***Abraham's History  
RO40-01***

**© Berean Memorial Church of Irving, Texas, Inc. (1977)**

We are studying Romans 4:16-18. Our subject is again "Faith in Spite of Facts." This is the second segment.

**The Book of Romans**

The apostle Paul, you may remember, began his letter to the Christians in Rome with some introductory remarks in Romans 1:1-17. Following those introductory remarks, in Romans 1:18 through Romans 3:20, Paul dealt with the topic of condemnation, and he showed us that all mankind is condemned by sin in the eyes of God. So, everyone is destined for hell. That is our natural condition (our natural status). Beginning at Romans 3:21, Paul launches into the main subject of his letter, which is the topic of salvation. This section extends from Romans 3:21 through Romans 8:39. Under this section, he first explained to us the doctrine of justification in Romans 3:21 through Romans 5:21. This is God's provision to preserve sinners from hell, and to take them into heaven.

This is where we are currently studying. This is the section that we're in. This section began with an explanation of how God can justify a sinner. We have that in Romans 3:21-31 (that whole chapter). Now we are in Romans 4, and Romans 4:1-25 constitute an illustration of justification from Old Testament history. That's where we are at this point in the study of the book of Romans.

Paul is going to complete this section on justification in the next chapter, Romans 5, where he is going to give us the results of justification. That's what's coming next. But before he takes up the grand results of a human soul being justified in the sight of a holy God, he wants to finish chapter 4 by taking one more shot at the fact that sinners are saved by faith alone. He wants to hammer home once more this basic crucial principle that a person is saved by grace, and by grace alone, and by no other way.

Religious people, such as the Jews that he has been referred to here in the book of Romans, tend to think that salvation is partly the grace of God, and partly the works of man. This principle, we are shown you, is not only false, but it is very dangerous, because it actually will prevent a person who practices that idea (part of grace, and part of human works) from being saved at all. That is because the only kind of salvation that God offers is by grace. If you contaminate it with works, then you have undermined the basis upon which God will save you, and you will not be saved.

**Abraham**

Abraham, from the Old Testament era, is used as the classic example by Paul of salvation, by faith, even though he performed certain religious rituals such as circumcision, which he was required to do. And he performed many good works. But neither of these were included, Paul shows, in the actual process of salvation. It was only Abraham's faith that counted with God.

**Salvation is by Grace through Faith Alone**

So, Paul sums up salvation by faith alone in this principle that we saw in verse 16. In the first part of this verse, it is presented in elliptical fashion, with words left out, and just the critical words put in, so that the actual Greek sentence says, "Therefore, of faith, that by grace." And that sums it all up. Paul brings it all together with that one statement. That sums up everything that he's been trying to say. He says, "It's by faith so that it can be by grace." Since God saves only on the basis of a grace gift, salvation has to be received by faith. If it's a grace gift, it's something you have to take. You just have to accept it. And you cannot work for it. And that's the point: "Therefore, of faith, that by grace." If you do not approach God on the basis of faith, then God cannot save you by grace. If you approach Him by works, you cannot be saved by grace. And if you cannot be saved by grace, you will not be saved at all. God will not compromise His essence. God will not compromise his plan of salvation just because it seems more reasonable to contaminated human viewpoint.

**The Abrahamic Covenant**

So, the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant was certain of fulfillment to Abraham, Paul points out, and to the Jewish nation, because it was a promise that was based upon a grace gift relationship. It was simply something that God said, "I'm going to do for you." And because it was a promise, Abraham and all that followed him we're certain of everything that was included in this covenant, which started with salvation, and then had specific earthly applications relative to the Jewish people themselves. That included, therefore, the promise of personal salvation (personal regeneration). The grace / faith system makes it all depend on God's character and on His doing. That's why it's certain. That's why it's permanent. As long as it's grace / faith, then it's all dependent on what God is, and it all depends on what He does. It does not depend on the kind of people we are, or ever will be, or anything that we do. That's the point.

**Eternal Security**

The eternal security in salvation is true, therefore, for everyone because of this basis. Whether you're Jew or gentile, everyone is saved by faith, because it depends on the character of God, and God's doing relative to provision for paying for our sins, which He did on the cross through His Son. Our salvation is secure; it is certain; and, it is eternal.

**Father Abraham**

Abraham, because he was such a man of faith, and was saved by faith, is described as the father of all of us who are saved in the same way he was.

