***God's Promise to Abraham
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Once more we're going to continue with the subject of "Faith in Spite of Facts.” This is the fourth segment in Romans 4:16-18.

We have found that the apostle Paul in this chapter has been using the patriarch Abraham as the classic Old Testament example of salvation by faith, and to show what a great man of faith Abraham was. Paul closes the whole fourth chapter of Romans with a review of the problem that strained Abraham's faith to the utmost – the problem, namely, that he had no heirs to fulfill the magnificent promises which God had made to him. Without a son, the promise that God made to Abraham back in Ur of the Chaldees could never be fulfilled. There could be no nations of descendants.

At first, this didn't seem to be such a very great problem. It seemed to be simply a matter of time before God would enable Sarai to conceive, who up to now, through all the years of their marriage, had not conceived, so that they had no children. It just seemed that it was going to be a matter of time now before God would bring this about, and the necessary heir would be born. Both Abram and Sarai, at the point that the promise was given to them, we're capable of procreating. But as the years went by, Abraham's anxiety began to show over the lack of a natural heir, and what that meant to the potential failure of the fulfillment of the promise.

You remember that on one occasion he slipped into a human view point solution of securing a son by Hager, Sarai's Egyptian handmaid (servant girl), and the result was the birth of Ishmael. This, however, was not God's solution. It was merely a human solution, and it only made things worse. Abraham's problem of no heir continued to where it even got worse, because it continued to the point where he and Sarai became so old that they were not capable of burying children at all.

Abraham's faith at this point was now facing its maximum test. Humanly speaking, no natural heir was now possible, and Abraham knew it. But Abraham's sexual deadness, on the other hand, did enable him to trust God more fully than he had ever before. It had been easier to trust Him that the promise was going to be fulfilled before. He could see how it could be done. Now there was no way that this could be done, humanly speaking. To trust God at this point was a totally different kind of faith than he had been called upon to exercise originally. This was a faith with considerably more depth.

In order to understand this passage in Romans (this section that we're in), we've been going back to the Old Testament to try to review for you just the history of Abraham, and how all these things came about, in step-by-step with him, to the point where now he has reached this absolutely hopeless condition. He's 99 years old. His wife is 89 years old. Both of them are physically incapable of procreating. It has been 24 years since he left Haran. It has been 13 years since the birth of Ishmael, and nothing has come to pass that gave any indication that the promise was on its way to being realized.

Then at that point we took up the record in Genesis 17. The pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ comes on the scene and appears to Abraham. We have already looked at Genesis 17:1-5. In these verses, we have indicated to us that Abraham has pretty well decided that Ishmael is going to be the heir of the covenant promises. But at this point, the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ appears to him, and identifies himself by the Hebrew title "El Shadday," which really is best translated as "all-sufficient God" – not "Almighty God," but "the all-sufficient God." The word God, which is "El" in the Hebrew, is in itself a connotation of omnipotence – the "almighty" part. The point was that the name "Shadday" comes from the basic word for "female breast," and therefore conveyed the idea of nourishment and sustenance. So, it was the all-sufficient God. This was a very fitting presentation and a very fitting name for God to use in coming to Abraham who, if he needed anything, certainly needed a provision, and a nourishment, and a sufficiency, and a sustenance that he had from no other source in order to realize God's blessings upon him.

At this point, Abraham was again admonished to live in an upright manner before God. That meant: "Abraham, develop a spiritual maturity structure in your soul, mainly so that you'll have the capacity to be able to enjoy My blessing." Remember that one of the reasons all this has been delayed is because Abraham, like all the rest of us when we begin the Christian life, don't have the capacity to enjoy the blessings of God. That takes years of the development through doctrine in our souls until we get to the point where we have the maturity to be able to appreciate and to enter into the blessings that God has for us.

He is told, therefore, to keep working on the spiritual maturity structure, and he is told also to stay in temporal fellowship. That's the only way to make forward progress. However, his walk before God is not a condition of the fulfillment of the covenant. This covenant, I remind you, is unconditional. God says, "I'm going to do it no matter what you do, Abraham. And no matter what your posterity does, this is going to be fulfilled."

