

Sunday, April 16, 2023 pm

JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE (13)

The Patriarchs (2)

The Life of Abraham (2)

With this lesson we are continuing our “journey through the Bible” a study of the 17 periods of Bible history. In our studies thus far we have examined 3 of the 17 periods, (1) Prior to the flood, (2) The flood and its results, & (3) The scattering of nations (tower of Babel). In our last lesson, we introduced the (4), the Patriarchs by identifying some details about it and an introduction to Abraham. We read about Abraham in Genesis 12-25. We began by examining his leaving Ur of the Chaldeans (and Haran) as God instructed him (Genesis 11:27-32) and the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-7) which will set the tone for the rest his life and in essence the rest of the Bible story. In that text, God made a 3-fold promise to Abraham – a land promise, a nation promise and a seed promise (in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed).

In our lesson tonight, we will go through the various events that are recorded concerning his life and begin making some observations about his life. We will devote 3-4 lessons to his life.

I. The life of Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12-25

- a. Genesis 12:1-7 – The 3-fold promise to Abraham.
- b. 12:8-20 – Abram goes to Egypt and deceives Pharaoh.
- c. 13:1-18 – Abram and Lot in Bethel and the land. Both are prosperous and go separate directions. Lot chooses to go toward Sodom (vs. 12). 13:14-18 – the LORD appears to Abram and again repeats His promise with greater detail. He dwells *“by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD.”*
- d. 14:1-17 – Lot is caught in a war between 2 groups of kings. Lot is captured, but Abram with his “318 trained servants” confronted the captors and delivered Lot and his family, and others.
- e. 14:18-24 – Returning from victory, Abram meets Melchizedek, “king of Salem” and “Priest of God Most High” who blesses Abram. Abram gives him a 10th.
- f. 15:1-21 – The LORD makes a covenant with Abram. Abram is concerned because he has no child and is willing to “help God” by fulfilling the promise through Eliezer his servant. YHWH says that the heir would come from his own body. Vs. 5, the LORD repeats some of His promise. Vs. 6, “And he believed the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Abram asks for a sign, and a covenant is established. 15:13-14 notes that it would not happen for “4 generations” and before it happened, they would be strangers in a foreign land for 400 years, afflicted and slaved. But they would leave with great possessions. BUT the promise was made that Abram would go to his fathers at a good old age and in peace (15). Vs. 18-21 – the borders and land of his inheritance are described in greater detail.
- g. 16:1-16 – Ishmael is born. Sarai, being barren offers to Abram her handmaid, Hagar (still trying to help God). As a result, Ishmael is born and there is strife between Sarai and Hagar. We read that Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael (16:16).
- h. 17:1-27 – moving ahead 13 years, Abram is 99 years old and the LORD appears to him again and at this time He again repeats His promise, changes Abram’s name to Abraham (Father of many nations) and promises to establish an “everlasting covenant” with him and his descendants “forever” (or “age lasting”). The covenant included a sign that every male was to be circumcised on the 8th day. Also Sarai’s name was changed to Sarah (princess). Abraham, Ishmael (now 13) (23-25), and all the males in his household were circumcised that day.
- i. 18:1-15 - Sarah who is now 89 and she laughs when hearing that she will have a child (12-15) and is rebuked. It is interesting that Abraham laughed in the previous chapter (17:17-18) but without rebuke. Why the difference? Abraham’s laugh was obviously joyous and with a declaration that it

- was not necessary (he believed God and was willing to accept any way the blessing was fulfilled), while Sarah's laugh was one of doubt. Regardless, as we will see, the LORD's will is fulfilled.
- j. 18:16-33 finds the LORD telling Abraham that He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham intercedes and is told that if even 10 righteous were found in the city HE would spare the city.
 - k. 19:1-29 records the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah while Lot is delivered.
 - l. 19:30-38 – descendants of Lot are recorded who would become the Moabites and Ammonites. BOTH nations would be thorns in the side of Israel.
 - m. 20:1-18 finds Abraham again traveling south to the land of Gerar where Abraham again has Sarah say she is his sister instead of his wife. Abimelech is cursed for desiring her.
 - n. 21:1-21 – Isaac is born and Hagar and Ishmael depart but are promised to be delivered by the LORD.
 - o. 21:22-34 we find a covenant between Abraham and Abimelech
 - p. 22:1-19 - here we read of Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac as the LORD commanded.
 - q. 23:1ff – records the death of Sarah and Abraham purchases the cave of Machpelah.
 - r. 25 records Abraham's later life and his death at 175 years of age.

