting to see how God would provide for him and his family, he, “on his own,” went down into Egypt. And there he got into plenty of trouble. Finally, he was forced to leave the country, and he took with him, Hagar, an Egyptian maidservant,

who was to provide a temptation for Abraham and Sarah, his wife, in the coming days. And so now let me go on to speak of the birth of Abraham's son.

II. THE BIRTH OF ABRAHAM'S SON.

Before Abraham left Ur of Chaldea, God promised Abraham that he was going to make of his descendants "a great nation" (Gen. 12:2). When he and his family left Haran after Terah, his father died, Abraham was seventy-five years old, and Sarah was ten years younger. After they had been in Canaan for ten years (Gen. 16:3), Sarah had given up any hope that she was going to have a child. So she approached Abraham about having a child through Hagar, her handmaiden. Abraham agreed. Hagar conceived, and Ishmael was born. This reminds me of what Adam and Eve did. Eve tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, and he ate it. Sarah was tired of waiting for God to give her a child, and so she decided to have a child another way. And Abraham went along with her in the idea. This was a second major lapse of Abraham's faith, and we know the trouble that the descendants of Hagar have caused to the descendants of Abraham.

Abraham was eighty-six when Ishmael was born. Chapter 17 tells us that when Abraham was ninety years old, thirteen years later, the Lord appeared to Abraham again, telling him that Sarah would have a child. To Abraham it sounded like a joke, and he laughed, thinking in his heart, "How can a man a hundred years old and his wife who was ninety years old have a child?" And then he let God know that he was perfectly satisfied with Ishmael, and he wanted Ishmael to be the promised son. Ishmael was thirteen years old at the time, and Abraham was thoroughly satisfied with him, and he wanted God to be satisfied too. *This was without a doubt, the lowest point in Abraham's life spiritually!* When he told Sarah, she laughed, too (Gen. 18:12), and then denied that she had laughed. Imagine! laughing at God!

Sarah was actually beyond the age where she could have children. Now behind the scene and away from the eyes of men, God continued to deal with Abraham and Sarah. In fact, Paul tells us in Romans 4, beginning with verse 18, an amazing thing, and you would think that the critics of the Bible would pick this up as an inconsistency in Scripture. Let me read you what Paul wrote. Speaking of Abraham he wrote these amazing words:

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Now when you put the Genesis record along side of Paul's record, don't we have a credibility problem here. Doesn't Moses in Genesis tell us one thing, and the Apostle Paul tell us something completely different? No, there is no problem at all if you understand how God works.

Have you ever waited for over twenty-five years for the Lord to keep His promise? Wouldn't you and I be inclined normally to think that if God didn't do what He has promised to do after twenty-five years, that he wasn't going to do it? I can understand that. I have felt that way at times about problems I have faced, and it didn't take me twenty-five years to get there!

Moses has told us what Moses did and what he said, and what Sarah did, and what Sarah at least said in her heart, but we are not dealing with two natural, unregenerate people. We are learning about the people of God, and how God works in them. Paul told the Philippian believers that He Who had begun a good work in them, would keep on working in them until the day of Jesus Christ. See Phil. 1:6. And he also told the believers in the same church that God is the One Who works in us "to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Outwardly it looked like Abraham and Sarah had given up on God, and that they had lapsed into unbelief. But that was not the case, as Paul said. Down in their hearts they knew that they had done the wrong thing in bringing about the birth of Ishmael.

And though Abraham even talked to God about making Ishmael the heir, he knew in his heart that Ishmael was not God's man. And so God Who works in our hearts and then outwardly in our behavior, took what looks to us like a weak faith and worked in them until they were not just mostly assured of God's faithfulness, but "fully persuaded that what He," God, "had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21). And God Who remembers that we are dust, and as I heard a man of God say once, "He doesn't expect anything out of dirt," meets us when it seems like our faith is failing, and by His strength sets us back on our feet "strong in faith."

If you are going through a time of testing today, and you have been inclined to give up, if you are really saved, you know down in the depth of your heart that God cannot fail, and He will not fail. He may make us wait, and may not do what we want him to do, but if He doesn't do what we want Him to do, He is going to do something that is even better.

Concl: Well, I didn't finish with Abraham. We are going to have to spend at least one more Sunday on Abraham. But I hope you have been able to follow me in what the Lord has shown me about the life of Abraham. And that we may firmly convinced that although the Lord may not lead us the way He led Abraham, and He obviously will not use any of us the way He led Abraham, yet we can be sure that He will lead us, and though He will certainly test our faith, yet while we may fail the Lord, He will never give up on us. Nothing can cause His faithfulness to fail. Let us leave today with that conviction firmly in our hearts.