

## Chapter 9

# EVEN AS ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD

*Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the [Gentiles] through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. (Galatians 3:6-9)*

We have seen how Paul reestablished his authority with the Galatians and how he had shown them the difference between the *hearing of faith* and *the works of the law*. At this point in his argument he revealed Abraham was endowed with imputed righteousness because he believed God. Those who are of the faith of Abraham are also endowed with the same righteousness and are counted to be children of Abraham. Paul also pointed out: God's promise to Abraham included all of the families of the earth, not just the Jews.

While this was evident in the Abrahamic covenant, it was foreign to the understanding of many, if not most, Jews. Nevertheless it was an avenue to their minds. Virtually all Jews held Abraham in high esteem. In fact many of the Jews regarded their natural kinship with Abraham

### Even as Abraham Believed God

to be all that was necessary to be accepted of God. On several occasions our Lord refuted this concept. In the eighth chapter of the gospel of John, He acknowledged that the Jews to whom he spoke were of the seed of Abraham, but then He said, *If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.* They were indeed children of Abraham after the flesh, but they certainly were not of the spiritual seed of Abraham. This was evident by their self-righteousness and total spiritual blindness. Prior to this, Jews of the same mind had confronted John the Baptist with this same boastful attitude: *we be Abraham's seed.* Like our Lord, John rebuked them for this and called for them to repent (change their minds), when he said: ... *think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham* (Matthew 3:9).

By informing the Galatians of the faith of Abraham, Paul informed all believers Abraham's faith was the faith (that body of revealed truth concerning Jesus Christ, in His Person and in His work). It was in Christ that God would bring about the blessing of all of the families of the earth. Paul informed the Galatians that the gospel was preached unto Abraham and he believed it. His faith, then, was counted unto him for righteousness, just as the righteousness of Jesus Christ is counted to be the righteousness of each believer.

Since this is true, if we observe the life of Abraham (recorded in the book of Genesis), we should see the grace of God manifested towards Abraham and Abraham's faith manifested towards God. However we should not expect to see Abraham acting perfectly in every situation he was brought into. Abraham was justified by faith, not by the deeds of the law, or by works of righteousness, which he had done. What we should expect to see is what we do see in Scripture:

## Even as Abraham Believed God

Abraham acting in his human frailties, yet trusting the Lord.

When we come to the call of Abraham (in Genesis chapter twelve) we read, *Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.* The use of the perfect tense (*Now the Lord had said*, in Genesis 12:1) indicates that the context for this call was when Abraham (Abram) was still in Ur of the Chaldees. While the context and call reveals that Abraham was to get out of his country and from his people, his actual performance reveals:

... Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran. (Genesis 11:31-32)

This portion of Scripture indicates Abraham did not leave his country and his people as God had said. When he left Ur of the Chaldees, Terah, his father, determined that he and others in the family would go with him. Perhaps Terah did this because the city of Haran was on the way to Canaan and it bore the name of Terah's firstborn son. (It is possible Haran founded this city and gave it his name before his death.) It was probably sentimentality which influenced Terah to accompany Abraham. No matter the reason, Haran was not the place to which the Lord had called Abraham; it was a place of the flesh and the remembrance of the flesh.

Consequently these events portray a daily battle in the life of the believer between the flesh and the Spirit. We, like Abraham, are confronted with choices. This is portrayed in Abraham's journey to Haran. Abraham's choices indicate that he did not always do what God had explicitly said. Abraham was influenced by Terah, the *old man*. By this expression, we mean no disrespect

## Even as Abraham Believed God

to Terah, but in the typology of Scripture, he represents the flesh (i.e. *the old man*), and Haran represents the world (because he was the *firstborn*). Thus Abraham was definitely affected by his relationship with the *old man* and did not continue following the Lord until the *old man* was dead:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3:1-11, emphasis mine)

In the twelfth chapter of Genesis, we learn that when Abraham arrived in Canaan, the Lord appeared unto him and promised: *Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him* (Genesis 12:7).

But Abraham did not remain in Canaan. There was a famine in the land. Abraham resorted to his natural ability to solve his problems and provided a natural solution by traveling south, out of Canaan and into Egypt. There is no record to suggest Abraham sought the Lord's will with respect to Egypt. He simply packed up his wife and nephew, and all that pertained to them, and went to a place that was not suffering a famine. Most of us would consider this the practical solution to the problem, but in reality it was the fleshly solution to the problem, because God had not called him to Egypt, but to Canaan.

