

Genesis – Section 2

A Study in Genesis 11 weeks

13 - Abram

14 - Learning From The Test

15 - Kinsman Redeemer

16 - Sarai & Hagar

17 - Abraham

18 - Lot

19 - Abimelech

20 - Isaac & Ishmael

21 - Wandering

22 - Jacob

23 - Garnish or Grain



This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

Genesis - 13 - Abram

In Genesis 11:10, we find a genealogy that ends with Abram.

Read Genesis 11:26-31 and make notes:

It is noteworthy that Nahor and his wife, Milcah, were left behind. God already had a plan that Abram's family was to be blessed - and He had put it into the heart of Abram's father to take him to Canaan.

They set out to go FROM the place of idolatry - TO the place of blessing - but when they came to a nice place they “settled” there! That is just like what you and I do today - isn't it?

Read Genesis 11:32; Genesis 12:1 and make notes:

Terah never made it to the place of “blessing.” Haran was a place of “in-between.” This is a good place for us to ask ourselves; “what is our place of idolatry?” Perhaps it is a person – status – or an image? Too many Church People today are in a place of idolatry.

The household of Abram's father, - simply did not have a good track record. Please note that God DID NOT say, a land that I will give you - but simply said, "a land that I will show you." Since Abram was the only child of Terah that was still with him, he would have inherited all that his father had.

God is asking Abram to leave behind his father's household - and to go to a place that, "I will show you." "Abram, I want you to lay down everything except your family - and go to a place, I'll show you were it is." Here begins the testing of the man who will become known as the "father of faith."

God says nothing about material ownership! Only that, "you will be blessed Abram. "

Genesis - 13 - Abram

Read Genesis 12:2-5 and make notes:

God put Abram on the same road his father had been on previously - on the way to Canaan. Abram made it to the place of blessing.

Read Genesis 12:6 and make notes:

This statement says, "the great tree" of Moreh. Later at the time of Joshua, this area is referred to as the "great trees of Moreh." This "great tree" was apparently in the process of reproducing itself.

Read Genesis 12:7 and make notes:

God still isn't making any mention that Abram would own any of this land - just that, "to your offspring I will give this land." Many people today – would have already bailed out – because of the lack of personal promise of gain.

Read Genesis 12:8 and make notes:

Abram begins to call upon God for guidance and direction! This place has some significance later. This is the place where Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord.

Genesis - 13 - Abram

Read Genesis 12:9-10 and make notes:

After arriving at the place of blessing – God allowed a famine to occur. Wouldn't that make us ask, "Are we at the right place?" - "Did I miss God in this?"

Being allowed to go to Egypt will be the second phase of the testing of this man who will come to be known as the "father of faith." As we read the following verses, we see Abram asked his wife to say that she was his sister for fear - the Egyptians might kill him in order to get his wife. Sure enough they thought she was beautiful, and when she said she was his sister, Pharaoh had her brought to him.

Read Genesis 12:16 and make notes:

Then God afflicted Pharaoh and his household with serious diseases. Pharaoh discovered she was in fact Abram's wife. He told Abram to take his wife - and to leave. Isn't it interesting that it does not mention that Pharaoh asked for any of his payment to be returned?

Read Genesis 12:20 – 13:2 and make notes:

Remember in verse 16, "Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels." Abram is called the "father of faith" in the New Testament. He didn't show much faith when he decided to lie to Pharaoh about Sarai. He didn't have to do that!

God already had it in His heart to bless Abram. This is just the first of several times when God would have His people - go to Egypt to be provided for and to be blessed when things weren't going so well in their land.

Genesis - 13 - Abram

Egypt was an idolatrous land. Egypt did not serve the Lord. But God used the plenteous provisions of Egypt to meet the needs of His people when they needed it. Abram did not have to resort to lying and deception. God would have had the Egyptians give him provisions without all the scheming and deceit!

We could look at several examples, but look at the Children of Israel and Joseph, most of us are familiar with that one. Joseph and the Children of Israel - didn't do any tricking of the Egyptians. The Egyptian leaders were very happy to give food and even land to the Israelites. And when they did leave the country, the Egyptians gladly gave them all the gold and valuables that they wanted. Abram did not have to lie!

God would have protected him and his wife - God would have given him of the wealth of Egypt anyway. But Abram - who would become the father of faith, - shows us here that he was just like you and me.

He started out following the direction of God. When things started looking perilous, he started trying to use his own plans instead of continuing to look to God for guidance. God had to bring diseases upon the Pharaoh to protect the chastity of Sarai.

Then God had to keep Sarai barren yet a longer period of time to be sure that no one could ever say that the child she bore - could possibly have been fathered by the Pharaoh. Part of God's plan to bless Abram - was to give him a son. This time of doubt by Abram - surely delayed the planned blessings from God.

Read Genesis 13:3-4 and make notes:

Finally - Abram comes back to a place where he is seeking God. In the past he followed God's direction, when God would come to him and say "go here" or "go there." But now Abram begins to "call on the name of the Lord."

Abram finally came to understand that God had a plan. And God's plan was certainly better than anything he could devise or come up with. "So now, before I do anything, I'm going to seek God in this matter."

Genesis - 13 - Abram

There are several things we need to make note of regarding these verses :

- Abram started out following God's direction, even though he didn't know where God was going to have him wind up
- Abram decided to place more confidence in his ability to provide a means of protection from perceived danger than in God's ability and God's plan
- As with the Pharaoh, often times the ungodly world will show more virtue, honor, and conscience than God's people
- Sometimes God will lead us away from our place of promise in order to meet our needs and then bring us back to the place of promise
- When, in our ignorance, we make the wrong decisions, God will do what is necessary to protect us and keep us pure
- Taking matters into our own hands can delay and diminish the blessings God has planned for us

Have you found the security of placing complete trust in God's plan for your life?

Do you daily seek his plans?

What is the evidence that you do?

Maybe you have been doubting and devising on your own - Maybe you have shown little if any faith in God's plan for your life. Abram came from down near the bottom of confidence in God's plan to a place of being called the "father of faith. "

You too can come to a place of complete confidence in God's provision and God's plan. We must not allow ourselves to be tricked into sitting forever and staring at our failure to this point. We need to look at the example of Abram and know that we too can develop our confidence and faith in God's plan.

Aren't you ready to stop all your wandering - and come to your place near Bethel? Bethel means "House of God."

Aren't you ready to start seeking God in everything you do - Aren't you ready to seek God's plan for every aspect of your life today ?

Genesis - 13 - Abram

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 14 - Learning From The Test

In the last lesson, we saw that Abram had received two tests in his following and obedience to God:

- will you follow God's direction even if you don't know the destination?
- will you trust God in times of apparent danger or will you devise your own plans

Abram passed the first test quite well - and he failed the second test quite miserably. I said Abram was very much like us today in that he preferred to trust his own ability to protect himself and his possessions in the threats of this world.

In this lesson, we are going to see Abram was "one up" on most of us. Let's look at the third major test of this man – who would become the "father of faith."

Read Genesis 13:1-12 and make notes:

In the last verse (v12) it stated - Lot pitched his tents “near” Sodom. This will be significant in a few minutes.

Abram, this man who had devised a deceitful scheme, - who had taken the time to work out the deceptive language he and his lovely wife should use, - was now on his way, returning from Egypt – back to the land God had led them to.

As Abram retraced his steps he had taken in going down to Egypt, - he no doubt reflected on his actions and words while in Egypt. He was able to recognize he had lied - and he had led his wife to lie, - and maybe even some of their servants to lie as well. As he was retracing these steps and reflecting on his sinful actions, - he also reflected on God's merciful intervention.

A whole sermon could be preached on the going to Egypt as a type of Christians going into the world. Christians, when moving and acting within the world's system, will almost always give in to sin. But that is not the message for this lesson.

I believe the spirit of this man of God - no doubt began to recoil in pain and hurt, - when he thought of how at first he had begun to fear, - and then in this fear he began to lie and to use deception. I believe this soon to be "father of faith" - experienced some real inner pain when he meditated upon the fact - that right in the midst of his deceitful scheme and actions, - the mercy of God was poured forth upon him and his wife, Sarai.

How the pain must have intensified when he remembered this heathen ruler had shown honesty, and integrity, - when he as an ambassador of the one True God had shown neither.

Genesis - 14 - Learning From The Test

I am convinced - as it was with Abram, - so it is still true today: - **Our hearts and spirits are enabled to strength and boldness - in direct proportion to how much we meditate upon God's divine mercy in our lives.**

These reflections and memories no doubt played a large part in Abram's drive to build an altar and to "call upon the name of the Lord." It was these remembrances and this new found desire to take things before the Lord on a daily basis - that led Abram to the place where he could handle the next incident as he did.

When Abram and his contingent left Egypt and returned to the land of Caanan, he was very rich. It is interesting - during the times of uncertain destination, and the times of hardship, - Abram and Lot were inseparable. But when they both had come to have "much possessions", - they then started to have strife between their camps.

It is at least pleasing to see - it wasn't Abram and Lot who were at each other, - it was the ones who worked with or for them. It seems - very often prosperity and the "having of much" - can separate the best of friends on this earth. It appears - prosperity can bring about strife and division so very quickly in our lives.

But Praise Be to God, Jesus is a friend that will never let the lack in our life or the prosperity in our life affect His love for us. Sadly, we usually allow our prosperity to cause us to want to separate from God.

When strife did arise between Abram's herdsmen and those of Lot, - it was Abram who used a Biblical principal found in Proverbs 15:1 - to put it to rest. A gentle answer turning away the wrath. This time of contention and division between Abram and Lot was the "third test" of this man who would become the "father of faith."

Abram had every right to tell Lot which area he would be allowed to have. After all, it was Abram - God had been directing. Lot was allowed by Abram to tag along, - but it was Abram - God had led to this land.

Abram could have given Lot a choice of:

- A - leaving and returning home to the land of the Chaldeans, or
- B - taking the land of his choosing.

Abram passed the test. He did not exhibit any signs of greed - but was willing to allow the other person to take whatever seemed best to them. When the strife broke out between his herdsmen and those of Lot, - Abram demonstrated his new found strength and confidence. Abram agreed to take only what Lot did not want.

Abram allowed Lot to select what he thought was the choicest of the land. Abram then took whatever was left over. Abram passed up the chance to be led by his sensual desires. Abram was willing to settle for less in order to maintain the peace. Abram no longer felt the need to engineer some cunning and deceitful plan to protect himself and his possessions.

Genesis - 14 - Learning From The Test

Abram was able to be generous beyond necessity - with a confidence that God would provide for him, - no matter what. Abram was willing to lay down that which God had brought him to - and to walk away from it in order to maintain peace. Confident that if this is what God wanted him to have, - then he would have it eventually and he wouldn't have to fight and fuss to have it. Confident that if this is where God wanted him to be, - then God would bring him here again and he would not have to resort to the ways of this world to remain here.

Lot on the other hand made the choice of his sensual desires. "This plain of the Jordan, it is very attractive." - "There is plenty of grass for the sheep. " - "There are great cities to provide the necessary shopping and supplies." - "No doubt the educational opportunities for my children are better among the big cities than out here in these rural areas."

Abram had come to realize that he increased in spiritual wealth when he remained in a peaceful and honest attitude. Abram had come to know that he diminished in spiritual wealth when he schemed within the world's system to attain physical wealth.

Abram had come to realize that the wealth of the spirit is far greater than the wealth of this world. Abram demonstrated that he had laid hold of another great biblical truth; - Romans 12:18 "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

God wants us to increase in spiritual wealth. The fruits of the Spirit simply do not come forth in the midst of a striving and scheming Christian heart and life. A peaceful mind and a quiet heart that are in daily touch with the Heavenly Father - are the soil from which the fruits of the Spirit come forth in abundance. Let's face it – Most Church People don't have the slightest grasp of the concept Abram demonstrated here. If they did – there would be fewer church fights, The Lord is our Provider.

Abram, in a Godly unselfish act, - yielded his claim to the choice land. Lot, who owed Abram much, - took advantage of the offer and claimed for himself the choicest looking properties.

Lot was where Abram had been - not too long before. Lot was being moved by what he could see and what he could hold onto. Lot was looking out for "Number One."

Abram was willing now to turn away from the apparent security of worldly possessions. Abram was content to take his tent, his altar to God, and nothing more than the Word of God that he had received, and go to live in peace.

Abram was no longer being moved by what he saw, - but was now being moved primarily by what God's Word had said to him. This unselfish, peaceful man - was soon rewarded by God.

Read Genesis 13:14-18 and make notes:

Genesis - 14 - Learning From The Test

After Abram had put down the strife. After Abram had passed this third test - by displaying his humble self-denial in order to keep the peace. After he had lost the companionship of his relatives. God came to Abram - and renewed the promise of making his offspring great. But God said something significantly better this time to Abram. God said, "Abram, I'm going to give you this land as far as you can see.

Many of God's people today never get to hear the full promise God has for them. Because they fail the test of greed and selfishness. Christians, still want to get the very best for themselves. Christians, still want to get all they think they should have, - and then make some provision for the other person.

It happens in the area of our physical family. We will put others absolutely last in order to make sure that "me and mine" - get what we want and need. It happens in the church family also. We will put others last and even sometimes speak against others - to help insure that our little church family gets what we think we should have.