So, the Lord Jesus Christ again repeats that point – that He will fulfill the covenant that he made with Abraham, and that Abraham's posterity will be greatly multiplied.

Abram responds by falling down and worshiping the Lord Jesus Christ, who has giving them the strong reassurance that the promise would be fulfilled, and that there would be nations, both physically and spiritually, descended from Abram. And to commemorate this confirmation of the nations of descendants, Abram's name at this point is changed from Abram, which means "exalted father." Abram, at this point, is father really of none except Ishmael, and for many years had not been father of any at all. His name is now changed from Abram to Abraham, which means the father of a multitude. This was a little bit of a problem for Abraham because he wasn't a father very many at all, and it was a little embarrassing because names in this time were very significant. Names were descriptive of characteristics of the people that bore those names.

So, the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ now proceeds, in Genesis 17:6, where we'll begin reading, explaining to him the significance of this name change to "father of a multitude:" "And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you." The word "make fruitful" in the Hebrew is "para." "Para" means "to increase with offspring." It is the promise of posterity. The first thing that Jesus Christ makes clear to Abraham is: "You are going to have many, many, many descendants." This is in the Hebrew Hiphil stem, and that in the Hebrew indicates a causative idea. It's a causative act.

So, what we are told here is that God is saying, "I will call you, Abraham, to have many children." It is a stem which in this case indicates a grace provision. God says, "I am going to do this for you. I am going to cause you to become a father of a mighty number of nations. It is in the perfect tense, which indicates a completed action in God's reckoning. When the Hebrew uses the perfect, this is God saying, "The situation is done. It's a fact accomplished. It hasn't taken place, but as far as God is concerned, it's done. So, it's spoken of in the perfect tense. It's very important for us to note that on this Hebrew word.

The word "exceedingly" again confirms the comparison that had been previously given – that the descendants would be like the sands of the seashore and the stars in the heavens. Jesus is making this promise to Abraham. As Jehovah God, He is making this promise to Abraham when Abraham and his wife were sexually inactive. They are, in all practical effect, sexually dead. And yet God job comes along and says, "Abraham, Man, I'm going to "para" you like you can't believe it. You are going to really find yourself a father of a great multitude, and I am going to cause it to happen." And He makes that very clear. This is a vastly different demand on Abraham's faith because of his physical condition, but a very strong confirmation from God.

Abraham's offspring would indeed grow into a nation of people, because, as we are going to find, he's going to be sexually reactivated. He's 100 years old now. He lives for 75 more. He dies at 175. And during the last 75 years of his life, he is fully sexually active, and has five more sons who become founders of whole Arab nations in themselves. So, this word "para" really tells Abraham more that he can anticipate at this moment.

The Lord expands it by saying: "Not only are you going to have nations come from you, but they are going to be kings from you. The word "kings" is "melek" in the Hebrew, which means "royalty." It connotes that the descendants of Abraham are going to have rulers who are going to be royalty. Great nations and great rulers are going to spring from them. "Shall come" is the Hebrew word "yatsa," which means "to go out." And this indicates that from the very body carrying the genetic structure of Abraham, these descendants would proceed. This is in Hebrew what we call the Qal stem, which is just a statement of fact. It's imperfect tense. Hebrew has only perfect or imperfect on the senses. Perfect means is completed; and, imperfect means it is not completed. And at this point, you notice he uses imperfect, meaning that it's down in the future. It hasn't happened yet, but it's coming.

"I will make you exceedingly fruitful. I'll make nations of you. Kings shall come out of you."

Verse 7: "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and your seed after you, and their generations for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you." The word "establish" is the Hebrew word "qum." "Qum" means "to set up." It's in the Hiphil stem again, which means causative. God is going to cause this covenant to be set up and to be established; that is, to be fulfilled. It's a perfect tense because with God, it's as good as done. It is not something that's going to be in the future, though it has not been yet fulfilled. But God says, "It's done. My covenant is established in all practical effects. All the details are fulfilled."