We begin this morning at Romans 4:17. Here Paul proceeds to conclude his Old Testament illustration of justification by showing once more just how much a man of faith Abraham really was. Let's begin in Romans 4:17, which says, "As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations." The very first part of Romans 17 is a set of parentheses. That line is just a parenthetical interjection. It is introduced by the word "as," which is the Greek word "kathos," which means "just as." And it is there to introduce a parenthetical expression for the purpose of explaining the last phrase of verse 16, which says, "Who is the father of us all." What does that mean?

Well, he throws in this little set of parentheses to explain how Abraham is the father of us all. In other words, we have to read it like this. Verse 16 says, "Who is the father of us all," and we connect that with verse 17: "before Him, whom he believed." In other words, you just jerk that parentheses out there to follow the thought. Abraham, who is the father of us all, before Him, whom he believed, even God." And then he goes on with his discussion.

It is important that we understand how Abraham is the Father of us all. He is not the Father of us all relative to Jewish promises. He is only the Father of us all in a spiritual sense. He is not the Father of us all in terms of the facets of the promise which dealt with a specific Jewish nation.

This is where the amillennialists make the mistake of saying, "Well, there is no difference between Israel and the church. The church is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham." Nothing could be farther from the truth, because the Old Testament makes it very clear that these promises were to Abraham and to his natural posterity only. It was to the people who had the genetic structure of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob within their bodies. It was not to anybody else. So, we have indeed been blessed by Abraham, which is what the promise included. Then Galatians explains to us that that blessing is in terms of our salvation. As Abraham was blessed by salvation that God just gave him on the basis of faith, so we follow his pattern of being saved by a salvation that God just gives us, and we accept by faith. So, he is our father. He is the progenitor. He is the file captain. He is the leader of the file, so to speak. And we have followed in that same pattern.

However, that does not mean that we have inherited any of the earthly promises which were to the Jews as a nation, and which will yet be fulfilled to them. So, when we say that he is our father, it is in terms of this spiritual aspect. And verse 16 end up with: "He is the father of us all." Verse 17 throws in a parenthetical remark to explain that. And that's introduced by this word "kathos" ("just as").

He says, "As it is written concerning Abraham." The word "it is written" is the Greek word "grapho." This refers, of course, to the Old Testament Scriptures. This word is referring specifically to Genesis 17:5. Let me just read that to you. When he says, "It is written, "Paul specifically has this verse in mind: "Neither shall your name anymore be called 'Abram,' but your name shall be 'Abraham,' for I have mad you the father of many nations." That's the verse that Paul has in mind when he makes the statement. This word "it is written" is in the perfect sense. The perfect in the Greek refers to something that took place in the past, and then the results continue on to the presence and, in effect, forever. So, we have the revelation of God in the past that was put down in written form. And it was written in the past, and then God preserved the manuscripts, and that which He wrote, we have to this very day as such.

It is passive because the Bible did not write itself. It was written by men who were under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, as 1 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21 tell us. It's in the indicative mood which indicates that we have a statement of fact here. The whole expression here "it is written," which is repeatedly used in Scripture, always connotes an authoritative, infallible source of information – the authority of the inerrant Word of God. It is written in those Old Testament Scriptures. What is written?

Well, he quotes from that Old Testament passage: "I have made you." "Have made" is the Greek word "tithemi." Here it connotes "to establish:" "I have established you. It indicates a specific divine destiny for Abraham. Again, we have perfect sense, which means that, in the past, the Abrahamic Covenant made a promise to Abraham and his seed, and this is still true today. This is very important. God says, "I have established this relationship (this promised covenant) between Me and you" It was established in the past, and it continues to the present. This is active voice, to indicate that it is God Himself who has appointed Abraham to this destiny. Again, it is indicative mood – a statement of fact.

**Abraham was the Progenitor**

It is "you," which is the Greek word "su," referring to Abraham. It is to Abraham specifically that this destiny has been promised, and that is that: "He would be the father of many nations." The word father is our Greek word "pater," which means "the male parent." Abraham, is the progenitor of nations. And he is that in the physical sense, but he is also a progenitor of nations in a spiritual sense, because everybody within a nation who is a believer constitutes a spiritual segment of the nation. Abraham is the Father of that segment.