With Abram we have seen "the Big Three" - as for as the testing of today's Christians are concerned:

will we follow the direction of God even if you don't know where the destination is

will we trust God to protect in the face of apparent danger – learn from the test

will we risk losing our prosperity or will we fight to maintain it –
trust God to be our provider

One of the glorious aspects of serving the Lord of Lords, - is the way He handles us in regard to these tests. We can look at these three tests and decide that Abram came out okay - because it seems - he passed two out of three. We can look at ourselves and see that we failed in a test God allowed to come our way, - and decide that we are a failure and are unworthy to be God's child or servant.

There is a bigger lesson here. Abram failed miserably on the second test of "trusting God to protect and provide in the face of apparent danger."

I believe Abram meditated on this situation and on the Grace God had shown in it, during his trip from Egypt back to Caanan. There is evidence in this last test that Abram learned from his mistake - in the second test. Keep that thought for just a minute.

David messed up big time when he had Uriah killed in order to try to save himself. And God had to call David on it because he didn't repent and confess. The memory of this matter went a long way in influencing David's response and trust in God in all the remaining days of David's life.

Peter failed greatly when asked if he was one of the Lord's. Peter came back from that place of denial and learned from it and he never denied being one of Christ's again, but boldly proclaimed the Gospel all the remaining days of his life.

Genesis - 14 - Learning From The Test

The greater lesson here - is not whether we pass the test or fail the test in the moment when it is given. The greater lesson God would have us grasp is this - "it isn't so much whether we pass the test or fail the test, - but did we learn from it."

The reason so many Christians today continue to go through the same test over and over – is that they haven't learned from it. Even if they somehow get it right, - but they don't learn from it, - God doesn't give the credit for it. And yet those who fail to do the right thing in the testing period, - but are able to reflect and meditate upon what happened and see God's intent, and learn from it - seldom pass through that test again.

God gives the Passing Grade based upon whether you learned from the test. God does not give the Passing Grade when you did the right thing but did not learn from it.

We can begin to get the passing grade credit - if we will just lay hold to these truths. We can spare ourselves and our family a lot of testing periods;

- will we follow the direction of God - even if we don't know the destination
- will we trust God to protect in the face of apparent danger
- will we risk losing our prosperity or will we fight to maintain it
- will we learn from our test? (this may be the most important)

Wake up! Pay attention! Learn and take heed! Start receiving God's full promises and blessings for your life.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 14 - Learning From The Test

(this page for additional notes)

Genesis - 15 - Kinsman Redeemer

This is the first war recorded in the Bible. For 12 years - five kings in the valley where Sodom and Gomorrah were located - had been subject to a king Kedorlaomer. In the 13th year - they decided they wanted their freedom and agreed together they would no longer pay tribute to Kedorlaomer. As could be expected, Kedorlaomer came with his army - and the armies of some of his allies - to show them who was boss.

This passage has some significance for those who like to make a case against the Bible which has been waged by the liberals and the humanist. For several decades those who were critical toward the Bible - claimed there was no historical evidence of 4 kings attacking and routing this valley. They also claimed there was no historical evidence to show 4 kings had been defeated by the small army of Abram. They declared this whole account was only a fabrication of man and said it should be removed from the Bible.

1959 - Dr. Nelson Glueck reported discovering fragments which gave a full account of this episode - just like the Bible had said all along. The lesson from this text has something to say to us today.

Read Genesis 14:1-2 and make notes:

These 4 kings came to invade and to put into submission the 5 kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar.

Read Genesis 14:11-12 and make notes:

Lot was now “in” Sodom! The cities of the plain were routed and plundered. Many of the people and most all of their goods were taken off by the invading kings. Lot and his family along with his possessions had been taken just like everyone else.

Many Christians today are being taken off into captivity by the invading kings of wickedness. And this is happening because they have decided they need to have a close association and maybe even an affiliation with the wicked neighbors.

Genesis - 15 - Kinsman Redeemer

Read Genesis 14:14-16 and make notes:

The 318 men – plus the neighbors – were not much of a match against the armies of 4 kings! This is the only recorded account of any military action on the part of Abram. Abram was not prompted into this military action by any attitude of personal gain or ambition. He plainly and simply desired to set his kinsman free from the captivity he had been dragged off into.

We know from previous lessons, Abram had come to be a man of peace. He was willing to risk losing everything he had in order to maintain the peace. Now we see he is willing to risk losing his peace in order to help liberate those taken into captivity.

How many people do you know today - would risk losing anything just to help liberate those who have been taken captive? Abram was a good man who not only served God - but he encouraged those around him to do the same.

This account is a basis for the attitude - that while we are to be a people of peace - and we should work toward peace - we should also be willing to provide for war when it is necessary to liberate our kinsmen who have been taken captive - even if they have been taken captive because they chose to be in the wrong place.

If we stop and think about this situation - Abram must have been crazy. While he no doubt had many servants with which he could fashion an army - these men were shepherds - they weren't soldiers. Even though he was able to enlist the help of some of his close neighbors - Aner, Eschol, and Mamre - they would be going up against 4 kings and their experienced armies.

These armies had just come off of a very successful campaign. Their adrenaline and confidence would be running high. Un-doubtedly, God was with Abram. His success was remarkable. He defeated his enemies and rescued Lot - and Lot's family, as well as the others who had been taken captive - along with all their possessions.

This seems to be one of the trademarks of God - throughout the Bible and even today - God usually uses the "least" of something - or people - to accomplish His remarkable results.

A horrible virus has crept into the Church today – I call it the “will come virus.” We need to get away from the attitude - “if we make it, they will come.” And we need to get into the attitude of “we must go!” They can not come – they are captives!

Genesis - 15 - Kinsman Redeemer

Abram could have taken the attitude that Lot got what he deserved - for hanging around and aligning himself so closely with these heathen people. Even though Lot had dealt less than honorably with Abram in the past - Abram would not deny his duty to his kinsman.

We ought to be ready to relieve those in distress when we have the power to do so. - regardless of how they may have treated us.

Abram would now experience 2 minor test.

Read Genesis 14:17-20 and make notes:

The first minor test was Melchizedek. He was the king of Salem AND he was a priest of the Most High God. He came out to meet Abram - and gave Abram and his men wine and bread. He refreshed their physical bodies - as it is in the power of a king to do. Then Melchizedek blessed Abram - as it is in the power of a priest to do.

Under this order, or dispensation, - it was the duty of the priest - to make offerings of peace between the Holy God and sinful man. In as much, the priest also held the divine authority to convey upon man the blessings of God.

This test was to see how Abram would respond to God by way of God's representative - in the face of success and blessings. Abram passed the test by revealing his pure heart. Abram gave a tithe (or a tenth) of all that he had to Melchizedek as God's representative.

It is important that you catch the fact that Abram gave a tenth of what he had - he didn't give a tenth of the spoils of war - as we will see in a few moments - he gave all the spoils of war back to those to whom they had originally belonged. Abram gave a tenth of his personal possessions.

The tithe goes back way beyond the Law and supra-cedes the Law. A tenth of all our increase is a small and reasonable tribute - to give the God to whom we owe everything we have. Since God is not with us in a physical form or manifestation - how else are we to give to God but to give to His representative.

Even though Abram was the one - upon who the call of God was now resting - he still acknowledged the spiritual authority of the priest of the Most High God.

Gentile Dispensation - Jew Dispensation - Church Dispensation.

Genesis - 15 - Kinsman Redeemer

Melchizedek was the last of the priest - under the ancient and primitive religion of the One True God. As the last priest under this order or dispensation - he came out to bless the one in whom God was beginning the New Order or dispensation - Abram.

Under the old order, God spoke with and worked with the people at large - whoever would acknowledge Him. Under the new order that was beginning with Abram - God would speak to and work primarily through a "called out nation." This was a foreshadowing of John the Baptist - who was a son of a priest under the Levite order. John the Baptist was the representative of the order or dispensation of Jews; and he came out to bless the One in whom God would begin the new order - of a "called out people" of priest and kings.

The second minor test is the goods from the liberated cities.

Read Genesis 14:21-23 and make notes:

If he would just give back the people of the city - he could keep the goods. By way of the rules of warfare, Abram and his men owned everything. They had conquered the possessor of these people and their goods. But Abram gave back not only the people, but also the goods of the city as well. Abram stated clearly that he did not want it ever to be said - that he had been made rich by the heathen.

Abram had laid hold of an important principle: The riches that come from this world are easily lost and the riches that come from God cannot be taken away. The people of God must be careful of doing anything that looks mean, greedy, or self-seeking.

God's servants and God's people should never desire the congratulations of this world. God's people need to be careful not to desire the friendship of this world or its people.

This episode of Abram going into battle to deliver his kinsman - who had been taken captive is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. We are the ones who have made our abode near those of this world. We are the ones who have drawn steadily closer to the world's strongholds. We are the ones who were taken captive by the world's warfare and destruction and imprisonment.

Jesus is the kinsman deliverer who has come to our rescue with no attitude of personal gain. Jesus is the kinsman deliverer who left His place of solitude and peace - and then came simply to set us captives free - and then to return to His Place. Jesus didn't just give God a tenth - as did Abram - Jesus gave God everything - desiring to keep nothing for Himself. God the Father in Heaven then gave everything to Jesus Christ.

Genesis - 15 - Kinsman Redeemer

What did Abram do - when he heard his kinsmen had been taken captive?

He came to where the captors were.

He attacked and routed the camp of the captor.

He destroyed the strongholds of the captor.

He then led the captives free and returned them to freedom.

Do you see any parallel between this - and what Jesus has done for you and me? On this earth, there is sickness, disease, & death. There is the grave. But there is Salvation in Jesus and there is the Holy Spirit.

The sad note today - is the Kinsman deliverer has come - and so many are refusing to go with Him - they are refusing to be led into liberty and freedom - they are choosing to remain in captivity. The enemy has come and taken people into captivity and bondage; some into alcohol bondage - some into drug bondage - some into pornography bondage - some into homosexual bondage - some into sexual promiscuity bondage - some into financial bondage - some into fear bondage - and a great variety of sinful habits and patterns and lifestyles.

Many are seeing their physical lives destroyed as well as their spiritual lives. I have some Good News! The captor has been routed! Glory to God. The captor has been defeated! The stronghold of the captor is being destroyed! Hallelujah.

The captives no longer have to remain captive! In addition to the message to us from the actions of Abram - there is another message God wants you and me to grasp. It is in the actions of those taken captive.

Some years ago we had a dog - and Irish Setter. She was a very smart and obedient dog. She stayed inside the back yard which we had fenced in. After a couple of years I had to take down a portion of the fence for about 3 days. She would run up to the place where the fence had been and just stop. She would not go past the place where the fence had been.

It is heartbreaking to our Heavenly Father to look down and see the fences of our captors tom down - the gates of their strongholds in our lives smashed in- and here we sit, still huddled as though we are unable to leave our place of captivity.

The Message To US:

We Must Go and Liberate The Captives

Regardless of how successfully or powerfully God may work in our life – we must be careful to remain respectful to God's representatives.

And give to God our tithe from our possessions.

To those who need to come out of bondage into the liberty of a life in Christ Jesus – COME OUT!

Genesis - 15 - Kinsman Redeemer

There are some who have seen God tear down the stronghold of the enemy in their life – and we just sat there, as though we were unable to get away - until the enemy built back the stronghold around our life.

To those who have been reluctant to “get up and out” even though the walls appear to be down - COME OUT!

Are you one who has been blessed as was Abram? Has anyone been taken captive around you? Are you going to go to battle in an effort to set them free?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 16 - Sarai and Hagar

In this lesson, we are going to look at two Old Testament types of today's Christians. We are going to look at an attitude and action of Abram and Sarai - and an attitude and action of Hagar. Most of us, today's Church People – are just like Abram and Sarai – or we are like Hagar.

Read Genesis 16:1-3 and make notes:

Abram and Sarai both understood - the promise of God that Abram would have an offspring - and his descendants would be numbered like the stars. Sarai also understood that the promise HAD NOT said she would be the birth mother of this offspring.

We do not know whether she was acting out of a desire to have a child - or a desire to see the promise come to pass. But in either case, this one thing stands out; Sarai and Abram had begun to take matters into their own hands. Sarai had an idea that was a customary practice of the peoples of that day. Abram "agreed to do what Sarai had suggested."

NO ONE in that land would find fault with what they did. All those around would agree and encourage Abram and Sarai in the actions they were undertaking. Everyone except God!

Even though the majority of people around us may find something acceptable, doesn't mean God will accept it. We have the advantage of having the rest of the Bible to read before interpreting this portion of scripture.

From other scriptures we know God doesn't find multiple marriage partners to be an acceptable thing. God warns, in several places, against multiple wives or multiple husbands. He also says - one who has more than one marriage partner isn't to be a leader among His called out people. A person in a polygamous relationship is going to have problems, divisions, contentions, and unrest to say the least.

But this message is not about multiple wives or husbands. The real issue here is that of "taking matters into our own hands."

The actions taken by Abram were not seen as "sinful" by the people of that day. Maybe Sarai's motive was not an evil one in itself. But their impatience in seeing the fulfilling of God's promise proves to be harmful to generations.

A GOOD THING, - if it is not of God, - IS NOT A GOOD THING!

Remember this one factor for a moment: God had already given the blessing that "Abram's seed would be as numerous as the sand". The Blessing of God had already been placed upon Abram even though there wasn't yet any seed.

Genesis - 16 - Sarai and Hagar

Read Genesis 16:4-5 and make notes:

Sarai was suffering some immediate displeasure in the result of having "taken matters into their own hands." But this is only a foretaste of the displeasure and discomfort to come of this action.