So, here is Abraham in the darkest moment of his life. He can't go anywhere physically relative to fulfilling a seed of descendants. Yet the Lord Jesus Christ comes on the scene and says, "It's all still in force. Nothing has changed. I'm going to establish what I promised with you, and I'm going to do it with your seed (your 'zera')." "Zera" means "offspring." It's the same word that we had back in the Greek when we were in Romans. His seed is going to receive this. In other words, everybody who is descended, and who is descended today, from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a Jew who comes under the Abrahamic Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant is not operational now. It has been set aside because we are now in an interjected program of God within His dealings with Israel – the program relative to the church age, the gathering out of a different group of believers, the body of Christ, the church, But once that is over, God will go back to the "zera" of Abraham and the covenant will be completely in force again. In other words, nothing has changed.

There are those who suggest that God promises Abraham now have been cast aside, and that any promises of blessing that God make Abraham are only going to be fulfilled through the Christians (through the church). They are wrong. God is going to fulfill through the Jewish people what He promised to Abraham. That program is very much in effect, and the word "zera" makes it clear that He's talking about those Jewish people – racial Jews.

The fact that the covenant enforced is further stressed that this word "everlasting," which is the Hebrew word "olam." "Olam" means "perpetuity" or "eternity." This is the same word that we used when we formed the Panama Canal Treaty. That treaty was created in "olam." If you had put it in Hebrew, that's the word you would have used" "olam" ("perpetuity"). The English has the word "perpetuity." That means it's forever. It cannot be changed. It is eternal. It is non-terminable. That's what the word "perpetuity" means.

So, again, the stress is upon the fact that this covenant is non-terminable: "I'm not going to change it. I haven't backed out on you, Abraham. Things look dark, and things look impossible, but I haven't backed out on you. You are going to be a father of nations and kings. The covenant is everlasting. And your sexual greatness cannot abrogate the covenant."

"Elohim" is going to be their God. That's the word for "God" that we have here in the Hebrew. "God" here is the name "Elohim" – God on His Creator power. He is to be uniquely the God of Abraham and the Jewish people, and therefore the Jews have an eternal future. God is eternal, so always will be His dealings with His earthly people the Jews.

So, whatever Abraham's problems were, he could at least relax over the fact that God was always going to have a future for his descendants.

Then verse 8: "I will give unto you, and to your seed after you. The word "give" is the Hebrew word "nathan," from which we get one of our English names "Nathan." "Nathan" means "will give." The idea here is again, that we have a grace gift. It is not something that he's going to earn or that he's going to work out. God says, "I'm just going to hand it to you. I'm going to "nathan" this thing to you. It is Qal stem. It is a statement of fact. Again, it is perfect. With God, it's a completed action. It's all done. It is active. God Himself is going to do the "nathan." He is going to hand this over to Abraham.

The gift, however, is not only to Abraham. It is also to his seed through Isaac and Jacob. And what is the gift? An "erets," which means "country:" "I'm going to give you a country – this land where you are a sojourner. The word "sojourner" is "magur." "Magur" means "a sojourning place," actually "a wandering place." I am going to give you this land – this wandering place. This is a place where you don't own any real estate at all. He had no title to the land, and no ownership. He was just a pilgrim wandering in this area. This was the land which God had previously identified to him: from the Nile on the south; to the Euphrates on the north; to the Mediterranean Sea on the west; and, to the Arabian Desert east: "It's all yours."

**A Possession**

This land in which you are moving as a wandering place is going to be given to you as a possession. The word "possession" is "achutzah," and "achutzah" means "ownership:" "It is yours. It is nobody else's. You have full possession of it." This is God talking. Is not the United Nations talking. The United Nations can make rules about what the Jews can have relative to Palestine, and what he can't have. The nations of the world can get together and make decisions about what the Jews can have and what he can't have relative to nations. But I want you to notice that this is what God is talking about.

