

***For Better or For Worse - Lessons From Old Testament Couples***  
***Abraham and Sarah - Faith Tested and Tried***

Lesson #2 for July 14, 2007

Scriptures: Genesis 12:2; 16:1-5;22; 17:16-19; 18:9-15; Hebrews 11:8-19; James 2:20-26.

1. Why did God choose Abraham? Why is Abraham the prime example of faith in the Bible? "Abraham's unquestioning obedience is one of the most striking evidences of faith to be found in all the Bible." {PP126.2} What specifically would you point to in Abraham's life to show his great faith? Or is it that he was the father of the faithful?
2. Considering the fact that he grew up in a pagan culture and pagan family, why do you think Abraham became faithful to God and stayed faithful to God? *Patriarchs and Prophets* suggests that his relatives and friends could not understand his behavior! (PP126.1)
3. "Now that Abraham was, in a special sense, connected with heaven, he must dwell among strangers. His character must be peculiar, differing from all the world." {PP 126.1} Why was it so hard to live a righteous life among a family that was apostatizing?
4. Going back to the early parts of the story, what do we know about Ur and Haran?
5. Why do you think God called Abraham to leave Ur, and then later called him to leave Haran? Why did God lead him to Canaan to live among idolaters and fertility-cult worshipers? Would you send your children there? Would you be willing to leave everything including family behind?
6. Since we are studying Old Testament couples, what do we know about the faith of Sarah? Did her faith help Abraham with his faith? Or did Sarah just follow along?
7. There were only a few things which Sarah apparently initiated: 1) She suggested that Abraham should take Hagar as a secondary wife. 2) Later, after discussing the issues with Abraham and God, she sent Hagar and Ishmael away. 3) Hiding behind the tent flaps but listening to the conversation, Sarah laughed when God suggested that she would have a baby in her old age. (Genesis 18:9-15) Then, to the Lord's face, she denied laughing! Does that sound like the story of a great faith-partner?
8. We are familiar with Abraham's statement in Genesis 15:2,3 suggesting that if something happened to him, Eleazar would inherit his property! We are also familiar with the Hagar/Ishmael story. Ancient tablets from the city of Nuzi suggest that those were the common customs in Abraham's day. So, according to local custom, Abraham was reasonable to consider those solutions. What evidence was there at that point in time for Abraham's faith? The statement of promises given by God in Genesis 15:4-6 was before Abraham was circumcised and before he had his promised child. What was the basis for that covenant statement?
9. **If something seems completely impossible, does it demonstrate more faith to believe in it?**
10. Some time later God came back to Abraham and promised once again that he would have a child. (Genesis 17:15-19) Abraham bowed down and began to laugh! Can one really trust God and laugh at Him at the same time?
11. Abraham and Sarah waited 25 more years after the first promise before the child was born.

After 25 years of waiting, do you think Abraham and Sarah had more faith or less faith? On what basis? **Is faith the greatest when it goes against the evidence?**