Read Genesis 16:6 and make notes:

Abram had earlier allowed this "servant to Sarai" to be elevated to a position of secondary wife. Now when there seems to be trouble, he acts as though she is still nothing more than a slave to Sarai.

Do you remember the "blessing of God that is upon Abram and his offspring?"

Read Genesis 16:7-10 and make notes:

Even those of the world, - even those in bondage, - if they are plugged into "God's Blessing", - will receive the fruit of the blessing. We have seen this with people of the world who have faithfully tithed - even though they do not accept Jesus as Savior. They have received the associated blessings that go with tithing. People of the world who "honor their father and mother" live a long life!

I have seen those of the world bless God's prophet and in return receive the prophet's reward. If you plug into one of God's promises of blessing, it will bring forth the fruit.

This won't save your soul from eternal hell. It will bring the fruit promised for this earth and this life. This is what Hagar experienced and received.

Genesis - 16 - Sarai and Hagar

Abram and Sarai sinned against God in their impatience. Hagar sinned in her pride and rebellion against her mistress. At the same time that Hagar has to answer for her sin of rebellion; - she was to receive the fruit of the blessing that she had been plugged into: - She was carrying the offspring of Abram, and his offspring had already been blessed to be too numerous to count.

We CAN receive the punishment and chastisement for our sins in one area of our life, - while at the same time we receive the blessings of God in another area.

Read Genesis 16:11-16 and make notes:

Just as Paul in the New Testament instructed the run away slave Onesimus to return to his master, - Hagar is told in the Old Testament to return to her master. Receiving the "Blessing of God" - doesn't necessarily change our station here in this life! However; receiving the "blessing of God" outside the plan of God is not necessarily all pleasant either: "He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

The descendants of Ishmael caused a great deal of pain and suffering to the God ordained descendants of Abram. If only Abram and Sarai had not taken matters into their own hands - to try to bring about the promise of God, - their offspring would not have had to fight all those years, which includes today, with the descendants of Ishmael.

We have received many promises from God concerning our lives. Promises concerning having our needs being met, prosperity, peace, and life. We must not be impatient in the fulfilling of any of these promises, even if we are tempted by someone whom we hold very dear.

Satan will often work through someone who is the closest to us - to get us to begin to work and act according to the world's plans and standards. It is so very important that we see what happened when Abram and Sarai - took matters into their own hands to attempt to hurry up the promises of God.

They did receive the promise, just as God said they would. Isaac came and his descendants are certainly too numerous to be counted. But here we are some 3000 years later and along side the promised blessing of countless offspring - is the countless offspring of man's attempt - Ishmael - that is harassing and inflicting distress on God's promised blessing.

When we start getting our minds, our wisdom, and our own efforts into God's plans, - the consequences can not only last a lifetime, but can go on into future generations.

Genesis - 16 - Sarai and Hagar

#1 - Don't put man's wisdom or man's strengths ahead of God's plan.

Hagar had been made Abram's wife by the will of Sarai and Abram. Yet when the Angel of the Lord addressed her, he called her "Servant of Sarai".

No doubt some of the problems between Hagar and Sarai - were that Hagar was starting to see herself as being elevated to a higher position. The angel made it clear to Hagar that she was still a servant by addressing her in the manner that he did.

Today, we find too many Christians who have received a blessing from God in some area, - starting to elevate themselves in their eyes - and letting those around them know about their blessing. It is important for each of us to ask ourselves the question - the angel asked Hagar; - "where have you come from and where are you going?"

We, just like Hagar, have come from a place in the world. We have been brought into a place of God's blessing and anointing. It was Abram's home for Hagar . It is the "New Covenant" relationship with Jesus - for us today.

When we receive a blessing from God and start to get proud and puffed up in our attitude toward others, - we often find it necessary to run away from the presences of others.

Usually, if we are forced to run away from people - because they are mistreating us, - it is because we have been flaunting ,our "blessing." "Where have you come from and where are you going?"

Hagar was leaving the place of God's anointing and blessing - and was on her way back to Egypt, - a type of the world. I see many Christians going in that same direction today. Please, dear friend, ask yourself, - "Where am I going?" - "Oh, but surely Brother Bob - now that I have been blessed of God, I can't continue in this station as just a servant." Yes! Yes! And Yes!

How much better off all of us would be - if we would just accept the fact the we are all servants of the Most High God. Go back and submit to the one - God has placed you under or with. It is within our flesh that we want to be called by the title of our accomplishments. "Oh yes, please call me the anointed one." - "Oh yes, you may call me the one upon whom God has given the gift of ."

The world would teach us to address each other by the highest title ever received. But God's Word teaches us to accept the title of servant and slave to the Lord. As the servant of the Lord, - if I was given a gift to use in accomplishing a desired work of the Father, - what exaltation am I to receive? As a servant, I was just doing my duty!

#2 - Stay where God puts you and use your gift with humility.

"Where have you come from and where are you going?" This is a perfect time to ask ourselves, "Where have I come from - Where am I going?"

Genesis - 16 - Sarai and Hagar

Many of us need to change directions today. We are actually on a path that is leading us away from God's place of blessing. I suggest - we take advantage of this timely question and do some inventory.

How about it Abram and Sarai? Are we taking things into our own hands and using our own plans to bring about God's blessings into our life?

How about you Hagar? Are we presently on a road that leads away from the place of God's promises? Are we presently taking a path that leads back to the world?

Have we been throwing our "blessing" up into the face of those around us? Have we been flaunting our gift of the Holy Spirit? Have we found it necessary to run from those whom we are supposed to be serving?

Let's make sure that we do not put man's wisdom and man's strength ahead of God's plans. Lets make every effort to stay where God puts us and use our Gift with humility. And from time to time ask ourselves, "Where have I come from and where am I going?"

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

(this page for additional notes)

Genesis - 17 - Abraham

Are we living in the “real world?” I have had a number of people tell me – they are living in the “real world.” Those who do so, are usually trying to convince me that I do not live in the “real world” in my efforts to live according to God's principles.

In one counseling situation with a teenager who was having sexual relations - when I tried to share God's Word - and the practical reasons why you should not be doing this - they told me that "this is the real world - you are out of touch and old fashioned – everyone is doing it."

In another counseling session with a couple who was having trouble in their marriage and in their whole family relationships - I discovered their favorite TV show was Roseanne. I had seen a couple of episodes of this show and all I saw and heard was one - “put down” after another. Each member of the family on that show was putting the other family members “down” - along with anyone and everyone they met.

I began trying to share with them – the need to be careful about the negative things that come out of our mouths - and to be sure what we speak is God's Word - that is uplifting and encouraging. They were quick to tell me – the reason they liked that show is because it is "the real world" - "that's just the way real life is - everybody says things like this."

Then in another session with a man who is having great trouble at work and at home because of his continuous drunkenness - when I began to share that drunkenness was sin – and it is going to totally destroy his whole life if he didn't allow God to deliver him from it – he told me, “you are out of date – this is the real world we live in – everybody is drinking a lot these days.”

Still, in another session a man told me regarding his aggression and hostility - "this is the real world."

All four of these people are right about one thing, - "it is real worldly" - what they are doing. But they are as wrong as sin about another" thing - EVERYBODY'S NOT DOING IT!

Now of these four persons, 2 were not saved - but 2 of these were saved people. Satan has somehow managed to get his motto into the minds of God's people.

Read Genesis 17:1 and make notes:

Abram was 99 years old, - 13 years after Ishmael was born, - when the Lord came and spoke to him. Sarai was 89 years old.

It is a little interesting that God identified Himself here as 'El Shaddai.' In the creation account - God is identified as 'Elohim', - the God who creates nature. Here He is identified as 'El Shaddai', the God who compels nature to do what is contrary to itself.

Genesis - 17 - Abraham

To those who wish to worship nature – or the things of nature - I would like to point out that the God I serve is not controlled by nature - the God I serve controls nature! Church, listen carefully - for several years now, the people of the church have been trying to manipulate God by the things of nature - the people of the church have tried to manipulate God with things like money, works, feelings, and numbers.

God is saying to His people today – Enough! “I am the Lord God Most High - I use nature to accomplish my goals - you do not use the things of nature to control Me or My Actions!”

Abram's disobedience with his action of impatience caused a long delay in the fulfillment of God's promise. After all this time - after all his waiting - what did God say to Abram? “Walk before Me and be blameless.” If you are reading from the KJV you have “be perfect.”

Romans 3:10 tells us that “*there is no one righteous.*” God – who knows everything – knew that no man can walk a blameless life upon this earth. What did God have in mind with such an instruction to Abraham?

Romans 4:9 tells us that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. To be more specific, Hebrews 11:6 says, “*Without faith it is impossible to please God...*”

Do you remember a couple of lessons back, - how Abram had shown such faith in God's provision and protection? Then in the previous lesson - we saw that Abram allowed his faith to falter and tried to take matters into his own hands? This is a somewhat gentle rebuke from God - “to return to your earlier place of faith.”

In Matthew 8, when the storm began to rage and the disciples became afraid, - Jesus rebuked them in 8:26, - “*You of little faith, why are you so afraid?*” Jesus gave the disciples a gentle rebuke for their lack of faith. Here in Genesis, God is gently rebuking Abram for allowing his faith to fall.

The word “blameless or perfect” - could also be translated as “mature.” God wanted Abram to walk before Him in a mature and complete way. There is a word here also for the Church today. For the past 30 years, we have grown increasingly less mature in our walk with God - the Church, instead of maturing and using our gifts like mature Christians - we have more and more, exalted the gifts and less and less honored the Giver of the Gifts! God is saying to the Church today - “Walk before Me and be blameless!” - Be Complete – Be Mature!

Then God went on to reconfirm the covenant He had made earlier with Abram.

Read Genesis 17:2-5 and make notes:

Genesis - 17 - Abraham

God said it was time to change Abram's name. Abram (Ab-ram), in Arabic, means "high father." Abraham (Ab-raham), in Arabic, means "father of a multitude."

The changing of a person's name when they entered into a covenant relationship was customary. Usually they would take on a portion of the partner's name and tack it onto the end of their name.

Some have stated this is what happened here, - in that the "am" part of "I Am" got tacked onto the end of "Abram." This sounds kind of nice that Abram was given part of God's name - but I don't think that was the case.

Since the name given by God - had a meaning to the Arabic peoples of that day - I think it was a purposeful renaming - and not just a customary "tacking onto the end" kind of thing.

The new name given to Abram indicated to all the peoples of that land, that God had made His covenant not with Abram, the Chaldean Chieftain; but with Abraham, the believer.

Read Genesis 17:15-16 and make notes:

In this passage of scripture is the first reference or indication that Sarai is included in the promise. Then it is outright confirmed -

Read Genesis 17:19-21 and make notes:

God also changed the name of Sarai to Sarah. Sarai means "my princess" while Sarah means "princess." God was indicating that up until now Sarai was just Abram's princess. Now she would be the princess of a great multitude.

Read Genesis 17:6-11 and make notes:

Genesis - 17 - Abraham

After reconfirming the covenant promise of a great number of offspring and that they shall possess this land - God told 'Abraham' that he and all his descendants should carry a sign or mark of the covenant in the body. It was a practice of the peoples of that time to make a covenant between two people - and when they did, they would cut themselves to allow their blood to mingle and the cut would leave a scar.

This scar when seen by someone else, would indicate this person has a covenant partner out there somewhere. Maybe you could not tell – by the scar in the hand – who they have a covenant with – but you know from the scar – that they had a covenant partner.

God's request was that Abraham, and all his household, and all his future household, and all his descendants carry this mark or sign of the covenant. “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.”

Having a scar – or mark – of a covenant served as a perpetual reminder of the covenant. For Abraham the mark was not to be placed on the hand. The covenant mark for Abraham was placed on the part of his body that has to do with reproduction.

There are a couple of reasons as to why this particular sign or mark:
to distinguish the seed of Abraham from the Gentiles
to suggest the idea of a holy seed of Abraham

There is something we should take note of regarding this mark of the covenant - unlike the customary mark of a covenant, - this mark was to be upon a private part of the body. The customary place was the palm of the hand. When greeting others and holding up the hand, they could see the mark and know that you have entered into a covenant.

They could not tell "what covenant" - and could not tell "with whom" - but they could see the mark of the covenant. God's intent wasn't for the others to SEE the mark, but that they would see the "lifestyle".

There is something else you should take note of concerning the mark of the covenant - God DID NOT place the mark of the covenant upon Abraham – Abraham had to place the mark upon himself.

Without it, there would be not covenant. God's desire was for there to be this covenant, - but Abraham had to cut away his own flesh himself to put the covenant into effect.

We as believers need to be careful in the area of our faith in God. Today, too many Christians are turning their attentions to the things of this world.

Genesis - 17 - Abraham

When a Christian begins to set their heart upon the things of this world, you can almost always tell:

the sunshine and joy begins to fade in their life
the desire to tell others about salvation in Jesus is not there
they withdraw more and more from the things of God
more and more disorder appears in their life

What are we to do? Just what God told Abraham to do. "Walk before me." He didn't say, "Walk behind me and Try to keep up." He didn't say walk along beside me and "try to keep in step." He said, "Walk in front of me."

God wants us to walk "in His presence" - in a "mature fashion." This phrase can sound a little religious if we are not careful. So, what does it mean to "walk in God's presence in a mature fashion?"