The current leader of the nation of Israel is coming down hard on this particular fact. He is pointing out, as others have not before him: "Why do we Jews have a right to Palestine? Because of 'achutzah.' It is a possession of absolute ownership. It's nobody else's. It is ours by divine ownership, and nobody has a right to take it from us, whatever has intervened over the years." That's amazing. Up to now, they've said, "We've been the dog's tail. We've been under the heel of other nations, and we've been abused, we've been persecuted. The time has come to that has to stop, and the Jew has to have someplace that's a place of security for them." Their foes have had all kinds of reasons, but this time, as we come close down to the end of the age, what are we running into? They even an Israeli leader who says, "The final answer is because God says it's ours. It is ours by divine gift. Therefore, it's our possession. And you cannot deny us that possession, no matter what's happened over the years when we have been scattered from our land."

In other words, what Begin is trying to tell the world is that it is not we Jews who are the squatters here in Palestine. It's the Arabs who are the squatters. They are the ones who don't belong in our land, not we. We belong in this land. They do not. And they have they been squatters on our territory for centuries. It's a whole new ballgame. It's a whole new way of looking at it. But it is a very scriptural way of approaching it.

So, it is their possession (ownership). Especially this word "achutzah" is a word that the Hebrew uses particularly relative to land possession (real estate ownership). The possession is in perpetuity. It is everlasting. No action on the part of the descendants of Abraham can permanently lose Palestine for them. They have an eternal claim to it. They have it by right of divine decree. This promise, at this point, was another assurance to Abraham that he was going to have an heir. He could not have anything for possession in the way of this land without a son. And Ishmael was out. That's already been made clear. So, what's going to happen here? God reassures Abraham: "I'll be their God, and I'm going to stand by your people." The Jews over the centuries have strayed from God, but He has never forsaken them.

Then, in verses 9-14, we are given the mark of this covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant was to be observed by Abraham's posterity as the divine plan for establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. We went back and we reviewed the problem of the fact that throughout history, man has been building his kingdom, and finally God pulled off this man and said, "Now with you, I'm going to displace the kingdom of man. With you, I'm going to place the Kingdom of God upon this earth." The ultimate expression of that will be out in the millennium.

Remember that Abraham at this time is a gentile. Since leaving Ur of the Chaldees: he was a gentile there; he's been a gentile ever since; and, as God is speaking to him, he's still a gentile. All Scripture has to be interpreted from this Abrahamic Covenant. If you don't do that, you'll make a great mistake, and you'll get a lot of things fouled up. The Bible is exactly the record of the fulfillment of this unconditional covenants.

**Circumcision**

To stress that this covenant is going to be fulfilled, God says, "Now I'm going to give you a religious ritual which will be very important for you to perform: the religious ritual of circumcision on your male children. This sign in the flesh is going to mark you as a child of the covenant blessings. It is going to mark you as the channel of the seed that will come from Abraham, and will then be transferred on through the centuries, until the ultimate expression of that seed will be the Lord Jesus Christ – the one who will ultimately fulfill all the details of the Abrahamic Covenant.

So, the religious ceremony of circumcision was established as the sign of Abraham's physical seed participating in the covenant blessing. No male came under the privileges of the promise without being a true son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And neither did he come under that blessing if he lacked the performance of circumcision on his body.

Circumcision symbolized the removal of the old sin nature (the control of the flesh) in the life of the individual, and the dedication to God of the physical vehicle (the very physical part of the man's body) which was to convey the seed that God had promised this tremendous blessing on. So, the Jew daily observed the fact that he was God's chosen vehicle for the transmission of the seed which ultimately was to bring the blessing upon all the world that God promised in the form of the Savior.

So, this ritual of circumcision had a great deal of significance and was very, very important. It was a very holy act. It was the expression of great faith in God, and it was a reminder to the male Jews of great standing (a unique standing) with God under the Abrahamic Covenant, and his personal role as a Jew in establishing God's plan of the Kingdom of God upon this earth.

