

***Beginnings and Belongings***  
***Faith and Frailty***

Lesson #8 for November 25, 2006

Scripture: Genesis 16:1-19:38.

1. This lesson covers the story of Hagar and Ishmael, Abraham's attempt to help God, God's repeated promises to give Abraham descendants, the promises of God followed by the laughter of Abraham and then Sarah, and Sarah's lie, Abraham's hospitality, followed immediately by God's meal with Abraham, Abraham's discussion with God and then the story of the final events of Sodom and Gomorrah.
2. What do you think Sarah had in mind when she suggested that Abraham should take Hagar as a secondary wife? Did she think Ishmael would be her adopted son?
3. Had God made it very clear to Abraham who the mother of this promised child was supposed to be? (Genesis 12:1-3,7; 13:15-16; 15:4-6,13-21; 17:1-8).
4. Abraham was 85 years old and Sarah was 75 when they decided to ask Hagar to become the mother of "their heir". **Polygamy was commonly practiced in the surrounding territories. In fact some have suggested that based solely on Scripture, polygamy cannot be ruled out. Why has it become so forbidden and such an issue in our day? What has led to the kinds of laws which we have regarding polygamy? What is the real evil of polygamy?**
5. **Did Abraham really believe that he was helping God?**
6. Have you ever tried to help God? Why did God wait so long to send Isaac? Was he afraid that Abraham and Sarah would not be good parents? Was he testing their faith?
7. **What should we do in our day when common sense and rationality seem to point in one direction and God's guidance seems to point in another direction?**
8. Read Genesis 17. Do you think this appearance that God made to Abraham was in a vision? Or did he appear in human form? How would you feel if God made all of those promises to you that he made to Abraham?
9. Why did God ask Abraham and his family to seal their part of the covenant by the act of circumcision? Read Genesis 17:9-14. Does God leave any room for personal decisions about circumcision? Is God exercising force? Notice that everyone in Abraham's camp was included. Does this mean that they eventually became part of the Israelite nation?
10. What would you do if God appeared to you and gave you a new name? Would you tell your friends? What if your wife's name was changed at the same time?
11. Read Genesis 17:17 and compare Genesis 18:9-15. Would you dare to laugh at God in his face? Why did both Abraham and Sarah laugh at God? Was this an involuntary laugh based on the apparent impossibility of the situation? Why does the Bible with its very limited space include the stories of these two giants of faith laughing at God? Sarah went on to lie about her laughter! Does the Scripture go out of its way to record the mistakes and sins of its heroes?
12. **Does circumcision have any meaning in a spiritual sense in our day? Did**

**circumcision have something to do with the circumstances in which Abraham lived? Why did circumcision become such a big deal?**

13. Read Genesis 17:15-19. Finally God mentioned Sarah by name. Does it require the exercise of greater faith to believe what God says when the circumstances seem impossible? Should we be ready at any time to say, "God has said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me?" (Genesis 15:2; 16:4; 17:15-19; Romans 4:16-25). What do these verses tell us about how faith works?
14. What do you think would have happened if Abraham had not shown hospitality to the three strangers on the road? Would the story have ended differently in any way?
15. Review the story of the three visitors who came to Abraham's home. (Genesis 18:1-8) With Abraham's thousands of attendants, why do you think that he and Sarah personally prepared food and served it to these three visitors? Did Abraham spend a lot of time waiting by the road looking for any visitors who might come along? Was this his version of watching the evening news? Notice that Abraham violated the laws of kosher!
16. Read Genesis 18:20,21. Compare Genesis 3:9. Taken literally these two verses seem to give a real-time commentary on God's reporting system. Is God really that ignorant of the events that take place on this planet? Is his reporting system not very reliable? What about all the texts we studied last quarter about the precise and detailed records that God keeps? If his records are complete and accurate, why does he use this kind of language?
17. Read Genesis 18:16-33. Who was Abraham talking to in this discussion? If you have a traditional English translation you will notice that this person is called LORD. This is an English code word for the Hebrew name YHWH. Is this God, the Father, or God, the Son? If Abraham is talking to God, either Father or Son, would this qualify as prayer? Have you ever said to God in prayer

Surely you won't kill the innocent with the guilty. That's impossible! You can't do that. If you did, the innocent would be punished along with the guilty. That is impossible. The judge of all the earth has to act justly. (Genesis 18:25)

Should Abraham have been struck down for his impudence? **Is that the way the faithful speak to God?**

18. Why does the Bible picture Abraham as bargaining with God? Do you ever do that? It would appear that Abraham was quite successful in his bargaining! What do you think God would have said if Abraham had gotten down to three?