II. **Lessons from Abraham's life (1)**

- a. In coming lessons we want to address a few aspects of Abraham's life: 1) Abraham's crisis of faith as he travels to foreign lands; 2) Melchizedek; 3) Abraham "believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness"; 4) Abraham tries to help God with disastrous results; 5) God's covenant with Abraham; The birth and sacrifice of Isaac.
- b. Abraham is tested
 - i. Scripture addresses testing. God often tests man by giving him instructions to see whether or not he is faithful to Him. Deuteronomy 8:1-2 (& 16), Deuteronomy 13:1-3 – when a false prophet speaks, they were being tested; Psalm 7:9 notes that God tests the hearts and minds (also Proverbs 17:3; Psalm 11:5, He tests the righteous; 1 Thessalonians 2:4 repeats that God tests our hearts.
 - ii. What about James 1:12-13ff, which notes that God tempts no one? The answer to this is to understand the difference between being tempted to sin, which is what Satan does, and God letting us be tested to see whether or not we will sin. That is why vs. 13 emphasizes He does not tempt anyone to do evil. BUT as we live life, we are going to face tests and even temptations? How will we endure them? James 1:3 - does the "testing of your faith" produce faith? When your faith is "tested by fire", how will you respond? Will you be "found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ"? (1 Peter 1:7).
 - iii. God tested Abraham - Genesis 22:1 notes that God "tested" Abraham. This is the ultimate test of his life and we will focus on that test in a future lesson. But here I want to take an overall look at his life and some of the tests he faced. Various sources list numerous tests that Abraham endured during his life. ALL of these showed his relationship with God. Some he "passed" while others he faltered. Consider the following:
 - 1. He is challenged to leave his homeland and go to a country he had never seen (Genesis 12:1). He listens to God and goes. Clearly, he "passed" that test.
 - 2. Famine – Gen. 12:10ff - After he arrives, the first event we read of is a famine. Abram takes his family to Egypt where he asks Sarai to conceal the fact that she was his wife. There is a deception which shows a lack of faith in God. Some of the results of this, Pharaoh assumes that Sarai is available and takes her to be his wife. Abraham is materially blessed, BUT Pharaoh and his house are plagued. When what Abram did is determined, he is rebuked and asked to leave Egypt. He "failed" this test. How will we fare during difficult times? Will we put the material before the spiritual?

3. Contention with Lot - Genesis 13. It is evident that Abraham is already a man with great influence and he rules his household. He could have made demands, but instead he calls Lot and reminds him that they are brethren. He gives Lot the choice of direction. We know that Lot chooses based on outward appearances and they go different directions. Interestingly, we read that God again appears to Abraham and repeats his promise with greater detail (14-18). When we face contentions with brethren, what is our disposition? Do we demand our way or are we willing to yield? (James 3:17 – the wisdom from above is willing to yield). He “passed” this test. IF we trust God, it is ok if others get their way. Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:7 after rebuking them for taking one another to court he notes, *“Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?”* Where is your treasure? (Matthew 6:19-20)
4. Delivering Lot – Genesis 14 records a war between two groups of kings. In the battle, Lot and his family are captured. With 318 “trained servants” (and help from neighbors – vs. 24), Abram confronts Lot’s captors (14:14-17) and is victorious. Two thoughts come to my mind here: 1) Abraham was concerned about his brother (Lot) and was willing to take risks to rescue him; & 2) Likely, there is faith as he with a very small army is willing to confront a larger enemy. Recall in this, he KNOWS that God is with him (cf. Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”) Abraham “passed this test.”
5. Waiting – Chapters 15 & 16 find Abraham waiting for God to fulfill His promise of a son. We find instances of Abraham trying to “help God” fulfill his plans. First, he offers his servant Eliezer as heir of his house. When he is told that the promise would be of his seed from his own body, he believes God. STILL, in chapter 16, with new information he tries to “help God” again, by conceiving with Hagar, Sarai’s handmaiden and Ishmael is born. Abram is 86 when Ishmael is born (16:16). It has been 11 years since the original promise was made. This test has mixed results – you find trusting God, BUT also applying human wisdom in the process thus the result is “pass/fail”. Lessons to consider: 1) In matters of His will, God does NOT need our help; 2) When man changes God’s plan to “help” Him, it usually does not end favorably. Consider that Ishmael will become “father” of nations that would be Israel’s enemies. Similarly, when we try to help God by changing His pattern, it will almost always end in a place further away from God and causing problems.
6. Circumcision – Chapter 17 as noted records circumcision as a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham. This is also where his name is changed (17:5). Abraham completely complies with the instructions given, even at the age of 99 and Ishmael being 13, and others of varying ages of maturity (remember his army – cf. Gen. 17:23-27). Without details, this was a painful process. Abraham was willing to endure whatever was required of him to faithfully serve God. Abraham “passed” this test. Lesson: It is easy to serve God when it is a matter of convenience. Will you serve Him when the times are difficult?
7. Concerning Sodom – Chapter 18 will address the sins of Sodom. Remember that this is where Lot is now residing. When Abraham is told of the LORD’s plans, he pleads with the LORD. You also see his concern in 19:27-29 where Abraham in the morning looks toward Sodom to see its outcome. Among the lessons we see in this is his genuine concern for others – not only his nephew and family. He grieves to know the destiny of Sodom. ALSO, he converses with the LORD about fairness and