For this reason, Satan, throughout Jewish history, has tried to lead male Jews into sexual immorality in order to discredit the testimony of circumcision which they bore in their own flesh as the mark of their personal separation to God. It is this particular mark of separation that Satan has despised, and it is this that he has struck so vehemently. And it is at this point that Israel has stumbled again and again and again in its history, where it brought God's judgment down upon them, because they were not just simply being sexually immoral. They were being sexually immoral under the conditions of having a mark that said, "I am God's person, and I am his vehicle for the bringing forth of the Messiah, and the nation that's going to nurture that messiah." Then to perform an act of immorality was a heinous sin in the sight of God, as you couldn't believe. And Satan knew exactly where to hit the Jew once the right of circumcision was performed. Sexual immorality was the thing he promoted among the nations, and they fell for it again and again and again.

The Jew who refused circumcision was completely excluded, of course, from the blessings. He was exiled from the nation, and from any inheritance in possession of any of the land that had been promised to the Jewish people. The sign of circumcision, however, I remind you again, was not part of personal salvation. Circumcision was something that a human being could do. Therefore, it is a human work like water baptism for the Lord's Supper. As they too do not have part of salvation, so circumcision, while being required, was not a part of salvation itself.

**The First Jew**

In verse 15, God turn to Sarah. Incidentally, once the act of circumcision was performed, which Abraham did (he did it the very day – this was completely fulfilled), Abraham cease being a gentile, and he became the first Jew, he became the first of the racial Jews. Now the Jewish nation was in full operation and in full existence. So, it was at the point of the circumcision of Abraham that he became a Jew, having been a gentile up to that time.

**Sarah**

In Genesis 17:50, we read, "And God said unto Abraham." Notice that Abraham's name has been changed already, and God gets around to Sarai's name: "As per Sarai, your wife, you shall not call her name 'Sarai,' but 'Sarah' shall her name be." "Sarai" seems to mean "contentious." There is some doubt about that, but that seems to be the basic concept. And the name was changed to "Sarah." "Sarah" means "princess," and, of course, you can see that there was a very significant reason for the name change by what was coming.

Sarah, at this point is 89 years old. She cannot bear children. She is, however, by God's power, to be sexually rejuvenated, and she would conceive. Through the blessing of this conception, God would finally give Abraham the legitimate son that he needed to fulfill the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant. Sarah, who had been barren all her life now is told that she would become the mother of nations: "And I will bless her, and give her a son of her. And I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nation. Kings of people shall be of her." For this reason, God says, "She must now be called "princess," because she is now the mother of royalty.

Of course, she became, as you know, the mother of the nation of Judah. She became the mother of the nation of Israel. She became the mother of the descendants through Esau, who became the Edomites, her grandson. So, she indeed became the mother of nations, even though she only had Isaac as the one child through whom the line was passed. And these nations, of course, produced kings to rule over them. As the mother of royalty, she is called "princess."

**Abraham's Laughter of Joy**

What was the response of Abraham to this? Verse 17: "And Abraham fell upon his face and laughed." The word "fell" in Hebrew is "naphal." "Naphal" is a word that expresses an act of worship. What he actually did is that he fell down in worship here before the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ who is speaking to him. He prostrated himself on the ground. Christ, of course, was standing before him in some human form: visible; and, recognizable. What Abraham did when he fell, Scripture says, is that: "He laughed." ... He falls to the ground, and something has struck him as being very exhilarating. And he burst out laughing. What's so funny?

Well, I want to point out, first of all, that this is not a laughter of unbelief. He is not saying, "You're putting me on, God. Do you know how old I am? Have you looked at so recently?" No, it was not unbelief. And we know this because Jesus did not rebuke him. Later, the same information is given to Sarah, and she does react with unbelief. You can check this in Genesis 18:13-15. And she is rebuked for her reactions. But Abraham's laughter is not rebuked. So, that clues us into the fact that it is not a laughter that signifies unbelief. It is the kind of laughter that you do when something very happy takes place that you didn't expect. It is the least thing you expected. And all of a sudden, here it takes place, and it's a laughter of joy. It's the laughter of exhilaration.