Perhaps you can as a little child - how you probably begged for some small toy or thing. Then later as an older teenager - you wouldn't be caught even touching the thing - let alone playing with it. As adults - If you don't remember yourself as a child, then think of your own child or someone that you know that has a child. Little children will very often be awed by the "bells, lights, and whistles" of a thing. They will beg for it, cry for it, maybe even throw a temper tantrum if they don't get it.

Being the "older and wiser" adult – we can quickly and easily see that the thing doesn't do anything. It just has "bells, lights, and whistles." Maybe we can see that it isn't made very well and that it will fall apart in no time – the money would be wasted on it.

As a "mature" person we can begin to see the real value of the thing and reject the junk. While the "immature" person is really drawn to it and begs for it. As a mature person in Christ, we will see the worthlessness of the things of this world and will reject it's junk. The immature Christian may very well be attracted to the "bells, lights, and whistles" of the things of this world. But we are to be mature as we walk in God's presence.

The message for us - is not different from the message to Abraham. Walk in constant reference to God. While we may walk among the heathen, we must walk as before the Lord. Be mature in our assessment of the value of things. Most of this stuff isn't. going to last very long. But there are some things that are going to last an eternity.

God made the provisions of the covenant known – But it was up to Abraham to place the mark of the covenant upon himself. Verses 23 & 26 & 27 tell us that Abraham and his whole household took on the mark of the covenant - the very day that Abraham heard the request from God.

Abraham's response was immediate and without delay. You can bet. at 99 years old, it was a painful thing for Abraham to comply with the covenant mark. But the scriptures indicate that He did so with a cheerfulness and did not grumble and complain about what God has required of him.

Genesis - 17 - Abraham

Today, we are hearing a request from God – for us to separate ourselves from the worldly things that are upon us. Will we spiritually circumcise ourselves of the fleshly and worldly things that are a part of our life?

The provisions of the covenant are already available - but only to those who will cut the flesh away. Don't sit around waiting for God to separate you from the fleshly and worldly aspects of your lifestyle. We must separate ourselves from the fleshly and worldly parts of our lifestyle - in order to activate the provisions of the covenant God has made.

Romans 2:29 tells us that we are a Jew, only if we have engaged in the circumcision of the heart – not by a written code. The New Testament tells us the circumcision that God really wants from us - is a circumcision of the heart.

The people we meet cannot see our heart and tell whether it is circumcised or not. They can and they do see our lifestyle! God is asking us to come out of the "real world" and come into the "real kingdom."

The Church has so much become engaged with the signs of the administered Gospel – that we have come to a place of neglecting the God of the Gospel. The signs and wonders that God had intended to follow the Believer and their faith walk - were never intended by God to be worshiped by man.

Yet, today's Church has come to a place of being excited by and chasing after the signs and wonders - just like a young child is excited by and chases after- the "bells, lights, and whistles." As a result, the signs and wonders in the Church have become empty, staged, fake!

Dear Church, turn back to your place of faith! God has already planned and willed that a Great Revival should be poured out upon our land and it's people - God has already made provision that a new and fresh outpouring of His Spirit should come forth. The signs and wonders of which will make the things that most of us have seen - look like child's play - and that's what most of them have been.

Those who have ears to hear, are hearing that God is saying -
"Be still, be quiet, and come back to your place of faith. I am not going to be doing things the way you think. Those who pay attention will be led into new pastures with fresh streams of water; and those who hold onto the past will be left behind in worn out pastures and fouled up streams."

But the only ones who will hear the voice and directions of God are those who will voluntarily "cut away" the flesh from their lifestyle.

Genesis - 17 - Abraham

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 17 - Abraham

(this page for additional notes)

Genesis - 18 - Lot

Chapter 18 gives the account of the Lord sending Angels to visit with Abraham before they went to Sodom to destroy the cities of the plain. We find in this chapter the account of Abraham interceding for the cities of the plain – asking God not destroy them.

In chapter 19, we find the Angels arriving in Sodom.

Read Genesis 19:1 and make notes:

Verse one is really a sad commentary when you stop to think of what it says. Lot had traveled with Abram for so many years. He had seen Abram fail in his faith; but he had also seen Abram honor God. When Lot left Abram and selected the choicest looking lands for himself, he went and settled in the plain "near the city."

In Genesis 13:12, Lot pitched his tents “near” Sodom. Here in verse one of chapter 19, we see Lot "sitting at the gate of Sodom." This suggest that he now was one of it's leaders.

Lot. at first, only moved to a close proximity of the wicked city. Then he moved closer and closer until he was finally taking "his place" within the wicked city. Much like Hagar leaving her place of blessing and heading in a direction that leads back to the world - Lot had left his place of blessing and steadily went closer and closer to the wicked world - until he was right in the midst of it - and even participating as one of it's leaders.

Then while the Angels are in Lot's house to spend the night with him, the people of the city come and demand Lot send them out so they might have unnatural sex with them.

Read Genesis 19:4-8 and make notes:

In verses 6 through 8 we can see - Lot has degenerated past the point of just taking "a place" among the wicked. He has now come to a place of willingness to sacrifice his own family members over to wickedness.

We won't do it in this lesson, but we could look at scripture upon scripture that lets us know that God expects us to protect our families. God expects us to intercede for our families. God expects us to refuse to allow our families to be carried off into wickedness without a spiritual fight.

Genesis - 18 - Lot

Lot obviously still had some sense of hospitality but how his mind had become perverted that he would not hesitate to offer his family up to such wicked people. The wicked inhabitants of this city pressed harder and harder that Lot should give over to them these strangers that they might cast their perversion upon them.

Read Genesis 19:10-11 and make notes:

There are several things we should take note of concerning the people of wicked cities – or people who live in wickedness. There is a progression in sin. The people of the cities of Sodom and Gommorah had certainly become unnaturally wicked and sinful.

1 Unnatural - their sin was unnatural

But their wicked stature had become even lower than that - these wicked and perverse people were not just "wicked beyond that which is natural wickedness" - they had become very bold, unashamed, and out in the open with their wickedness.

#2 Shameless - they were no longer hiding their sin

They were so bold as to be proud of the wicked lifestyle they were living that they had begun to demand publicly their right to live this way with whomever they choose. And if anyone should dare to try to curb them in even one area, then they threatened violence.

3 Violent - if you don't let us have our way with sin, we will hurt you - we will destroy you

And then in their violence to demand that they be allowed to do the wickedness of their heart, when judgment comes - such as these people being struck with blindness. Even though they have received judgment for their sinful lifestyle - they didn't repent even in the midst of judgment.

4 Unreasonable - they don't just want to sin - they want others to provide them with the resources with which to sin

When wickedness gets to this degree among a people - it goes to all levels and all ages.

5 Universal - it will affect everyone

The people who had gathered at Lot's door were from every part of the city, and were young and old alike.

Genesis - 18 - Lot

If we continue in "Unnatural" attitudes and actions, - they will lead us to being "Shameless".

If we continue in our "Shamelessness" and refuse to recognize the sin and wickedness of our lifestyle, - we will become "Violent".

If we continue in our "Violence" of attitude and actions without any repentance, - we will become "Unreasonable".

If we remain in this "Unreasonable" sinful and wicked attitude and heart, - it will permeate to every level and age and person around us and will become "Universal".

The Angels told Lot that if he had any other relatives that lived in the city that he should get them to leave with him in the morning for they were going to destroy the city. The scripture tells us Lot went to the men that were espoused to his daughters and they wouldn't believe him. A sad part is that we can see further how Lot was sinking to their level in verses 15 & 16.

Read Genesis 19:15-16 and make notes:

Early the next morning when Lot and his family were being encouraged to leave quickly, it says "Lot hesitated." Lot had developed an attraction to this place of wickedness. Lot was finding it hard to leave this place that would surely defile every part of his being and every member of his family.

Finally the Angels had to take them by the hand and pull them out of the city. Lot had already begun to show the early stages of infection.

The Bible is so encouraging here in that it says - the Angels pulled Lot from the city because the "Lord was being merciful to Lot." Isn't that really something - even when we are so attached to that which WILL KILL us and WILL DESTROY our family - God is Merciful toward us.

This is not "just a nice story" - it is a picture of the nature of man. Lot was at one time in the place of God's blessing and the place of God's promise - among the household of Abram. Lot was now at a place of having to be "pulled" from among the wicked so as not to be destroyed along with them.

I can introduce you to people today that were once right in the middle of what God was doing and saying. Then they began to move closer and closer to the things of this world. For some it was actual material things. For others it was worldly attitudes. Then they found a place for themselves among the things of this world.

Genesis - 18 - Lot

Today, when you try to share with them the Word of God and try to get them to leave that place and come back to their place with God - they simply find it very hard to turn loose and often can't turn loose on their own.

Don't you know - when Lot first moved to the nearness of the wicked city, that he would not have ever imagined - he would ever offer up his two virgin daughters to such wickedness. I can't tell you how many times I've heard Christians say things like, "I would never have guessed that I would do or say such things." - "I would never have believed that I could have become so worldly."

The terrible wickedness that God's people can get into - starts with nothing more than just being willing to go near the sin and wickedness of this world. So great of a sinful action starts with such a small move.

God's instructions for deliverance was for Lot and his family to go to the mountains.

Read Genesis 19:17-20 and make notes:

Lot had asked the Angels for permission to go to the smallest city of the plain instead of going to the mountains like he had been told to do. Lot understood that he had to leave the place of big sin - but he wanted to keep the place of little sin.

Lot appears to have more confidence in the protection of a wicked city than he had confidence in the protection of what God had told him to do. He was permitted to go to Zoar the smallest of the cities.

Perhaps Lot thought - since this was a smaller city, that it wasn't as wicked as the big city. The account tells us - God utterly destroyed the cities of the plain - except the one in which Lot had retreated. It also tells us of the disobedience of Lot's wife and her death because of it.

Read Genesis 19:30 and make notes:

Genesis - 18 - Lot

Finally, Lot is going where he had been told to go. Lot and his two daughters, left the city and went into the mountains to live and took up residence in a cave. Don't overlook the position Lot finds himself in. At one time he was very wealthy and prosperous - he had a great many possessions. Today he has nothing but a hole in the ground and his two daughters.

Through Lot's actions in Sodom; - then his reluctance to act immediately upon the instructions from God to leave Sodom; - then his asking for a concession instead of doing what he was told - his daughters had NOT BEEN taught by example to do what is right and to obey God. They had been taught by example - to do what seemed right to them. We need to remember "There is a way that seems right to man but the end of it is death and destruction."

While living in this cave the two daughters of Lot decided - they should make sure that their father had offspring. Since their mother was now dead and they were not married - their decision was to engage in incest and bare children for their father. The results of our sins are very often far reaching beyond our scope and ability to grasp.

Both of his daughters got pregnant and each one gave birth to a son. The oldest daughter of Lot gave birth to a son - she named "Moab" - from whom the Moabites came. The youngest daughter of Lot gave birth to a son - she named "Ben- ammi" - from whom the Ammonites came. The Moabites and the Ammonites were two wicked nations that inflicted a great deal of pain and suffering upon God's chosen people.

If Lot had remained with Abram - and had made himself subject to the Lord's anointed - If Lot had not gone near the wicked places of this world - Might he not have been blessed of God and kept the blessings? Might his offspring been brought about by wholesome means instead of incest ? Might he not have been a source of bitterness to God's chosen?

This passage of scripture telling of Lot becoming drunk and having an incestuous relationship with his daughters - is the last thing we have recorded about Lot. What a terrible way to end the story of your life!

Lot's epitaph - or his eulogy - might have gone something like this:

"Well, ole Lot, he started out in the household of the anointed of God, why he was right there among those to whom God spoke, but he decided to go down and make his place kind of close to the hot spots of the world. Then before you know it, there he was right in the heart of the world's most wicked city and even took up a place of leadership in it; why he became a part of them. When it came time for God to destroy the place, Lot didn't want to go, so God had to pull him out of it just to save his life. Poor ole Lot, his wife was killed when she turned back to see the city destroyed. After that he just went up into the mountains with his daughters to live in seclusion. In the days before he died, he would get drunk a lot and began to have sex with his own daughters. Sure enough both of them had children by him."

"That's pretty much the end of his life. But, even though Lot died, the fruit of his sin continued for several generations; and you know, the fruit of his sins was a mighty sharp thorn among those that were seen as the apple of God's eye."

Genesis - 18 - Lot

Some think Lot took a place of leadership in the city so that he could try to bring some decency to those people. We can't really know one way or the other about his motives for becoming a part of the cities leadership. But we sure can tell about the results of becoming a part of or taking up a place in the wickedness of this world.

We can see how Lot degenerated, step by step. We can see how it affected his own immediate family and several generations to come. Before we close this lesson – let's read a portion of a letter - a letter written to the first century Christians:

Read 2 Peter 2:4-3:18 and make notes:

What happened with Lot, and his life, and his family - is a picture of what will happen to each one of us - who chooses to NOT BE CIRCUMCISED of heart concerning the things of this world. If you are already finding yourself being drawn to the things of this world - QUICK, turn around and cling unto the Lord. If you are secure that you are not being drawn to the things of this world - PLEASE, go out and try to wake up those for whom it is not too late.

Can we really have the heart of God when we can sit by and allow those around us - to be headed for such an end as Lot received ? What does God ask of us today ?

if you are not saved - accept Jesus today -
if you are saved and are starting to like the things of this world - turn around quickly -
if you are clinging soundly to the things of God -
then reach out to those who are not and help them come back

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 19 - Abimelech

There are two messages - God would have us receive from chapter 20 of the Book of Genesis. Every Believer needs to be aware of these two Words from God. For those of us who know them, - we need to be reminded of them from time to time.