The word "many" is "palus," and this word stressed is the amount – that there are going to be a vast number of believing people, as it is written (recorded) authoritatively in Scripture: "I have established you, Abraham, alone as the progenitor of a fantastic number of nations. The word "nations" is "ethnos." "Ethnos" refers to national entities. It looks upon these in terms of both their physical aspect and upon their spiritual expression. Abraham was the physical progenitor of several national entities, as you know. He was obviously the physical progenitor of the nation of Israel, but he is also the progenitor of the Arab nations. That's why the Arabs also look to Abraham. Through Abraham's son Ishmael there were Arabs. Through Esau, there were Arabs. Through Abraham's five sons that he had by Keturah, there are Arab nations.

So, Abraham is the father physically of certain nations. But Abraham is also the spiritual progenitor of many gentile nations in terms of the believers of that nation. The believers constitute a nation within a nation, and God looks upon the believers as the real nation (the real national entity), because they are functioning on divine viewpoint by the sheer fact that they have begun with base one as believers. This is why the book of Romans will tell us a little later that they are not all Israel who are of Israel. God says, "I look upon the nation of Israel, but the real nation, as far as I'm concerned, are those who are born again. So, while some of them are genetically Jews, as far as I'm concerned," God says, "only they are of the nation of Israel who are born-again. The rest of them don't count.

So, God has a way of looking upon a nation, and He looks upon the United States, and He sees the United States in its totality of its citizenship. Then He looks upon the United States in terms of the way He views a nation from divine viewpoint, and only the believers constitute American citizens. So, today, from God's viewpoint, the only true American citizen is the one who is born-again. The person who is an American, but not born-again, is merely a legal citizen. He is not a citizen in the eyes of God. God has therefore dealt with those who are non-citizens in a nation in a totally different way than those who are true citizens of a nation.

So, Abraham here is the father indeed of certain nations physically. He is also the Father of all those within a nation who are born-again. So, a nation can be viewed, in other words, racially or spiritually.

This closes this particular set of parentheses which was introduced here to explain to us how Abraham is the Father of us all, whether we are Jews or gentiles. He is the father of us all in a spiritual sense. Then the verse takes up where it left off in verse 16. Verse 16 says, "Who is the father of us all."

After the set of parentheses, verse 17 says, "Before him whom he believed, even God." "Before" is the Greek adverb "katenanti." This means "in the sight of." Abraham's status as spiritual father of all believers was that as per God's viewpoint. This is how God looked upon him. God's omniscient eye saw Abraham as the progenitor of many nations of spiritual children: "Before Him (that is, God), whom he believed." The word "believed" is "pisteuo," which means "to trust." This faith has reference to Abraham's attitude after salvation, however. At this point, it does not have reference to his believing in God. He did that in Ur of the Chaldees when God first revealed Himself to Abraham, and Abraham was born again back there in Ur. But we're going to see that after Abraham was saved, he had the same trouble that you and I do. He had the same problem of facing up just to how real all this business of the Christian life was. He had to face up to just how real was this doctrine, because that's what he was getting from God. God was giving him information about Himself; about His ways; about God's plans; and, so on. That's doctrine. And Abraham was faced, as he went through life, with what he should do about this doctrine. How was he going to function under it? Does it really work? Is it everything that it's cracked up to be?

**The Essence of God**

So, Abraham, we're told, after he was saved, believed God. This is in the aorist sense. It's the point of positive volition to this promise that was given to him repeatedly about his posterity. It's active. Abraham himself did the believing. It's indicative. It's a statement of fact. And what he believed in was God ("theos"). But here's an interesting thing about this word "theos." It is our normal Greek word for God, but it does not say in the Greek "*the* God." It just says, "He trusted in God." And that indicates to us a stress on the essence of God. What Abraham was looking to was not a single person of the Trinity as such. He was looking to the fact of just who God was. As we have so often said to you, if you would only recite those ten basic attributes that constitute the essence of God: when you face a problem; when you face a crisis; or, when you face a decision, you would discover that when you remember just who God is, you would have a great deal of guidance for yourself from that alone. You would have a great deal of comfort, and you have a great deal of assurance.

Abraham sat down, and he would recite to himself the attributes that constituted the character of God. Because he did that, he was able to keep going. He was able to keep moving, as we shall see, under a situation that became increasingly discouraging for him ever to have fulfilled the promise that God made back in Ur, and which Abraham accepted with such high hopes and expectations.