Abraham, who after all these years has been struggling; hoping; standing by in confidence to God; and, taking the smart-alec remarks because of his name "Abraam" ("exalted father" – father of nobody); and, finally the father of Ishmael, which isn't father of much. Then he gets a name now – "the father of a multitude," and that kind of worried him a little bit at the moment. But before he's through worrying about how many cracks he's going to take about that, God says, "This is it. You've developed the capacity. Your spiritual maturity structure is fully intact and developed. Now you are going to be able to appreciate a son. How you will enjoy him, and how you will be able to train him! Abraham, he's going to be a joy to you, and you're going to be a joy to your son."

"One of the great tragedies of life is that parents who are not capable of providing spiritual insight and blessing for their children still can have children. Therefore, the children are born into the homes of animals. And they produce animals in what they do with their children. But God says, "Abraham, you've got this spiritual quality now. Now I can give you this son. If you handle him right, you'll train him properly to be the father of royalty, and the father through whom this whole earth is going to be covered by the kingdom of God."

So, when Abraham was told this, he just burst out in laughter – the laughter of joy, and the laughter of exhilaration, and of a provision that he had long-awaited that finally came here. At the same time, he was awed by something that contributed to the exhilaration and the awe of the moment, because of something in his "levav," his "heart," which is the Hebrew word for "intellect" or "mind." It does mean "heart" (the physical organ), but like the Greek "kardia," it is used for the thinking capacity. And here in his mind, in his intellect and his thinking capacity, he was running over the fact of the problem that existed: "I'm 100 years old, and Sarai is 90 years old. And he probably thought to himself, "My goodness, my wife and I are 190 years old between us, and we're going to have a baby." And he maybe even thought such a foolish thing as: "I wonder where that cradle is that we used last time. I wonder where we'll put him. I better build a new tent." You can't tell what flew through his mind? And all the while, he's giggling in this exciting, exhilarating, awesome moment: "Here I am. There is 190 years between us, and we're going to have a baby." This was not discrediting God. It was a happy wonderment at the announcement of the baby.

**Ishmael**

Then, in verse 18, Abraham thinks of something. In this moment, something does pop into his mind, because immediately he knows that this means something very significant for Ishmael. This means that Ishmael is definitely out now. Where he's been holding onto Ishmael as possibly how this promise is going to be fulfilled, now there was no doubt in his mind. Ishmael was out. But he loved this boy. He had a great deal of affection for Ishmael, who was now a 13-year-old youngster, moving into his teens.

So, suddenly, Abraham turns to God and says, "O, that Ishmael might live before You," meaning, "God, please bless Ishmael. You're going to bless me. You're going to bless the son that's coming with great blessing, but Ishmael is important to me. He's my son, too." The result is that God responded to him, first of all, in verse 19, by stressing to him again: "Ishmael is out. Whatever I'm going to do with Ishmael, I want you to understand that he is not the channel of the promise:" "And God said, "Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son indeed. And you shall call his name "Yitschaq." And the word "Yitschaq" ... means "laughter." God, who is one of the great humorists of all times has said, "Abraham, you laughed with joy. You were just struck with such awe and wonder by the fact that I told you that the baby is coming. Do you know what we're going to name the boy? We're going to name him 'laughter.' So when you call him, you will say, "Laughter, come in here. It's getting dark out there. You'll never be able to mention this boy's name ("Yitschaq") without being reminded of this wondrous moment in your life when I told you, 'You've arrived. The baby is on the way.'"

So, he stresses again that this child is going to be here, and what his name will be: "And I'll establish My covenant (the same one given to his father) with him for an everlasting covenant (another 'olam,' with no end to it), and with his seed after him," because Isaac would also have descendants in turn. The promise is going to be passed on to Isaac and to his descendants.