Abraham had been in the plains of Mamre. He had interceded for the life of Lot and his family. Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed by God. It isn't clear whether Abraham was aware – that Lot and his two daughters had escaped the destruction in the plain of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is possible Abraham wanted to leave the vicinity of the massive destruction - but most likely it was simply time for this "herdsman" to move with his vast herd of sheep, goats, and camels.

Abraham leaves Mamre and takes his large herd to Gerar.

Read Genesis 20:1 and make notes:

The Negev was in the southern part of the land that was later to be called Judah. Gerar was a Philistine city located in the rolling hill country.

Read Genesis 20:2-3 and make notes:

“God” - *Elohiym* = gods in the ordinary sense.

This is a pagan man, - a man who believes in many Gods. God appeared to Abimelech as a Supreme Being - but not necessarily as Jehovah.

Read Genesis 20:4-6 and make notes:

God (*Elohiym*) - is still speaking to Abimelech as a Supreme Being.

Genesis - 19 - Abimelech

Read Genesis 20:7 and make notes:

“Prophet” - *nabi* - an inspired man - a prophet.

This is the first time in the Bible – that God has identified a person as a prophet. If you want to do a study on the prophets of the Bible, you will want to start with Abraham. Abraham is the first person to hold the Office of Prophet in the Bible.

Please note - God identifies the Prophet as one who "will intercede" for you - He says, "he will pray for you and you will live."

Read Genesis 20:8-13 and make notes:

Abimelech was scolding Abraham - he declared Abraham had caused him to do something that ought not be done. Even these Philistines - in the early years of their existence - had a code of ethics that forbid the taking of another man's wife. Abimelech continued in his chastisement of Abraham, "What did you see us doing that caused you to want to treat us this way?" - "What in the world did we do to you that made you do this to us?"

Abraham tries to make excuses, "I didn't think anyone here revered God." And then the one so many of us have tried when we have been caught trying to be deceptive - "Well, what I said wasn't entirely false - you see, it is sort of the truth."

Abraham told half of the truth - "she really is my sister." But he didn't tell all of the truth - the “rest of the story” - is that she is his wife. The "wife relationship" takes precedence over the "sister relationship."

Please remember this - when we tell only part of the truth - and the part we leave out causes someone to believe things are different from what they are – we are lying. PERIOD!

If we think only in terms of the moral conduct codes of our society, we can give Abraham an undeserved judgment. In that day and culture, it was not unacceptable for a man to take his half sister as a wife, - nor cousin, - nor niece, etc. Taking Sarah, - his half sister - as his wife wasn't Abraham's sin. Abimelech is not to be seen as a villain here either.

Genesis - 19 - Abimelech

What Abimelech did - in calling Sarah into his harem and beginning the preparation for her to become one of his wives - was a normal and acceptable practice as well - with the understanding that she was not someone's wife already.

This episode occurred approximately 20-24 years after the time Abraham and Sarah went to Egypt - and the Pharaoh tried to take Sarah as his wife. Sarah is now about 89 years old - she was still attractive and desirable. (now ladies, there is hope - you don't have to write yourself off in the "being attractive" area just because you get some years behind you)

The Bible tells us - she was attractive, so we don't want to try to take that away. There is possibly another factor that figured into Abimelech wanting to take on another wife. Abraham was a very successful and powerful nomadic herdsman. Abraham was doing pretty good in that area 24 years earlier.

Pharaoh felt compelled to give Abraham a great number of sheep, goats, donkeys, and camels to add to his possessions - not to mention men servants and women servants. When Abraham left Egypt, he was someone to be paid attention to. He had enough servants to put up a good fight. If the servants didn't get you, he could just stampede his massive herd across your encampment - and there just wouldn't be much left.

Twenty four years have gone by - the animals have continued to reproduce - the servants have reproduced - Abraham just wasn't someone to ignore. Maybe the report of Abraham having defeated the kings was floating around.

Abimelech may have felt it in his best interest to marry someone from Abraham's household in order to secure an ally instead of by accident making an enemy of Abraham. Hey, if Abraham has this sister that is 89 years old and she hasn't married - it ought to really endear me to Abraham if I marry her - and it doesn't hurt one bit that she is a "knock-out."

Abimelech may have had no evil intentions at all when he took Sarah into his harem. He may have thought he was doing something good for Abraham as well as for his kingdom. Truthfully, Abimelech shows much more integrity in this whole situation than does the man who has had a personal relationship with God.

Abraham, - the first Prophet of God, - falls way short of the mark here. When Abraham begins to try to make his pitiful excuses, something really sad takes place. In verses 11 and 13, Abraham doesn't address God by the name he has come to know Him - Abraham stoops to the level of these pagan Philistines. Abraham refers to God as Elohiym, nothing more than a god among the many gods these people worship.

Abraham had been experiencing a personal relationship with God - Jehovah - and yet he didn't address the personal God that he knew. He only referred to "a god" in the presence of these pagans. Abraham - the first in the Office of a Prophet - passed up an opportunity to be a witness for the Lord Most High! Have you here ever done that?

Genesis - 19 - Abimelech

In verse thirteen - Abraham reveals this idea of Sarah being introduced as his sister, was a plan they had worked out years ago when they first set out from their own country. Friends - this is pre-meditated lying. Abraham didn't just slip up in a moment of weakness - he planned in advance to be deceptive and was - on more than one occasion.

Abraham should have learned his lesson in the situation with Pharoah. And yet, here he is 20 years later – still doing the same thing. Abraham is repeating the very same sin!

Read Genesis 20:14-16 and make notes:

Abimelech had publicly called Sarah to come and be a part of his harem. Now that he was aware - he was in the wrong - he made a public declaration of such. The Scriptures tell us - Abimelech called all his officials together and told them what he had done - he made restitution to Abraham in public - before witnesses. He publicly gave Abraham free reign anywhere in the land over which he was king.

Abimelech publicly acknowledged to everyone - Sarah is innocent and he declares her "vindicated" of any part of the deception. He didn't leave any place for the people of the land to accuse her of wrong doing. He was basically saying, she was following the instructions of this man - who is her master.

Read Genesis 20:17-18 and make notes:

When we look at the original Hebrew words used in this text - it indicates a disease came upon the household of Abimelech which made it impossible for them to conceive. Some of the old scholars suggest that it was a disease that made it impossible for them to engage in the activities which would allow conception.

This is possible and very likely - unless you want to see this as something that took a very long time to take place. It would take a great number of months to come to the conclusion that the entire household was unable to conceive - unless there was an immediate debilitating disease. Also consider - when a new wife was brought into the harem, the time of preparation could range from a few weeks up to a year depending upon the particular king.

Genesis - 19 - Abimelech

The Scripture tells us - Abimelech never touched Sarah. Either it was a very long time - or he was suffering from some immediate disease. I personally lean toward the disease that fell upon the household of Abimelech. I really like the simplicity of verses 17 & 18 - Abraham prayed for Abimelech - and God healed and restored their ability to conceive.

It is also noteworthy, that while even in verse 17 - Abraham prayed to Elohiym. Verse 18 declares that it was Jehovah that stopped the conceptions. It was very important for God to step in and to protect Sarah from Abimelech's sexual advances. God had promised Abraham and Sarah a son - it was quickly approaching the time that God was going to give that Son of promise.

Satan no doubt was working to get Abraham to go to the area of King Abimelech. Satan was fully aware of Abraham's weakness - Satan was fully aware of Abimelech's appreciation of a pretty woman - Satan probably felt that Abimelech would offer to marry Sarah in order to secure an alliance with someone as powerful as Abraham - Satan would win a major victory, if he could get Sarah to have a child by Abimelech. Why it would be significant if they just had sexual relations?

If that should happen - it would take away the glory of God for giving a child to this old couple. Everyone would be able to say it was Abimelech's child. God didn't let that happen.

Lesson #1:

Being ignorant when you commit sin - will not keep you from receiving the judgment and the consequences of that sin.

Abimelech didn't have any idea that what he was doing was wrong. But he received the judgment for it just the same. Because this people was outside of the covenant relationship, it was necessary for a covenant person to intercede for him.

Had it not been for the intercession of God's Divinely Anointed person - Abimelech and his whole household would have died for the sin.

Sub-message A:

Don't touch God's anointed - you have to answer to God.

Sub-message B:

God warns people before the point of no return.

Abimelech is making his plea before God - "I'm innocent." Abimelech is crying. God says in verse 6 - "I know you did it with a clear conscience - that is why I kept you from touching her."

God was keeping the sinner from going to the point of no return until he had a chance to know the consequences. Had Abimelech chosen to ignore the Word of God that came to him, as so many people are choosing to do today - he would have surely died the night - or day that he went in to touch Sarah.

Genesis - 19 - Abimelech

Do you see the mercy of God in this text? Here is a man that does not know God. He is about to touch God's anointed. The Mercy of God is poured out - in this man's ignorance. God does not strike him down immediately - he is given an opportunity to make things right.

I believe with all my heart - that people today are given an opportunity to make things right in their life before they reach that point of no return. Un-fortunately, it seems that more and more are choosing to ignore the Word of God that comes to them.

Lesson #2:

If you are one of God's anointed, then you don't have to be concerned about someone taking what is yours.

Even if someone is planning and purposing in their heart to take you for all you have - you don't have to worry. In this situation - the Anointed One of God is not living the Holy life of Faith that God would have him live.

In this situation - a pagan had his heart set on taking that which God had ordained to be part of Abraham's blessing – Sarah. Even though the Lord's Servant was not living up to his calling - God looked out for him. In this situation, Abimelech did not mean harm, but had he followed through with his personal plans - he would have destroyed Abraham's blessing and promise of God to him.

God has not changed through the centuries! He is still able to protect His children today! We can walk in great confidence today as His children.

If you have accepted Jesus as your personal Savior - then you do not have to be concerned about those who would try to take advantage of you - you don't need to walk one hour in fear of losing the things God has promised you.

Now, don't make the mistake of taking this as a justification to live like hell - we will see in God's Word that there is also a judgment upon God's people when they refuse to be obedient. But this is an assurance that we can live our life without the fear of what others may threaten or try to do to us.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 20 - Isaac and Ishmael

Genesis chapter 20 is a somewhat sad note in the account of Abraham's life. If you remember, - in chapter 12 - Abram lied about Sarai and said she was his sister because he was afraid the Egyptians might kill him for her.

Abram was chastised and he acted like he had learned something from this, but in chapter 20 we see - Abraham still had doubts in trusting God to protect him. In chapter 20 is the account where Abraham lied to Abimelech and said Sarah was his sister; - because he was afraid that Abimelech might kill him to get her.

God had to intervene and speak to Abimelech to protect the purity of Sarah; because Abraham had fallen in his faith. This is a crucial time in Abraham's and Sarah's life. This is during that year when the Lord had said "next year at this time you will have a son."

Here they are, going down the runway to receive the long awaited promise of God - and they fall down. What a terrible time to fall down in your faith – in the very moments before God is going to pour out your promised blessing.

But these are just the times when Satan fires his biggest attacks. When we start getting close to receiving the promise. If God had not intervened when he did, people could always have said the baby was that of Abimelech. It would have stolen all of God's glory in this blessing.

Friends, - we do continue to go through the same test and trials - if we don't learn and grow from them.

Read Genesis 21:1-2 and make notes:

"The Lord did what He had said He would do." Every child conceived - is the handiwork of God - but in Sarah's case it was a special "gift of grace" - and certainly a product of "Divine Power."

Who would ever dream or seriously think of a woman who was 90 years old giving birth to a child? Especially when her husband was 100 years old. Our world is presided over by a real and personable God. And because He is a personable God, we must make room in our thinking for some surprises of divine origin and power.

Genesis - 20 - Isaac and Ishmael

Read Genesis 21:3-5 and make notes:

Wow! Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. He has waited over 25 years to have this promise fulfilled. A lesson that today's Church people need to not just look at but study closely.

On the 8th day, Isaac was circumcised according to God's instructions and he was given the name Isaac at this time. His name seems so very appropriate. Isaac means "laughter."

When Abram was told that he would have a son in his old age, he laughed with joy. When Sarah was told that she would birth a son in her old age, she laughed in doubt. When Sarah saw that the boy child was born, she laughed with joy. When Ishmael looked upon Isaac at his weaning, he laughed in mockery.

The promised seed of Abraham - that would come through Isaac - "would be" - and today is - the Joy of all the Saints. Isn't Jesus your true and real joy? If not, then please make it so today.

Please take note: This child's birth was foretold by God - years before it was to come to pass. The exact time of his birth was told before hand. His conception was of Divine intervention. Isaac was the child of promise. He was the Heaven-appointed heir of the covenant blessing.

In very like manner, Jesus' birth was foretold; - the exact time of birth given; - Jesus was conceived of Divine intervention.

It is important that we also note - Ishmael was approximately 14 years old when Isaac was born. He was 13 years old when the Angels warned Abraham about the cities of the plain and said that Sarah would give birth a year later.

Read Genesis 21:6-8 and make notes:

In those days it was customary to have an official day of weaning for the child. It usually occurred at the 2nd or 3rd birthday. It was also customary for the father to provide a feast and time of celebration.

Genesis - 20 - Isaac and Ishmael

Up until this time, the child was pretty much the mother's responsibility exclusively. From this time forward, the father became the primary care giver of the child. That concept would shake-up some American fathers.