So, there's no definite article because we're stressing that Abraham's confidence is in who God is – His character. Well, once more, we would translate in this way, taking the last part of verse 16: "Who is the father of us all," and then adding verse 17: "in the sight of God whom he believed. He is the father of us all in the sight of God whom he believed. Abraham couldn't see himself as the father of us all, but he believed God, and he could see himself, therefore, in that respect.

**Bible Doctrine**

At this point, I want to back up and review with you the history of Abraham in reference to this promise in order to give you the same frame of reference that the Jews had, and their understanding of Abraham in his experience, so that you will really see what Paul is referring to here in these verse that he's going to close this chapter with. You will really see what a magnificent man that Abraham was. Yet, what Abraham was, in terms of faith, should be nothing to what you and I are, because he didn't have anything like the revelation that we have. He had nothing like the doctrine that you and I have.

Doctrine functioning in our souls automatically produces a fine person. As long as we are open and receptive and positive to doctrine, it produces fine things in us while we're taking it in. But Abraham had a limited amount. As you shall see, Abraham had his ups and downs, but he did a fantastic thing with the limited doctrine he had. Now, if he did as well as we're going to see he did, just think of where you and I could go today.

**Abraham's History**

Let's go back to the very beginning. Abraham lived in the Mesopotamian Valley, surrounded by a magnificent culture. His name was Abram at the time, a bit. He's living in Ur of the Chaldees, and he has this name "Abraham," which means "exalted father." God reveals Himself to him. God promises to do something great for him, and through him for the whole world. Abraham didn't fully understand what you and I understand. You and I understand how the kingdom of man, from the Tower of Babel, had again engulfed the earth after the flood, and that man was again making all the same mistakes. And God was saying to Abraham, "I'm going to take you, and I'm going to establish God's authority on the earth through you. The Kingdom of God is going to be imposed through you. Its ultimate expression will be the Messiah Savior that I'll send."

In time. Abraham understood more and more of this. Jesus Himself said to us, "Abraham saw My, day and he rejoiced." Gradually, Abraham got more information, and he understood what God was saying to him back in Ur. But he went as far as he understood. God, in a glorious way, revealed Himself, and Abraham responded.

**Stephen**

We have this described for us in Acts 7:2-3 in the discourse of Stephen just before he was murdered by the Jews for his faith in Christ. Here's where it all began. He said, "Men, brethren and fathers, hearken. The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran. And He said unto him, 'Get out of your country, and from your kindred, and come into the land which I will show you.'"

**Genesis 12**

We go back over to Genesis 12, and we see what Stephen is referring to in those first 3 verses: "Now the Lord said unto Abram, 'Get out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, and to a land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I bless you and make your name great. You shall be a blessing. And I'll bless them that bless you, and I'll curse them that curse you. And through you, all the families of the earth be blesses;" that is, with salvation.

**Ur of the Chaldees**

So, here you have Abraham hearing this from God. The God of glory suddenly reveals Himself to Abraham. Back in Ur, God says these words to Abraham. And Abraham responds with magnificent, positive evolution, and he's born again. He believes the promise. He was born again, and he proceeded to act upon it. He left Ur of the Chaldees for the Promised Land of Canaan.

He lived in the Mesopotamian Valley between these two rivers: the Tigris; and, the Euphrates. And Ur was down on the south side of the River Euphrates. The Mediterranean Sea is to the west. The pathway to the land of Canaan, which was the Promised Land, was by a route that's called the Fertile Crescent. You have to come up the river route where the water holes are to be found, and then down along the coastline. You couldn't survive going through the Arabian Desert.

So, this was the route that Abraham had to follow. So, he crossed the river, and started up this Fertile Crescent route to the land of Canaan. That is why he was called "a Hebrew." "Hebrew" means "cross over the river." So, he was called a Hebrew because he crossed over the river. However, remember that when he did that, he was a gentile.

When he received this revelation of glory, living in Ur of the Chaldees, his response was to cross the river and head up for the Canaan land. At about the place where he began swinging westward, toward the Canaan land, was the city of Hebron. We find that Abram left Ur. He was accompanied, however, by certain of his relatives. For some reason, he did not leave them all behind.

Now, Abraham was born-again. How much divine viewpoint does he have? How much spiritual maturity does he have in his soul? Not much. Not any more than anybody else. So, Abram, beginning with that small amount of spiritual maturity, proceeds, first of all, to act upon what he has been given by God. He says, "I believe you." He demonstrates that belief by crossing over the river. So, he's called the Hebrew, and he starts moving up toward the land of Canaan. His not sufficient, apparently, for him to just cut himself off from his relatives and leave all of them behind.