12. While Abraham and Sarah were waiting for the promised fulfillment, Abraham ran into other difficulties. Sarah was apparently very beautiful, and twice he lied to kings about his true relationship to his wife! How do you think Abraham justified that in his own mind? Since Sarah really was his half-sister, the daughter of his father but not of his mother (Genesis 20:12), was it really a lie? Did Sarah demonstrate her faithfulness by lying on Abraham's behalf? What do you think was so attractive about a woman 60-to-80-years-old?
13. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you felt it was necessary to lie? Did it work? Did lying get you out of trouble or did it cause more trouble?
14. Abraham is a huge figure in biblical history. About 20% of the book of Genesis is devoted to his life. A large portion of the chapter on faith in Hebrews 11 is devoted to his story.
15. **Abraham had eight separate conversations with God that are recorded in the Bible.** Do you think there were many others that were not recorded? Were those conversations the real basis for Abraham's faith? The ***Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*** suggests that Abraham's relationship with God reached the place that when God spoke, Abraham obeyed. (p. 21) That is regarded as the ultimate example of faith by the authors of the ***Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide***. Do you agree with that premise? Do you agree that Abraham always obeyed God's instructions?
16. Read Genesis 17:15-19 and 18:9-15. On two different occasions, God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son. The first time, Abraham laughed. The second time, Sarah laughed and then she lied about her laughing. After those experiences would you have named your child "Laughter" (Isaac)?
17. Why do you think Abraham and Sarah laughed? Was it because they felt so comfortable around God? Was it because they felt the promises were so preposterous? Was their laughter an example of their faith? Or was their laughter evidence that they still had some work to do? In a day hundreds of years before any scientific study of human reproduction, if you were a woman and your periods had been stopped for years, would you think it was possible to have a child? Why do you think God waited so long?
18. Finally, God told Abraham that he should be circumcised with all the males in his household. Was that the first example of circumcision in the world? If not, what did Abraham know about circumcision? What was the purpose of circumcision? Was circumcision just an arbitrary command by God to test His children? Or was there a very practical reason for it?
19. The ***Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*** suggests that when Abraham and Sarah left Egypt, Pharaoh gave them a number of menservants and maidservants. Was Hagar one of those?
20. Try to imagine yourself in the position of Hagar and Ishmael. Is it surprising that Hagar began feeling superior to Sarah? Can you start to understand how Hagar and Ishmael felt when Sarah became pregnant and then when the child was born and weaned. Is it any surprise that the 17-year-old, Ishmael, might make fun of the three-year-old, Isaac?
21. What do we learn about the story of Sarah and Hagar as Paul applied it in Galatians 4:21-31?
22. Read Genesis 22:1-19. What do we learn about the relationship between Abraham and Sarah from this story? The relationship between Abraham and God? The relationship between

Abraham and Isaac? Mothers, how would you feel if you woke up one morning to discover that your husband and your son were missing and then they were gone for days and you had no idea where they were? What would you say to your husband when he came back and said that God had instructed him to sacrifice your “miracle child” on a distant mountain?

23. How would you summarize this story? Is this a case of “do what God tells you whether or not it makes any sense”? Try to imagine what Abraham was thinking during those three days and nights during the journey to Moriah. The Canaanites practiced child sacrifice on a fairly regular basis. The gods of the Ammonites and the Moabites required child sacrifices.
24. Do you think it was this experience that resulted in Abraham being called the great example of faith? If so, why?
25. In modern times there have been examples of fathers and mothers who have, for example, beaten their children to death with a baseball bat or drowned them in a bathtub, and later claimed that God had instructed them to do that. What do you think about such claims? Why do you think the story of Abraham and Isaac is different? Or is it?
26. Isaac asked, “Here is the fire, here is the wood, but where is the lamb?” Do you think Abraham had a prepared answer to that question? Shouldn’t his servants have asked that question? Shouldn’t Isaac have asked this question even before they left home? Or were they afraid to ask the old man?
27. Abraham is praised in Scripture as a father who commanded his household after him. (Genesis 18:19) Is this a great example of that? Who else was involved in this great story of faith with Abraham, Isaac, and God? What did the onlooking universe think about God’s interaction with Abraham on this occasion? Read *Patriarchs and Prophets* pp. 153 to 155.
28. Ellen White in *Patriarchs and Prophets* says:

The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds. The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan--the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out--is the lesson book of the universe. **Because Abraham had [155] shown a lack of faith in God's promises, Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings.** God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation. {PP 154.3}

Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unflinching obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false. {PP155.1}

29. Is it by chance that the three great monotheistic religions in the world today all consider

themselves to be “children of Abraham” and that they all revere that site?

30. God needed to demonstrate to the entire universe that at least a few of “these humans” seemed to be getting the message! God was able to “stand tall” because of the behavior of His friend, Abraham. Satan was defeated. We need many more witnesses of that kind!

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