This marked the fulfillment of the mother's duty to the newborn child. Sarah, who was a princess and also of old age, did not give over the nursing of the young child to a nurse. She provided the servant duties of nursing to this child of promise. The spiritual "daughters of Sarah" today - would do well to study this and to pattern their attitude after it.

Church, we should never see ourselves as of such station or position that we could not stoop to serve - and even suckle the babies in the Kingdom. The phrase "and the child grew," - should catch our attention. This phrase was used concerning the baby Jesus.

The child grew daily away from the place of needing milk - and steadily closer to a place where he could eat solid food. This would make Ishmael either 16 or 17 years old depending upon whether Isaac was weaned on the 2nd or 3rd birthday.

When we are first born into the Kingdom of God, - it is primarily our spiritual mother's responsibility; - that is the Church's responsibility; - to feed, nourish, clean, and protect us. But there must come a time when we are weaned from the nursing of the mother - and begin to develop and grow into an individual - with an individual relationship with the Father. There MUST COME a time for each of us when we look primarily to the Father - for our direction, instruction, and protection.

It doesn't mean we can't always hold a special place in our heart for our mother. Nor does it mean that we cannot continue to have a close relationship with our spiritual mother.

The catastrophic problem that has permeated the Church today - is that the Church is filled with un-weaned persons that are much too old to be nursing. Number one, they aren't getting the sustenance that they need; - and number two, they are hurting the mother.

Read Genesis 21:9-11 and make notes:

Sarah saw the mockery of Ishmael. Perhaps he was only mocking little Isaac as one who would like to continue nursing. Perhaps he mocked the whole feast of celebration. She asked Abraham to send this boy and his mother - the "slave woman" - away from them and her son. She didn't want him to even share in the inheritance with her son.

It was "a grievous thing" for Abraham to consider sending Ishmael away. Remember, Ishmael had been Abraham's son for 15 or 17 years now.

Genesis - 20 - Isaac and Ishmael

Read Genesis 21:12-13 and make notes:

God told Abraham not to allow this to be a grievous thing with him. God addressed Hagar as Abraham's "maid servant." It is important for us to learn from this - that even though we put together certain things and certain plans - God doesn't necessarily accept them.

Abraham and Sarah tried to elevate Hagar to a position of "wife" to Abraham. He even fathered a child by her - just as Sarah and Abraham both planned. God gave us a clue when He had the Angel in the wilderness to address Hagar as "Sarah's hand maid." God is making it clear now - by addressing Hagar as Abraham's "maid servant"; - that God never recognized this as a marriage between Abraham and Hagar.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus; just because we decide that something is so, doesn't mean that God sees it that way. We need to come to a place of seeing things the way God sees them instead of trying to manipulate God into seeing things the way we want them. There are many people on this earth that are living together today or have lived together in the past as husband and wife; that God has never seen as married!

If God were to come to some men today to talk with them regarding that person or persons that they lived with, - He might start out with something like, "that woman that you had sex with" or "that woman that you fathered a child by." God might start His conversation with some women - with something like, "that man that you had sex with" or "that man that you birthed a child by".

Just because our families and friends recognize us as married – does not mean that God does. Just because the state recognizes us as married – does not mean that God does.

Many people have had nothing more than an "adulterous" or "fornication" relationship with another person in the eyes of God. "Oh, but Brother Bob, we had children together and we lived together for so many years." Yes, but was it all of your own doing?

In verse 13, God continues to address Hagar as the "maid woman." God never recognized Hagar as Abraham's wife! God did bless Ishmael because he was the seed of Abraham. But God never saw Hagar as Abraham's wife.

Ishmael was a son after the flesh - and as such was entitled to the blessings promised according to Abraham's flesh. Isaac was the son after the promise and as such, he was entitled to the blessings promised according to Abraham's spirit.

Genesis - 20 - Isaac and Ishmael

Read Genesis 21:14 and make notes:

This is an important verse of scripture for us to study today. Abraham had now received a divine instruction to dismiss Hagar and her son. It was divinely ordained that Hagar and Ishmael be dismissed from this particular household of blessing. Abraham, the master, took the bread and the water and gave it to Hagar.

It does not say that Abraham had his servants give her provisions, - but He himself gave Hagar and Ishmael the provisions for their journey. Even though it becomes necessary to dismiss someone from our presence and from our life, - it doesn't mean we can't do so with some compassion and tenderness.

I can see how maybe Hagar and Ishmael might have been able to put forth some pretty good arguments. "Let us just move over there a ways, but stay close by; we will give up any claim to inheritance." "Please, just don't make us leave the territory."

I can see that it would have been easy for Abraham to entertain such suggestions. He had some "fatherly feelings" toward Ishmael and it would be good to Abraham to be able to go and check up on him from time to time, to see how he is doing.

I don't know if he did, but it wouldn't be out of the question for Abraham to have developed some "loving feelings" toward Hagar. After all, they had some intimate times together. These intimate times brought forth a child.

I can also see that Abraham might have had some problems with taking Sarah's suggestions. He took Sarah's suggestion in the first place to have a child by Hagar, and that didn't turn out too well between Abraham and Sarah.

God intervened, and told Abraham that sending Hagar and Ishmael away was the divine order for restoring order in the home. Considering Abraham's feelings - it just might be that if God had not intervened in this matter - that Abraham would not have sent Ishmael and Hagar away.

Ishmael represents the physical or fleshly descendants of Abraham. Ishmael and his descendants represent those that are in legal bondage. They represent those who persecute and mock the believers. Isaac represents the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Isaac and his descendants represent those who enjoy spiritual freedom. They represent those who are persecuted because they believe.

Genesis - 20 - Isaac and Ishmael

This separation was approved and encouraged by God because - it foreshadowed the separation of the unbeliever and the believer. It pictured the separating of those in legal bondage from those in spiritual freedom. It pictured the separating of the world from the Church.

This separation from the family of Abraham - was no doubt distressing to all the parties involved; - Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael. But it wasn't all bad for everyone. In so doing, Hagar received her freedom; - she would no longer be a bond servant. Ishmael was quickly upon the age when he would want to take a wife and begin his own family and life. Ishmael was leaving with the "mark of the covenant" upon him. He had the promise of God's provisional blessing upon him. He had God's Word that he would become a great nation because of his father Abraham.

Many people today are recipients of Gods provisional blessings - while at the very same time are strangers to His covenant relationship. If you are having trouble accepting this – the New Testament gives us some commentary on it.

Read Galatians 4:22-31 and make notes:

When people begin to make a mockery of our being sincere and serious with God, we need to separate ourselves from them in our daily lives. We can love someone, just as Abraham loved Ishmael, but separate ourselves from them in our daily lives in order to protect and maintain the sanctity of our household.

To love someone and to care what happens to them does not mean that we have to co-habitate with them. To dismiss someone from our daily lives and refuse to allow them place in our household, or local fellowship, doesn't mean that we don't care about them or love them.

God determined and ordained that His covenant people - should be a peculiar people - and a people separated from those of the world. God ordained that those who are outside the covenant should be separated from those who are of the covenant.

Ishmael had to be separated from Isaac. Ishmael could have the temporal blessings; - but it was necessary to separate him from those who were to receive the eternal blessings.

Even though many of us have intimately involved ourselves with the things of this world - and even brought about fruit by these involvements - it doesn't mean that we are supposed to maintain these intimate relationships.

Genesis - 20 - Isaac and Ishmael

People of God – Let Us Come out from among the world! – Let Us Separate ourselves from those of the world! People of God – Let Us dismiss those that are not of the covenant relationship - dismiss them from our daily lives. We can become weaned – stand as adults in our relationship with the Father – and will spend a lot less time fighting – if we do so.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 20 - Isaac and Ishmael

(this page for additional notes)

Genesis - 21 - Wandering

In the past several lessons, we have seen God's original intents for man – and his relationship with God. We have seen in this first book of the Bible – some serious and compelling questions asked of us – in our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Some of the lessons may have weighed heavily upon some.

In this lesson, we are going to find an encouraging Word. Is there anyone who would like to hear an encouraging word?

Most of us know what it is to desire freedom. Are we ready for freedom? Teens – debtors – prisoners?

The last lesson left off with God telling Abraham that it was right and good for Hagar and Ishmael to be dismissed from his household.

Read Genesis 21:13 and make notes:

God was making it easier for Abraham to dismiss Hagar and Ishmael from his household.

Read Genesis 21:14 and make notes:

This scripture is one of those that most Christians don't care to try to remember - but we all ought to have it firmly set in our memories. There will be those persons whom we will have to dismiss from our daily lives. We will have to be firm about it - but we can be gentle and compassionate in the matter.

The phrase "she wandered in the desert" is an important phrase for us to look at today. To "wander" is something totally different from "traveling." When someone "travels", they have a destination in mind and are going from point A to point B. When someone is "wandering" they have no particular destination in mind and in fact aren't going anywhere.

To say that they were "wandering" - says that they had no goal or vision. Sadly, this is the state that many Christians are in today. It is sad to think that spiritually lost people are wandering – but it is tragic for Christians to be wandering.

Genesis - 21 - Wandering

Those who are wandering – have no goal – they have no particular vision. They are aimlessly going from place to place – from situation to situation. They might stop here for awhile then move on to some other place and maybe stop there for awhile. When one is "wandering" they can and very often do travel the same paths over and over - but never really arrive anywhere in particular.

"Wandering" uses up our resources, strength, and our energy just like "traveling" does - but with one major difference. When we "travel", that is we are going from one place to another specific place, we end up at a known destination. When we "wander", that is going here and there and yet nowhere specific. We run out of fuel and energy and may very well find ourselves "no-here."

Read Genesis 21:15-16 and make notes:

Here they are - they have "wandered" no doubt for days - the water skin is empty and surely they had several days supply. Their resources are gone - no more water - their physical strength is gone - they just couldn't go on any further - and they are out there in the middle of "no-here" - alone. Hagar's confession says they held no hope; "I cannot watch the boy die."

Today, there are so many Christians where Hagar and Ishmael found themselves. We have wandered around until we have spent all of our energy and our resources and our strength. We had no goal, we had no vision, we have just been on the move - and now, we find ourselves in what looks like a hopeless situation, we seem to be all alone, and we just don't have the where-with-all to go any further.

Some might say, "but you said before that Ishmael and Hagar represent the world, surely they can't be a type of a Christian." Please bear with me for a few moments here. Christians do find themselves in the same kind of situation. There are a great number of them in this very situation today.

Read Genesis 21:17 and make notes:

She is not address her as anyone's handmaid. She is called by name.

Genesis - 21 - Wandering

Here they are - they have been traveling for days on end - they are sunburned on their faces and hands - their eyes are sore from the hot sun and scratched by the sand - their lips are parched - their physical strength gone - and so is their supply of food and water. Hagar has helped Ishmael up under the inadequate shade of a desert scrubby bush - she has staggered over to another place to take advantage of what little shade she can find - they both have resolved to just die here today - and along comes this Angel of the Lord and he says, "What's the matter Hagar?"

Have you ever been in – what appears to be a hopeless situation and have someone come in and ask what seems like a really "nerd" kind of question?

I remember some years ago, when with great precision, I placed the middle finger of my left hand perfectly between a 4 pound hammer and a brick. The end of my finger exploded like a balloon that had been squashed until it popped. My wife drove me to one of those Med-First places. I went in holding my bandaged finger somewhat above my head - there was blood all over my hand and arm - I'm rocking back and forth - I'm making all kinds of faces. I mean at this point you don't need a gift of discernment - Then the woman behind the counter asked in a real sweet southern accent, "Are you in pain?"

Now, if you have been in this kind of situation, you know what kind of responses come to your mind. God gave this woman an immediate gift of interpretations - The room had several people sitting there waiting for their turn with the doctor. When I turned and looked squarely in her face, I didn't have to say a word - she immediately got up as she was saying, "I'll get the doctor right now."

I can't help but believe Hagar heard what she thought had to be as dumb of a question as what I heard that day. This angel comes up and asks, "What's the matter Hagar?" I believe she must have thought, "What's wrong with you, are you totally blind, Dude?" "Read my parched lips, we're dying here!"

The Angel of the Lord probably saw Hagar's actions – to be as dumb as she thought the Angel's question was.

Let's review for just a moment: When Hagar had run away from Sarai and Abram, - and the Angel of the Lord met her in the wilderness in Genesis 16:11, the Lord showed enough interest in this child to name him. Then when God re-affirmed the child of promise was coming through Sarah, Abraham began to intercede for Ishmael to be blessed by God. In Genesis 17:18, Abraham asked God to allow Ishmael to live under the blessings. In Genesis 17:20, God said he surely would bless Ishmael and make him a great nation.

Then when Abraham was instructed to place the mark of the covenant upon all the males of his household, - Ishmael was not overlooked (Genesis 17:23). Ishmael had the mark of the covenant upon him. Then when it was time for Ishmael to be dismissed from the household of Abraham - God said it again, that Ishmael would be made into a great nation (Genesis 21:13).

Genesis - 21 - Wandering

For some reason, Hagar seemed to be ignoring what God's Word said concerning Ishmael. God's Word said he would become a great nation, - that specifically he would be the father of twelve tribes.

1 - We get into despair and hopelessness when we do not know what God's Word says, or when we forget what it says.

If God's Word is true - then this boy simply Isn't going to die here today.

Read Genesis 21:18 and make notes:

This is really something to hear. God did not say that he would become a great nation. God said, "I will make him into a great nation."