**Terah**

So, we read in Genesis 11:31-32: "And Terah took Abram, his son (that is, Terah was the father of Abram, and would naturally be in charge of the expedition, even though Abraham says, "I'm going." We have no indication that Terah went because he was a born-again person. But for some reason, Abram had the influence. He said, "I'm going to this land." And they said, "All right, we'll go with you."

**Lot**

"Terah took Abraham, his son, and Lot, the son of Haran." Haran was another son of Terah – a brother of Abram, but he had died, and Lot was the orphan boy: "His son's son, and Sarai, his daughter-in-law (his son Abram's wife).

**Haran**

"And they went forward with them from Ur of the Chaldeans, to go into the land of Canaan. And they came to Haran, and dwelt there." So, they came up to this point, and there they stayed.

We're told the same thing back in Acts 7:4: "Then came he out of the Land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land in which he now dwelt." So, they stayed here at this point of Haran until the father Terah was dead, which is what we read then in Genesis 11:32: "And the days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah it died in Haran.

So, how long did they stay in Haran? That's the point; that's the question; and, that's the fact that we don't know. We don't know how many years they spent in Hebron. We don't know whether Abraham was a young man when he left Ur; or whether he was a middle-aged man when he left Ur; or, where he was. We do know, however, that the party followed the Fertile Crescent route as far as far as Haran, and there they stopped for an unknown number of years.

The Bible makes a special note of the fact that while Abraham was sexually active (and so was Sarai), they had no children. This is just sort of almost interjected, but it is not almost interjected because God the Holy Spirit has a very important point to be making again and again. Genesis 11:30: "But Sarai was barren. She had no child." This is in the line of describing who the family members were, and how they related, and verse 30 just says, "Sarai was barren." She had no child." That does not mean that she was incapable of conceiving. It does not mean that Abraham was incapable of sexual reproduction. It simply means that she simply did not conceive. This was, as I said, a period of learning Bible doctrine for Abram, and of developing a spiritual maturity structure in his soul. He had to do the same thing that you and I do in our spiritual lives.

After the death of his father Terah, Abraham moved out of Haran, and now we have a fix on his age. At this point, he was 75 years old. His wife Sarai, was 65 years old. She was not an elderly-looking woman, obviously, as we shall see later, because when Abram (because of the weakness and the developing quality of his faith) decided that he had to beat it down to Egypt to survive a famine, the first thing that happened to this 65-year-old woman is that she gets taken into the Pharaoh's harem. And you don't have too many 65-year-old women being captured and carried away into somebody's harem. So, obviously, Abraham and Sarai, though they were to us what is quite an advanced age (75 and 65), were still in the prime of life. And again, the point to make is that they were both sexually potent, alive, and functional.

When he left Haran, he left only with his immediate family. The rest of the relatives did not go beyond that point with him. So, he takes his wife. Sarai. He does take Lot, the orphan boy, with him, probably with the idea that he may be the one who will have to be his heir. The rest of the family is left back in Haran. That's why later, when Isaac is born, and they need a wife for him, he has to send Eliezer the servant trooping back up to Haran to get somebody from one of their family members for Isaac to marry. But the rest of them stayed up there in Haran.

**Canaan**

Now, Genesis 12:4-5 describe this for us: "So, Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him (that is, from Haran), and Lot went with him. And Abram was 75 years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abraham took Sarai his wife, and Lt, his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."

At this point, Abraham had gathered some material wealth, and he had gathered quite an entourage of servants who became part of the family group, as well as himself; his wife; and, the nephew lost. So, all of them, with all their possessions and everything that they owned, moved out of Haran.

In Acts 7:4, in Steven's account, we read again: "Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans. He dwelt in Haran. From there, when his father was dead, he removed into the land in which he now dwelt." And, of course, the people to whom he was speaking then dwelt in the land of Palestine.

After arriving in Canaan, God told Abram that this was the land that he and his descendants would possess forever. He has made the move from Haran, and he has come into Canaan. Naturally, he's looking around. He's very curious to observe this country. And it is wild; wide; and, mostly empty. Genesis 12:7 says, "And the Lord appeared unto Abram." This is at the point of his completing the Fertile Crescent journey and his arrival in Canaan: "And said, 'Unto your seed I will give this land.' And there he built an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him."