ultimately accepts the LORD's decision. Concerning love for others, Abraham "passes" this test.

8. Abimelech – Genesis 20 – if Genesis is chronological, this is much later than when he took Sarah to Egypt. They travel to Gerar – a city west of the southern portion of the Dead Sea and approaching the Mediterranean. For whatever reason, they were traveling and arrived in that land. Abraham does the same thing he did to Pharaoh and has his wife (now ~90) deceive Abimelech. They did so out of fear that he might kill Abraham so that he could have Sarah. But Abimelech takes Sarah to be a wife, but God intervened. When Abimelech confronts Abraham he is told why he had been told what he was. As a result, Sarah is restored to Abraham, given a large gift and permitted to dwell wherever he wanted in the land. Abraham prays for Abimelech and he and his people are healed for God had closed up the wombs of their people. Even at this later date, we find Abraham's faith wavering here – he "failed" this test. Lesson for us: Even one with a mature faith can waiver from time to time. We need to always be vigilant. 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us that when you think you stand, take heed lest you fall. James 1:6-8, while dealing with prayer speaks of asking in faith, "with no doubting". Hebrews 10:23 says, *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.* Understand when we waver there is a weakness in our faith. Satan will use that to exploit us if we are not vigilant (cf. 1 Peter 5:8-9)
9. Isaac is born. Chapter 21 records the birth of Isaac – Sarah is 90 and Abraham is 100 years old. God has kept his promise. We also read in this chapter that Ismael scoffs and Sarah demands that Abraham cast out Hagar and Ismael (remember that this would NOT have been an issue if proper decisions had been made years earlier). Nevertheless, Abraham, being told by the LORD to listen to her, he sends them away with some provisions. In this, we find that at times we are going to be faced with tests that have no good solutions. We sometimes have to make unpleasant family decisions. All we can do is follow our best judgment. Abraham "passed" this test because he did as the LORD told him. AND the God did take care of them as He had promised Abraham (21:12-13)
10. Offering Isaac. Abraham's ultimate test is recorded in Genesis 22. Isaac is likely in his early teens and God tells Abraham to offer his only "begotten" son at a designated place. Abraham completely complies with the instructions and as he is about to slay his son, the LORD stops him. A ram is offered in his place and again the LORD reassures him of the promise. Abraham "passed" this test with great and perfected faith. We will address this in greater detail at another time. We do find here a mature faith that has been tested over and over and Abraham KNOWS that God is in control and worthy of being trusted. This is where our faith ought to be headed.
11. Sarah dies. Chapter 23 records the death of Sarah at 127 years of age. Abraham purchases a burial plot called the "cave of Machpelah" (23:9ff). This shows great faith as he knows that he will die and the land promise will still have not been fulfilled, but he KNOWS that eventually that God will fulfill His promises. Thus he wanted to rest in that promised land. Later Abraham will be buried there, followed by Isaac and Jacob and their covenant wives. Again, Abraham "passed" this test. Hebrews 11:13-16.

And thus, we are introduced to the life of Abraham. Because of his significance, we will devote 2-3 more lessons to his life before moving on. But find here a life filled with tests. As Christians, we are going to face

numerous tests in our lives. How will we handle them? IF we fail with some of those tests, how will we respond? Will we give up, or will “get up” and move on (cf. Philippians 3:13-14)? Think about it!