Love for perishing souls inspired Abraham's prayer...His deep interest for Sodom shows the anxiety that we should feel for the impenitent...the spirit of Abraham was the spirit of Christ." {PP 140.1-2}

19. Read Genesis 19:1-11. What was the purpose of telling the story of Sodom's last night? What do these verses tell us about conditions in Sodom? How did things become so bad there? Remember that these are the people who were rescued by Abraham just a few years earlier! Based on what you know about Sodom and Gomorrah, what do you think was the reason for their destruction?
20. 2 Peter 2:7,8 describes Lot as a righteous man. Why would such a person choose to raise

his family in the city of Sodom? (See #23)

21. **There are some verses in Scripture that are absolutely stunning to us given our cultural milieu. Read Genesis 19:8. What would lead Lot to offer to give his virgin daughters to a large group of violent and homosexual men?**

22. Lot apparently had other children, who were already married, living in Sodom. Try to imagine yourself going to the home of your child to convince them to grab their things and get out of Sodom. What would you say to them?

23. What do we know about Lot's wife? What was her spiritual background? Did Abraham help Lot find a wife?

The wife of Lot was a selfish, irreligious woman, and her influence was exerted to separate her husband from Abraham. But for her, Lot would not have remained in Sodom, deprived of the counsel of the wise, God-fearing patriarch. The influence of his wife and the associations of that wicked city would have led him to apostatize from God had it not been for the faithful instruction he had early received from Abraham. The marriage of Lot and his choice of Sodom for a home were the first links in a chain of events fraught with evil to the world for many generations. {PP 174.2}

24. Try to imagine yourself fleeing from Sodom. Would you be inclined, like Lot's wife, to look back, at least for a glance?

25. Would the world have been a better place without Lot and his daughters? God, knowing full well the future history of these nations, decided to preserve Lot and his daughters anyway. Was that a good decision? (2 Peter 2:7,8)

26. **If you had been Lot escaping from the city of Sodom, where would you have gone?** What happened to Lot's enormous flocks and herds? Where were his herdsmen? What do you think would have happened if Lot and his daughters had gone straight to Abraham's place?

27. If you had the choice right now of leaving all your earthly possessions and living in poverty for the rest of your life but with a guarantee of eternal salvation, would you accept it?

28. Read Genesis 19:12-29. What do we know about Zoar? If you knew that the cities behind you were experiencing the outpouring of God's wrath in fire and brimstone, would you want to stay as close as possible? Or would you want to flee as fast and as far as possible?

Lot dwelt but a short time in Zoar. Iniquity prevailed there as in Sodom, and he feared to remain, lest the city should be destroyed. Not long after, Zoar was consumed, as God had purposed. {PP 167.3}

29. We know very little about the rest of the life of Lot or his daughters except for their incestuous relationship that resulted in the Moabites and Ammonites who ended up being long term enemies of the Israelites. Did they ever make an attempt to speak to Abraham about what had happened? Did Abraham try to find them? Why or why not?

30. **Who was it that poured out fire and brimstone on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah?** Would it matter to you if it was God, the Father, or God, the Son? Who was

the God of the Old Testament? (1 Corinthians 10:4; Luke 24:44) Did the disciples or any of the followers of Jesus in his day have any inkling that they were walking with the one who had poured out fire and brimstone on Sodom?

31. Stop and think about the overall goal of the plan of salvation. Isn't the purpose to separate God's people from their sin, so that sin can be eliminated once and for all from the universe? Do we make it easy for God to separate us from our sin? What was the final outcome of the Hagar-Ishmael episode? Where are the descendants of Hagar-Ishmael now? To what do you attribute the apparent differences in character between Ishmael and Isaac? Did Abraham reject Ishmael? Why do you think Ishmael ended up living in the desert, apart from almost all other humanity? Did Abraham's treatment of Hagar lead to this development in the character of Ishmael? What does the Koran say about the story of Ishmael?
32. For more than 17 years Hagar and Ishmael lived in the home of Abraham and Sarah. What kind of relationship did they have? Did Hagar have any more children?
33. Would it have been better if the story of Hagar and Ishmael had been left out of the Bible? Why was it included?

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