In verse 20, God says, "Now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do for Ishmael:" "As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him. And I'll make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. Twelve princes he shall beget, and I will make him a great nation." God says, "I'll not forget Ishmael. He too will become the father of a great nation. He'll have twelve sons. These sons will become the heads of nations." Of course, again we have from Ishmael the descendants of the great section of the Arab world.

Verse 21: "But I will establish My covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear you at this set time in the next year;" that is, Isaac is to be born one year later. Now, at last, the faith of Abraham is fully vindicated. God was keeping His Word indeed. Abraham had the capacity now to enjoy the blessing of the son, and, with Sarah, to handle him with divine viewpoint.

Verse 22 says, "And He ceased talking with him, and God went up from Abraham." At this point, the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ discontinued the conversation. And as we found at the beginning of the passage, Christ, who was always present with him, suddenly appeared so that he could see Him, and He now disappeared so he could no longer see Him. However, He was still present with Abraham.

In Genesis 17:23-27, you have the account of how Abraham complied with the directive of circumcision. He did it that very same day. It evidenced his unmitigated faith in God and his fully developed maturity. "Abraam," the gentile, now became "Abraham," the Jew, and everybody in his family (all the males) were included. And we have no evidence that any of them resisted, which was a great testimony to their confidence in the spiritual leadership and authority of Abraham.

However, there was still Sarah in the background. Abraham went home and told everything that had happened. He explained it all to Sarah, and Sarah did not react with the same zeal, enthusiasm, and confidence that Abraham did. She still had a lot of mental reservations and doubts. Every time she looked at herself in the mirror, she said, "This just cannot be. I don't care what you say."

**The Lord Jesus Christ**

Genesis 18:1: "And the LORD." Notice what you have. The word "LORD" is in all capital letters. That is Jehovah. When we have this in English, it indicates that it's the sacred Tetragrammaton "Yahweh." Abraham is visited by the Lord and two other men. All these appear in human form: "And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre as he sat in the tent door of the heat of the day." Abraham is sitting there, and suddenly a theophany occurs. A theophany is an appearance of the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ in visible form. Sometimes He is referred to as the Angel of Jehovah. A theophany is the appearance of Christ before He had a physical body: "And along with Him: two angels. And he (Abraham) lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him. When he saw them, he ran to meet them, from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground."

Verse 3 indicates to us that Abraham immediately recognized that one of these was God: "And he said, 'My Lord.'" The word "Lord" indicates the Hebrew word "Adonai" ("Adona” really). "Adonai" is another name for God. And Abraham uses that word, indicating that he recognizes that: "This is God who has appeared before me:" "And he said, 'My Adonai, if now I have found favor in Your sight, pass not away, I pray You, from Your servant.'"

So then he invites them (extends to them hospitality): "'Let a little water, I pray You, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourself under the tree. And I'll fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort your hearts. After that, you shall pass on. For, therefore, you are come to your servant.' And they said, 'So do as you have said.'"

**Angels**

This is the passage, as we shall see in the chapters which follow, where these men go on to Sodom and Gomorrah, and when they arrive there, it is evident that not only is this the pre-incarnate Christ, but the two other men with Him are angels. Hebrews 13:2 says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware." The passage in Hebrews is referring directly back here to Abraham, who entertained angels, not being aware who the other two were, but knowing that the one was God.

So, they have agreed to accept his hospitality. So, Abraham and Sarah rush about and prepare a meal, and they proceed then to serve the meal. Then, in verse 9, after the meal, Abraham has been standing there serving them as their host. Sarah, in the meantime, has been standing behind the flap of the tent door, within earshot of everything that is going on.

"And they said unto him (to Abraham), 'Where is Sarah, your wife?' And he said, 'Behold, in the tent.'" She can hear. At this point, in verse 10, the Lord Jesus Christ announces that in one year, He will return. And at that point, Sarah would bear the son: "And He said, 'I will certainly return unto you according to the time of life.'" "According to the time of life," literally in the Hebrew is "When the time revives." What the phrase means is "at this time next year:" "'I will certainly return at this time next year. And, lo, Sarah, your wife, shall have a son.' And Sarah heard it in the tent door which was behind Him."