So, Abraham is growing in his spiritual maturity structure. He is now broken off from his family. He has gotten all the way into the land that God has told him to go to. And he has responded to this latest declaration of God that he's going to give him this vast territory of land, this huge bit of real estate. He has responded by worshiping God. He builds an altar.

This divine promise again, I must remind you, was made to Abram when he had no child to be his heir. Again, Stephen calls our attention to that point in his account in Acts 7:5: "And he gave him no inheritance in it; no, not so much as to set foot on. Yet, He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seat after him, when as yet he had no child." The truth of the matter is that Abram never held title deed to a square foot of the land of Canaan all the days of his life. He himself never actually came into ownership possession. The only piece he ever owned was a burial place that he bought after Sarah died. But he himself was always a stranger; always a pilgrim; always a traveler; and, always, the Bible says, "Living in tents," which again indicates that this man was beginning to develop faith in God.

If he was so rich, why not build a structure such as many of the heathen lords and kings lived in? Why was he continually moving around, living in tents as a nomad? Because, the New Testament tells us, he looked to God who had said, "I'm going to build you a city like you wouldn't believe, Abraham." This man's faith was so great. He says, "I'm just going to wait for God to build the city and the home in the house that He has for me, and the tent is OK." And he was a very, very rich man. But he was already beginning to show his spiritual development because he was now able to begin handling his prosperity. He was passing the prosperity test, as well as in previous years, he had perhaps been faced with the poverty test.

So, he responded by worshiping God: expressing what? "I believe you. God, I don't have a child. I'm 75. My wife is 65. But I know you, and I believe you. He was clearly a man of great faith in God. He had to be to move from the security of Ur to nowhere and nothing. It was necessary for Abraham to grow for the same reason that you and I have to grow spiritually, because God wanted to bless him. The thing that Abraham lacked was capacity to enjoy the blessings. While he had the promise, he did not have the spiritual capacity to enjoy the blessings. This is what most Christians never understand – that until they have a spiritual maturity structure in their soul, which in effect then puts within your soul this kind of a container, you cannot receive the blessings of God. Until you have a container, which is the spiritual maturity structure, there's no place for God to pour His blessings so that super grace is overflowing on all sides of you. Now you are at the time of your spiritual life, and you can enjoy everything under the sun.

Many people are given what we call blessings and good things in life by Satan. Many unbelievers have these things but they don't enjoy them. They can't enter into a joyful relationship with these things. So, they have everything, but they can't enjoy it. And that's what Abraham's situation was. God says, "Abraham, I'm going to bless you like you wouldn't believe, and like I've never blessed a human being. But if I give it to you now, you won't enjoy it. You don't have the capacity. You're born-again, but you don't have the capacity." I'm glad he didn't know at the time he left Haran that it was going to be 25 years before he even saw the baby son. I'm not sure whether he was capable at that point spiritually to move this direction, or say, "Hey, forget it. I'm going back down to Ur where all the action is, with the comfort of the life that we knew there, and so on. He did not have the capacity. And that's what God was trying to build into this man – to get him to the place where He could pour the blessings on him.

So, Abram and God looked forward to the blessings of the promise, but Abram had to be developed spiritually, so that he was more than just an unbeliever. He lacked the capacity.

We have this indicated to us, for example, by what he did in Genesis 12:10-20. We have the story about the fact that when he got to Canaan, he suddenly found himself in a famine situation. If he would have been a spiritually mature man, he would have said, "Well, God, you like me all the way here from Ur, and I followed Your directions. I know you're going to take care of me. I know who you are. I know you can feed me." God said, "I'm going to bless you." Where? In the Promised Land? And this has always been the Jews' problem. Anytime the Jew goes scooting over here to Babylon, or down to Egypt, or someplace else like Jacob later did, what happens to them? That's it. All blessings stop for the family group, and misery breaks out upon them.

**Egypt**

So, Abraham, because he was not mature, goes scooting down here to Egypt. When the famine breaks, he heads for Egypt. And, of course, there is where he got into all the trouble with Sarah. He said, "She's my sister.” She was his half-sister – that was true. And he presented her as his sister. And the Egyptian ruler promptly takes her into the harem, and then God comes into the picture and lets you know what's happening. And the pharaoh is horrified, and he really reams Abraham out. You know, that's a humiliating thing when an unbeliever sounds to you about your not acting right – to a believer. That is really rough when an unbeliever (a Pharaoh) is giving Abraham a big lecture on doing right. He really reamed him out. You can go and read the verses yourself. The result was that he says, "Get out of here." And the Pharaoh, because he was so pleased with Sarah and had taken her into the harem, he bestowed huge amounts of gifts of material things on her brother Abraham to keep his favor.