Read Genesis 21:19 and make notes:

When God consoled Hagar it revived her spirit. When her spirit was revived, her eyes were opened and she could see God's provision.

Many Christians today have their eyes closed. Some of them are closed by choice, just like Hagar did by turning away from her son so that she couldn't see him die. We say that we can't bear to look, so we close our eyes. We say that my eyes are so tired and they burn, so we close our eyes. We say that there is no hope and I simply will not watch as my child dies, so we close our eyes. Then sometimes the circumstances and the environment that we are in - closes our eyes for us. Either way, the eyes of many Christians today are closed and they do not, and they can not see God's provisions.

2 - When we can bring people consolation through God's Word, their spirits are revived – and when their spirits are revived, their eyes are opened.

Genesis - 21 - Wandering

We can find fault with Hagar in the way that she handled this situation. We basically don't like the idea that a mother would walk away from and abandon her child when the child needed her the most. Even though her actions are not all that acceptable to us, she did have a mother's heart for her child. She cried out in anguish and despair that her son was dying and it seemed so hopeless. Even though she was a heathen. Even though she represents the worldly persons - God heard that mother's prayer - and he answered her.

I am convinced God has a special ear that listens to the prayers of mothers for their families. This ought to be encouraging to you mothers, especially those of you who are saved - if God would hear and answer this pagan woman's prayer, surely He will hear and answer the prayers of those who are part of the covenant.

Let's look briefly at how things went with Ishmael -

Read Genesis 21:20-21 and make notes:

Remember, Ishmael represents the non-covenant people - and yet God "was with him" as he grew up. God's blessing and God's favor were upon Ishmael even though he was outside the covenant.

Remember Genesis 21:13 - "*I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring.*" This is just one of several scriptures that indicate people can receive God's blessings because of their father's relationship with God.

Then after Ishmael grew up:

Read Genesis 25:12-18 and make notes:

Ishmael's life went just like God's Word had said it would. God's Word is faithful, trustworthy, and ever so reliable. It is true that Hagar and Ishmael represent those of the world and not Christians. Ishmael represents the unbeliever - Ishmael represents those who mock the covenant relationship. This is why this passage of scripture is so encouraging. If God is so faithful to keep His Word concerning the heathen and the unbeliever - how much confidence we as believers can have that He will keep His Word concerning us.

Genesis - 21 - Wandering

3 - **God's faithfulness to keep His Word for the worldly folks is our assurance that He certainly will keep His Word concerning the spiritual children of the covenant.**

There is one other thing that I believe God wants us to grasp while we are here. I want to share with you the "Gospel according to the Re-Chargeable Battery." The ordinary battery is created with a set amount of voltage and current capability. Once this allotment of energy is used up, the battery is discarded, or thrown away for it has no further usefulness.

Some Christians act like they believe they are an ordinary battery and are afraid of being used - they fear that as soon as they are used up that they will be discarded. The beginning of the "good news" is we are not like "ordinary batteries" - but we are more akin to the "re-chargeable" batteries. The re-chargeable battery can be used up, run down, and then re-charged any number of times.

This is the concept God used on Hagar and Ishmael. He allowed them to be totally drained of their energy before restoring them. Their doubt and their meaningless wandering used up their energy quickly and uselessly.

We will find ourselves totally drained from time to time. God will allow us to be used sometimes until there simply isn't anything left to give. But He doesn't do this because He is ignoring us - it is simply that He wants us to be useful for the long duration.

It is our "wandering" without a goal or purpose in life - that waste our God given energy. It is never wasted when used to reach out to others - but even when we have been drained in useless wandering - God is able to re-charge us and restore us to a place of power and strength.

Not knowing or not remembering God's Word will bring us to despair -
bringing consolation from God's Word revives the spirit, which opens the eyes -
God has already proven His faithfulness to keep His Word concerning us -
Being allowed to totally drain isn't God's punishment but is God's perfection.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

Have you ever had someone "pull your leg?" We are going to look into the life of a man who is probably responsible for originating this phrase "pull your leg."

To Abraham and Sarah was born the son of promise, Isaac. Isaac married a woman named Rebekah and they had a set of very famous twins; Esau and Jacob. As most of you probably know, Esau was the first to be born.

Read Genesis 25:26 and make notes:

The name "Jacob" means 'supplanter' - to take the place of especially by force, scheming, or treachery- to remove or uproot in order to replace with something else

When we attempt to "trick" someone, we use the phrase of "pulling their leg", even to this day. Jacob came into this world, "pulling the leg" of his brother. And as we look at the scriptures, it seems that Jacob lived his life with one episode after another, of "pulling the leg" of someone.

Read Genesis 25:29-33 and make notes:

We don't see compassion, we see treachery and scheming! Isaac becomes old and blind and figures that his days aren't too long on this earth, so he decides that he had better "pass out the blessing."

Read Genesis 27:6-7 and make notes:

It becomes apparent – from whom - Jacob inherited this scheming spirit.

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

Read Genesis 27:15-17 and make notes:

Jacob goes into Isaac, all dressed up as if he were someone that he is not - and prepared to offer items of proof that he is someone that he is not. Now remember - Isaac's request - was for Esau to go out and hunt fresh game and to prepare Isaac's favorite meal. Hunting down game takes time and it - then takes time to prepare it.

Read Genesis 27:20 and make notes:

Please note that Jacob came into the tent where his father Isaac was - and Jacob was coming in "as a lie" - he was trying to appear like someone else, - and he was pretending to have prepared something like someone else. Jacob has SPOKEN a lie! Jacob said outright that "God had given him success in the hunt." To Isaac, this saint of God, - things just didn't seem right!

Read Genesis 27:21-22 and make notes:

Isaac, is experiencing what too often occurs in the Body of Christ today. This situation doesn't seem right - but this person assures him that it is, - saying that it is because of God's favor and blessing. Who would want to deny that God blesses and shows favor sometimes?

It doesn't stop there for Isaac, for it still doesn't "sound" right - but this person tries again to assure Isaac that it is right - see, "it does feel right doesn't it?" Poor old Isaac! This thing doesn't seem right- and it doesn't sound right. But he is told that "God is in it" - and that is why "it is happening so fast" - and he is allowed to "feel" that "right kind of feeling."

How many times - has this kind of experience occurred among God's people?

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

Read Genesis 27:24 and make notes:

Now Jacob has spoken a lie the second time to Isaac - Jacob actually said "I am Esau."

Read Genesis 27:26-27 and make notes:

After being assured that the reason things are happening so fast - is because God is in it - after hearing the person speak with their own mouth that "I am the one" - after having the chance to see that it does "feel" like it is supposed to - now Isaac is given the "proof" that it must be so because "it smells right."

This isn't a case where Isaac just happened to misunderstand something - and Jacob took advantage of that misunderstanding. This is a situation where great pains were taken to insure that Isaac would "hear what he needed to hear"; - "feel what he needed to feel"; - "smell what he needed to smell" - even the assurance that God's blessings were on this endeavor - with the express purpose of getting Isaac to believe something - that simply was not true.

Just like the name "Jacob" implies - "supplanter" - all this trickery, - this scheming, - this treachery, - was to substitute Jacob in the place of Esau for the purpose of getting his blessing. As you might guess, Esau did come back with the requested meal for his father - only to find out that Isaac had already given the blessing to someone he thought was Esau.

Read Genesis 27:36; Genesis 27:41-46; Genesis 28:1 and make notes:

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

As you can see again here, - Jacob's mother is still into this business of deception - it wasn't her concern that Jacob might take a Hittite woman to wife - it was her concern that Esau might carry through with his threat to kill Jacob. So Jacob left to go to the house of his mother's brother to find a wife.

Read Genesis 28:11-16 and make notes:

If there had been no reason to consider the stopping of all this deception before - there surely was one now. Why would anyone feel the need to go about in deception when they had received such a blessing from the Lord God Almighty?

Read Genesis 28:20-22 and make notes:

How nice of Jacob - to say, "well if God really will be with me and really will bless me, then I will give Him a tithe of all I get." Wasn't Jacob showing such faith in God and generosity?

Jacob finally arrives at his uncle's place and he finds the girl of his dreams and immediately falls in love with her.

Read Genesis 29:18 and make notes:

Laban readily agrees to this deal.

Read Genesis 29:20-25 and make notes:

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

I have heard from several men that when they woke up on the morning after the wedding - that the woman they found in their bed was not the woman that they had married! No doubt some of you women have had similar feelings.

Do you remember that Jacob's mother, Rebekah, - had a lot to do with Jacob's scheme? Well, this man, Laban, - who has now deceived Jacob, - is Rebekah's brother. Deception and scheming seem to run in the family!

Friends, this is a spiritual problem and it does in fact often run in a family. Jacob and Laban worked out another agreement that Jacob could also marry Rachel - if he would agree to wait at least a week before the wedding of Rachel - and then to work for another seven years. Jacob's family begins to grow and he begins to think that he should start doing something for his own family's future.

Read Genesis 30:30-31 and make notes:

Jacob asked that he be allowed to have all the spotted and speckled goats and sheep. Jacob even offered that at any time there should be found a goat or sheep among his flock that was not spotted or speckled, that it would be considered stolen. The account even states that Jacob kept the two flocks separated.

Read Genesis 30:37-43 and make notes:

Remember that Jacob had received a personal promise from God that he would be blessed and protected. Why is Jacob scheming against anyone?

Read Genesis 31:2 and make notes:

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

Do you suppose that this was a gift of discernment? (ha ha) You have been busy scheming and looking for ways to trick this person over a several year period - and you seem to be prospering and they seem to be diminishing - and you "notice that their attitude toward you is not what it used to be." Jacob hears from God that it is time for him to return to his father's land - Jacob tells his wives and their servants to prepare to travel. Jacob shares with them a dream he has had.

Read Genesis 31:10-12 and make notes:

Jacob has heard from God that God has seen the treacherous dealings that have come toward Jacob. That should have been enough to comfort Jacob - Jacob should have been free from any worry about "what if that person tries to trick me or take advantage of me?"

Read Genesis 31:20-26 and make notes:

It sure does make you mad, when you have been busy deceiving someone and then they turn around and deceive you, doesn't it ?

Read Genesis 31:31; Genesis 31:43 and make notes:

Even now, Laban is trying to deceive Jacob into believing that their deals had not occurred, and that Jacob owned nothing. But they did settle and parted company with a friendly oath and even heaped up a great pile of rocks. Jacob continued on toward the land of his father. Jacob received word that his brother Esau was coming in that direction with a great company of people.

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

Read Genesis 32:7 and make notes:

Jacob is still ignoring the personal promise he received from God - he is taking defensive measures as seem good to him - he puts the women and children out front - and after he has done everything he can think of doing - he apparently still is in fear.

Read Genesis 32:9-12 and make notes:

Finally, he begins to remember that God had promised to bless and protect him. Just like you and me - we go along doing things our way, and in the wisdom of the world - and when it seems that our way is not working out - "GOD SAVE ME!" - "God, remember what you said about you protecting me and blessing, - "be sure and remember God!"

Read Genesis 32:23-26 and make notes:

Here we go again! Jacob has been told personally by God that He is going to bless Jacob. And Jacob is still "pulling someone's leg" to attempt to get a blessing.

Read Genesis 32:27-29 and make notes:

So once again, scheming, and trying to "best" someone else, even literally "pulling their leg", - Jacob is trying to make his blessing come to him. If you read on in the following accounts of Jacob's life, you will see that this attitude and spirit of scheming, lying, treachery, and trickery was passed on to his children.

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

Two of his sons, Simeon and Levi, tricked a whole city of men into a situation where they were slaughtered and their woman and children taken as slaves - then the Caananites were against him.

Then there was the time that all of his sons except Benjamin lied to Jacob and tricked him into thinking that Joseph had been killed and eaten by a wild beast. When in fact they had sold him to some slave traders.

Jacob sowed deception and treachery - Jacob reaped deception and treachery. Before Jacob was born, God spoke to his mother, Rebekah, and told her that the younger son would rule over the older son.

Please take note that the promise of God's blessing this man was on him - before he was born. There was absolutely no need for Jacob to try to scheme and trick others in order to get ahead. Jacob did not need to try to take advantage of Esau to get Esau to give up his birthright. Jacob did not need to try to trick his father in order to get "the blessing." The Promise of God was already given that Jacob would be blessed in these things.

Then if that were not enough, while Jacob was on his way to find his wife - God appeared to him in a dream and stated that he would be blessed and prosperous. Jacob never needed to try to trick and to scheme in order to get ahead in the world. Jacob never needed to fear that others might try to trick him and to take advantage of him. He had the promise of God that he would be blessed.

I submit to you that Jacob received the blessings that he did - not because of, or as a result of, his schemes and tricks - but IN SPITE OF!

Dear friends in Christ, - have you seen any promises in God's Word concerning your well being and protection? Have you seen anything concerning God meeting your everyday needs and the needs of your future?

Then why are so many of God's children today busy scheming and attempting to trick one another in order to "get ahead?" Why are there so many in the Church that are busy trying to deceive the others in order to get what they think they want or should have?

I know that some say, "well, it's just the world that we live in." It was true that Laban dealt treacherously and dishonestly with Jacob. It is true that there are many in this world that will deal dishonestly and treacherously with you today. But I must ask you, "if God be for you, who can be against you?"

Dear friends, If God has already promised to meet your needs and to protect you from the enemy - if God has already stated that those who try to curse you will be cursed - if God has already promised to be with you always and to never leave you - Whom will you fear? - Whom need you fear?