**Sarah's Laughter**

She hears what Christ has said. Sarah immediately thinks of her physical condition: "Now Abraham and Sarah were old, and well-stricken in age. And it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women." "After the manner of women" means that she had passed the change of life, so she had no child-bearing capacity. Sara reacted just as Abraham did – with laughter: "Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, 'After I have become old, shall I have pleasure – my lord being old also?'" "She laughed within herself" means silently, in her mind. She didn't laugh out loud. That would have been very rude and unmannerly. However, this was the laugh of belief. It was preposterous to her that at her age, Abraham and she would again be able to engage in sexual pleasure, let alone, childbearing.

Now, part of the strain, obviously, on Abram's faith over the years was Sarah's unbelief. Even after this recent theophany that Abraham had experienced had caused him to laugh in exhilarated relief and joy, she obviously did not respond and come through with the same kind of confident faith.

Because this was an expression of unbelief, verse 13 indicates to us that the Lord Jesus Christ rebuked her: "And the Lord said unto Abraham, 'Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I of a surety bear a child who am old?'’" Now notice that no words (no sounds) have passed between them. Sarah is behind the tent flap. She is listening. She hears what has been said. She thinks this to yourself about her age, and she laughs within herself – not outwardly.

This person said, "Why did she laugh?" Obviously, He must have the capacity to know what's going on in her mind, which, of course, He did, being Christ. His omniscience knew exactly what was taking place, and this startled her. The Lord asks Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh at this announcement?" She realizes that this is no ordinary person.

In verse 14, He rebukes her: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Matthew 19:26 gives you the answer, in case you don't know what the answer to that question is. Matthew 19:26 says, "Jesus beheld them and said unto them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" And had Sarah's maturity, structure been developed to the point (through her intake of doctrine) that Abraham's was, she would have had no problem.

"At this time appointed, I will return unto you;" that is, "In one year, I'll return unto you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." He says to Abraham, "I'm going to show up here a year from now. And when I come, you're going to find that your wife has been pregnant for nine months, and the son is going to be born when I return."

Well, Sarah is now in awe, so she makes another foolish move. She tries to deny the whole thing. Verse 15: "Then Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh.'" Now, that's not too good to try lying to God. I mean, that's kind of stupid to begin with. So, she has a little spiritual disorientation, where she should have been clued in that this is a supernatural person: "If He could say that, He knew what I did. He knew what I was thinking. There's no need for me to try to con Him that I didn't laugh." Of course, she was afraid. That's why she did it. She was awed by this.

"And He (Jesus) said, 'No, but you did laugh." And that was the end of the conversation. The result was that was that this made a believer out of Sarah in a hurry. Hebrews 11:11 tells us: "Through faith, also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised." So, Sarah suddenly came to the same competent faith that Abraham had. This made a believer out of her. There was no doubt in her mind after this conversation that she was indeed going to be the mother of the promised heir of the Covenant.

Of course, shortly after this visit, Abraham and Sarah discovered that, sure enough, it was true. They became sexually rejuvenated, and the result was that the conception of Isaac took place. These were two people who were as good as dead. The God stepped in and changed it all. What a satisfaction for Abraham for the faith and confidence that he had in God got all those years when there were so many things against reason for him to continue with that kind of confidence. And what a capacity he obviously had now to rear and to enjoy Isaac ("laughter"). There was laughter all around this time of great spiritual prosperity.

Now, that's the whole background that Abraham faced, and that every Jewish person knew well. He understood all these details. I hope that you understand them as well, now.

In the next session, we're going to go back to Romans. And when we take up Paul's remarks against this frame of reference background, you'll fully be able to appreciate what Paul was referring to, and what a magnificent picture (and what a true picture) he is painting of Abraham as a man of faith.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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