Well, when he left, he took all that with him. He didn't give it back to Pharaoh. When he got back up to Canaan, he was really a wealthy man, which is why some of the problem rose immediately then with Lot, and the contending between them, so that they had to separate. But the whole situation here of going down to Egypt showed that this man did not have the capacity yet for God to say, "I'm going to give you blessings." And I mean material blessings. He had some, but not the kind of blessings that God was going to give him later. He became a fantastic potentate in that eastern country in terms of wealth – pure royalty.

God says, like he says to us, "I can't prosper you. You can't handle it. I can't give you this kind of blessing or that kind of blessing, because you can't handle it. If I give you too much money, you'll quit could come in the church. I'll give you a lot of money, and you'll get so busy with using your money that you won't be able to study the Word of God. You won't have time to listen to tapes. You won't have time to meditate upon the Word of God. So, I have to keep you restricted. I can't turn you loose. But once you've developed the spiritual maturity so that you can enjoy my blessings, then I'll be ready to give them to you.

So, Abraham goes back up to where he should have been – back up here in Canaan. And in Genesis 13:14-17, we have the story about Abram's conflict with his nephew Lot, and their mutual workers (their staff), and Abram's gracious settlement of the conflict by letting Lot take whatever he wanted. And Lot took choicest area of the plain. And Abram separated and went a different direction. You had this in Genesis 13:14-17.

Now, Abram, at this point, is still childless. But he's trusting though the years are rolling by. His progress in building the spiritual maturity structure is going forward, though, since the Egyptian incident, because here in this passage, relative to the Lot incident, we have something that shows us his attitude toward the increasing material possessions which he's coming into. In Genesis 14:21-23, we find that his nephew Lot, because he decided to live among the heathen and unbelievers, got himself caught up in a fracas that ended up in his being captured and taken away by a group of kings who were attacking another group of kings. When the word was brought to Abram, he gathered up his force; mounted a military command from his own household; and, went out and rescued Lot as well as the king of Saddam.

The result of that kind of operation automatically gave him the right to the booty (to the spoils of war) which they captured in the process. Abram could have really advanced his wealth again at this point. But notice, the spiritual maturity that is developing in this man who was just chased off to Egypt because he was worried about a little famine, and that he wouldn't have enough to survive it.

Genesis 14:21: "And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, 'Give me the persons and take the goods to yourself.' And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I lifted up my hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet and that I will not take anything that is yours, that you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' Save only that which the young man have eaten, and the portion of the men which were with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.'"

What I am saying is that: "I have recaptured what they have taken from you, the King of Sodom, but God is my provider, and you keep your stuff. I don't need it." And there was a lot of it. He says, "Whatever the young men have eaten, we'll take that. And whatever was necessary in the process of the campaign – we'll write that off, but the rest: you take it. I don't want it." Now that was a fantastic demonstration that this man was growing. Furthermore, it is at this point, in the process of this campaign here in Genesis 14:18-20, that he ran into one of the old pre-Mosaic priests that God had – this man named Melchizedek, of which Jesus Christ is the successor in the Melchizedek priesthood, which is superior to the Aaronic priesthood.

Genesis 14:18: "And Melchizedek, the king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine. And he was the priest of the Most High God. And he blessed him (that is, Abram), and said, 'Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be the Most High God who has delivered you enemies into your hands.' And he (Abram) gave Melchizedek tithes of all."

This indicated now, again, a forward motion on the part of Abram spiritually, because he recognized God's priest, and he had positive volition toward him, which was expressed by his offering to the sustenance of the ministry of this priest. But the problem was that the cloud was still there. His capacity to enjoy the blessings of the promise were increasing.

However, still, there was no child, and the years were passing. He was now well past 75. He was now moving toward where another desperation was beginning to enter the picture – that he would become incapable of procreating. We're going to stop in the story at this point and we're going to pick it up there to complete this picture of what Abraham, the man of faith, really faced, and how he survived, and why he survived. He is a great visual aid. He is a great example. He is a great test case from which we can learn.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

[**Back to the Romans index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/romans.htm)

[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)