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

Why do you need even start to worry about someone trying to take advantage of you? It is enough to have it recorded in God's Word - THAT IS ENOUGH!

But I can tell you from personal experience that God cannot be out done. I have found myself in situations where someone didn't actually mean to hurt me, but never the less their actions did put me in a bad situation financially - I can testify honestly that God provided my deliverance and my restoration and even restored more than I lost. It's true! I can do nothing less than to give God praise and glory for it.

I have found myself in situations where it was the express intent of the individual or group of persons to cause me harm - I can testify that when I did nothing to get even, to retaliate, or to try to scare them - My God turned the curse and attack away from me and put my enemies in a place much worse than they had tried to put me in.

Dearly loved Children of God - we do not need to walk in any fear of those who would try to trick us, - scheme against us, - or to cheat us. We DO NOT need to "do unto others before they do unto us." We need only to walk in the way of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wisdom of this world tells us something different.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:18 and make notes:

We need to renounce the ways of the wisdom of this world and take on the ways of the wisdom of God's Word .

Read 2 Corinthians 4:2 and make notes:

Read 1 Peter 2:1; 1 Peter 2:21-22 and make notes:

Genesis - 22 - Jacob

Please note from the example of Jacob - that if we are among God's Children, then we will be blessed. If we sow deceit, treachery, and scheming - then that is what God will allow us to reap along with our blessings - the continuous aggravation of being tricked and taken advantage of.

But if we will be sure to sow honesty and faithfulness - then God will make sure that others must deal with us in such ways - even if that is not their intent. On the one hand, what a horrible way to live your life; not knowing who you can trust, or when – but on the other hand, what a peaceful way to live, not worrying about who might be telling you a lie, knowing that "if they do lie or cheat you", that God will make any necessary restitution. That is where God wants each of us to live - a peaceful life without any deception

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 23 - Garnish or Grain

Jules Verne, the famous author of *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, also wrote another book entitled *The Mysterious Island*. The story is about five men who manage to escape from a Civil War prison camp by high-jacking a hot-air balloon. Once airborne, they quickly realize the wind is carrying them out over the ocean. In no time at all, they notice land is disappearing from sight. They also notice the balloon is starting to lose altitude.

Since there is nothing to provide heat to give them altitude, they begin to throw things over the side of the basket. Shoes, coats, weapons are tossed overboard - and the balloon begins to rise again. However, this doesn't last long. The balloon again begins to sink toward the waters and they toss their food over the side. It is better to be hungry than to be dropped into ocean!

But this doesn't last for long either and the balloon again starts sinking toward the ocean. With a quick untying of the ropes the floor of the balloon drops away and they are given another lift. Shortly after this, land is spotted and as the balloon starts its final descent, they fall into the water and swim to an island. These men would ultimately survive - because they learned what they could live without. (Adapted from *Get In The Ark*, Steve Farrar, pp. 187-188)

This is the challenge of our times – isn't it? Having an understanding of the things that we can live with - and what we cannot live without. And this has been the same challenge of mankind through several thousand years.

In the book of Genesis, there is an account of a great famine that hit the land of Caanan. The brothers of Joseph were sent to Egypt to trade silver for grain. They were unaware their younger brother Joseph - whom they had sold into slavery many years before - was now a high official in Egypt. Joseph was in fact the person in charge of distributing the grain.

Joseph realized his brothers didn't recognize him, and he had the silver they used to pay for the grain – secretly placed back into their bags before they left. Let's pick up the account where the first grain is about to run out and the famine has continued.

Read Genesis 43:11-12 and make notes:

The text we read in Genesis spells pretty much the same scenario out for us - as described in the story of the men who escaped in the hot air balloon - and the situation many of us today find ourselves in during our life's journey. We have to determine if we are going to live or die - because of what we do - with the superficial things of this world - or the substantial things of eternity.

Genesis - 23 - Garnish or Grain

This text places us right in the midst of difficult days. Jacob and his sons are enduring some tough times. The country was locked down in a famine. Some believe it would be an accurate translation to say - "famine was 'heavy' in the land."

Jacob came to a point where the supply of grain obtained from Egypt in the first trip was gone. Now they had to go and seek more grain. The harvest of grain had failed in Canaan and nothing was left but the things mentioned in Genesis 43:11, "balm, myrrh, honey, and some nuts."

It was obvious that they could not live on these things. Something far greater in nutritional content was necessary. Inadequate food means inadequate health. An absence of nutrients will not only lead to sickness and infirmities - and in time - it will most certainly lead to death.

Nutrients are just as important for the mind as they are for the body. Starve the body - and death by starvation will follow. Starve the mind - and the mind will wither in death also. A starved body is terrible to look upon - and an emaciated mind is just as terrible to look upon also.

But What about our own souls? Can the soul of a man be starved to death - because of too much spiritual "balm", "honey", and "myrrh?" And not enough substance of real nutrition?

The soul has to be fed just as the body has to be fed. There is a death that can come to us - from a spiritual famine. And most who die from spiritual famine - it is not because the correct spiritual food is not available to us - It is because they have chosen to consume the food of lesser value.

We cannot live our life on desserts and sweets. This principle is true of the spiritual life as much as it is the physical life!

This famine in Canaan was terrible. They didn't have any grain. However, Scripture defines for us what they did have - Balm – Honey – Spices - Myrrh – Almonds.

While some have taught that the famine was probably the result of a rain shortage - this text doesn't support that conclusion. A shortage of rain would most likely have affected the other crops as well as the grain. While it doesn't really matter "what caused" the famine - it would seem a better suggestion to think that some type of disease or blight that affects grain was the likely cause of the famine.

While the "cause" isn't that important for this message - it is important for us to take note of the fact - that while there was a famine of grains – necessary to sustain life in that region - there was still other products that were available.

This famine did not mean an absence of all foods - it meant an absence of the foods crucial to sustain life.

There are times in our walk with God - that this same kind of thing happens with us. We can have many things at our hand and heart - that seem enjoyable to eat - but they will never take us to the levels that God wants us to go.

Genesis - 23 - Garnish or Grain

A fast song - can only take us so far. A superficial fellowship with the church - can only go so far. Involvement in a small group - will only go so far.

Having my "felt" needs met - can only do so much. Business techniques to run a church - will only go so far. Purpose-driven goofiness - will starve a person's spirit to death.

I would ask you to consider the symbolism - of these things Jacob was willing to trade for grain. God is pointing something significant out to those who have ears to hear.

Balm - It was a resin-like substance that served as an ancient sedative.
It brought some relief to pain.

PRINCIPLE: In a famine, we are going to need more than just a sedative to help us sleep through it. In fact, if we sleep through a famine - we will die.

Honey - This is most likely not the honey that came from bees - but rather a collection of a syrupy substance that comes from boiling down grapes, raisins, carob beans, and dates. It was very sweet and served much as our own syrup would be used for pancakes.

PRINCIPLE: In a famine, if a relationship with God is merely based on the sentimental, emotional, "warm-fuzzy" feel, - it will not take long for our faith to wither!

If all we have is sweet, syrupy feelings toward God - then it won't take long for us to get disappointed with God, the Church, - or one of the saints. A sweet, sentimental God - is idolatry because God has been reduced to man's terms!

Spices - This most likely was a powdered gum that was used for incense. It was used as a perfume sometimes placed on the body and sometimes used in a home. The purpose of it's use - was to change the perception of something. We want our body to be perceived as being clean and fresh – even if it isn't We want our home to be perceived as clean and fresh – even if it isn't.

PRINCIPLE: In a famine, there is a much greater need for the Church to work at changing the world than to just change the way we are perceived by the world. To serve the spices means that we will have little regard for the burden-bearing of intercession and evangelism that would be too much work. Brother and sisters - we can smell great - but die from starvation.

Genesis - 23 - Garnish or Grain

Myrrh - Was associated with its perfume-like qualities and it was an important part of the incense. Its greatest use was for its medicinal properties. There apparently was an aspect of a basic anesthetic that was used to stop the pain of flesh wounds.

PRINCIPLE: In a famine, there are things of far greater importance than simply easing the pain of a wound! When a person is in pain – I am in favor of easing the pain. However, if all we do is numb the pain so a person doesn't suffer - they will still die! In a famine – physical or spiritual - we simply must do something more than ease the pain.

Almonds - They were a delicacy and could be served either salted or crushed and sometimes mixed with sugar.

PRINCIPLE: There are some things that are extremely enjoyable but what good are they if they cannot help a starving man.

All of the things that Jacob sent to Egypt were simply seasonings and spices - things that could garnish the meal - but not things that could sustain the life of a person. Jacob was in effect telling his sons to empty their sacks of the superficial - and bring home the substantial. We must have grain! This church has to have grain! Everything we have must be traded for grain! We cannot live on the superficial spices of life. We must have the grain of life.

Read John 12:24 and make notes:

We must make the great exchange - exchanging the superficial for the substantial! And when we do – we can impact the world for Christ! We must be a people who are not only willing but a people who does in fact trade the garnish for grain.

A large number of Churches today have been scammed by the devil - because of our own pursuits of the superficial. The church in America is starving to death - eating to the full on nothing but the garnish and seasonings of the superficial. Too many churches have traded in singing songs like "I Surrender All" and "Jesus Use Me" - for songs that say "God is so good." We are asking God to Bless Us instead of asking what we can do for him.

Genesis - 23 - Garnish or Grain

It is all too common that Churches are hearing sermons that work to bring our self-esteem to a higher level - so we can feel better about our sense of "self-worth." The greatest self-worth that any of us will ever feel - is when we invest our lives into spreading the Gospel.

Look at the book of Acts church - and how they sacrificed: They sold their possessions to further the Kingdom. They stopped their life plans and became missionaries. They sacrificed their time to teach new converts. They sacrificed their schedules to give time to prayer. They became tent-makers to help the church press further. They sacrificed their lives in the very face of physical persecution. They sacrificed their prejudices to reach the Gentiles. They sacrificed their associations from the past so that they could have a spiritual bearing on the future.

The kind of revival the Early Church experienced - will not come to pass - until we empty our sacks of the superficial - and fill them with the substantial. Revival will not come - until we can empty the sacks of the spices - and fill them with the grain!

Change like this does not come from without - it can only come from within. It comes from a Changed Heart!

If we will let our life fall to the ground and be sacrificed, - we can expect much to come of it. We cannot afford to live our lives for the superficial - We must live our lives for that which is substantial! We cannot live for time - but rather we must live for eternity!

We must be a praying church. The programs can slide, - the activities can cease, and all the trappings that come with church life can stop - but we cannot afford to quit praying. Prayer is a lifeline of power for the church. Prayer is not easy - in fact prayer is a great life-long struggle.

It does appear that the more we attempt to experience the good life that is available to us as an American - the more things compete for our prayer times. The Greek word for "agony" is "AGONIA." It indicates a struggle or a conflict. The underlying thought comes from the Olympic Games. There are two opponents in a contest and struggle for the crown. Someone will be injured and someone will be the victor.

We must be faithful to prayer:

Pray in Agony. - Pray in Pain. - Pray in Weariness. - Pray in Labors. -
Pray in Stripes above Measure. - Pray in Prisons. - Pray in Dying. -
Pray in the Beatings. - Pray in the Rods and Stonings. - Pray in the Shipwrecks -
Pray in the Uncertainties of the Deep. - Pray in all of the Perils of Life. -
Pray in Watching and Waiting. - Pray in Hunger and Thirst (for Righteousness). -
Pray in Fasting. - Pray in the Cold. - Pray in the Weakness. -
Pray in the Offenses of Life. - Pray in the Infirmities.

Yet, in spite of this challenge of prayer, there is great vitality in prayer. There is great victory in prayer!

Genesis - 23 - Garnish or Grain

I read an incredible story. A man went to a large city in Columbia many years ago. He did not speak Spanish. He rented an apartment and fasted and prayed for souls for 18 years. He was an intercessor – he was not a preacher. He died on the mission field. He never had a convert. He only prayed and fasted for 18 years. Then Missionaries Bill and Molly Thompson – along with Lewis and Sally Morley - felt to go to that city to start a work.

They rented a storefront and prepared to fight hell - as they did everywhere else they had gone. Instead, great revival broke out. They later found out about the man that had recently died there after 18 years of intercession. He had lived on the same block. He was a great success because he labored in prayer. And because of his prayers – they experienced success.

Many Christians have heard enough preached about how the Word of God must have a place in our lives. The Word of God has to be preached in - and then prayed out. So, I won't spend time on Holiness of lifestyle in this lesson - Because that has been covered in numerous sermons. Suffice it to say, we must have holiness and separation from this world.

Read 1 John 2:15-17 and make notes:

Are we going to trade the superficial for the substantial? Are we as individuals – going to live on "grain?" Is this a church that is going to live on "grain?" Or do we plan to try to survive on the garnish - or that which is superficial ?

Please – if you haven't already - make today – the day you trade in the quest for that which is superficial - and make every effort to strive for that which is substantial. If you don't know Jesus as your personal Savior - that is where it must begin. He accepts all who come to Him and rejects none.

If you are a prodigal son or daughter - coming home to Christ Jesus is a joyous thing. He welcomes all – and chastises none who return to Him.

If you are one of those who has tried to remain faithful to Jesus - but realize you have been working only for the garnishments - rather than for the grain- why not make today – The Day!

Genesis - 23 - Garnish or Grain

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Genesis - 23 - Garnish or Grain

(this page for additional notes)