After this, Abraham had a solution to another problem: He and Sarah had determined,

### Even as Abraham Believed God

before they left Ur of the Chaldees, that wherever they went, they would say Sarah was Abraham's sister (which was true). Sarah was extremely beautiful even at age sixty-five. According to their plan, they informed the Egyptians that Sarah was the sister of Abraham. Consequently it was not long before the beauty of Sarah was recommended to Pharaoh, who took Sarah into his harem. He would have made her one of his wives, but the Lord sent a plague upon him for Sarah's sake. Then Pharaoh knew Sarah was Abraham's wife. Whereupon he called Abraham into his presence and rebuked him for saying, *She is my sister*. Indeed, she was his half sister, but she was also his wife. Despite these weaknesses, the Lord continued to bless Abraham because of their grace and faith relationship.

In Genesis chapter thirteen, we learn that God had so blessed Abraham and Lot that the land was not able to bear all of their herds. Thus the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot began to quarrel over pasture land. This prompted Abraham to go to Lot and say:

Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. (Genesis 13:9)

This shows some spiritual growth on the part of Abraham: he was not consumed by greed, but gave Lot first choice in the matter. Then, motivated by greed, Lot beheld all of the plain of Jordan, *that it was well watered everywhere*, and he chose this area of Jordan, where Sodom was, to be his portion according to Abraham's word. After that, God told Abraham to look in all directions, northward, southward, eastward and westward: *For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever*. Despite Lot's choice, God still promised all of the land to Abraham.

## Even as Abraham Believed God

After some time had passed, Chedorlaomer laid siege to the cities of the plain and Lot was taken captive, along with the kings of the vale:

And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. (Genesis 14:14-16)

Thus Abraham disregarded his personal safety and battled the mighty king Chedorlaomer to secure the safety of his nephew Lot and his family. The Lord was gracious to Abraham in this battle because of His promise (for the seed had not yet been given through whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed) and granted Abraham the victory over Chedorlaomer. After this Abraham met the priest of the most high God, Melchizedek, and gave him tithes of all he had gained in the battle to express his thanksgiving for God's wondrous grace. It was then that the king of Sodom desired to reward Abraham for his efforts and:

... Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine 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 any thing that is thine, lest thou should say, I have made Abram rich. (Genesis 14:22-23)

Thus the Biblical record again reveals Abraham's faith: he had trusted the Lord for the victory over Chedorlaomer; he had trusted the Lord for His provisions to him and his young men; he had expressed his thanksgiving to the Lord for his blessings by tithing to Melchizedek; and he had trusted the Lord when he refused to be made rich by the king of Sodom. Thus Abraham was (and is) a living expression of the truth: *The just shall live by faith.*

Nevertheless, in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, we find Abraham expressing some doubts

## Even as Abraham Believed God

concerning the promises of God: since he had no son of his own, he wondered if his heir would come from one of his servants. Thus the Lord came to Abraham to encourage him concerning His promise and said:

... Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it unto him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:5-6)

Thus God confirmed the promise He had made to Abraham ten years earlier, before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees. God confirmed that Abraham would not only have a son, but his heirs would be compared in number to the stars of heaven. There is no doubt that Abraham revealed this meeting and God's promise to Sarah. Thus upon hearing of this confirmation, Sarah showed that she, too, had the ability to solve problems by fleshly means. It is possible Sarah reasoned: since she had been unable to have a child throughout all of the years of their marriage; and since Abraham was growing old and his ability to father a child was passing; and since she had a young and healthy Egyptian maid, Abraham could go into Hagar and have a child by her.

Abraham, like so many of us, was not as strong as he might have been and so he agreed with Sarah's plan. Apparently he did this rather quickly and without argument, because it gave him something he could do, in the face of years of failure, to produce a son. Like so many Christians with similar schemes, he convinced himself this fleshly plan was not fleshly at all. He probably reasoned that this might be the way God would fulfill His promise. Urged by the desire for a son and also by fleshly desires for Hagar, he went into her and produced Ishmael. Ishmael was the delight of his old age. Nevertheless Ishmael was not the son of God's promise. Ishmael was the son of the flesh. Consequently, about thirteen years later, the Lord visited Abraham again

## Even as Abraham Believed God

and said:

... I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life, and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. (Genesis 18:10-14, emphasis mine)

Thus God affirmed that His promise would be fulfilled at the appointed time, when it was apparent to Abraham and Sarah, as well as to us, it was impossible for God's promise to find its fulfillment by the efforts and will of the flesh.

This points out a very important truth in our relationship with God and one which Paul expressed to the Corinthian church. Paul said, he and Apollos could plant and water (that is: they could preach and teach), but it was God alone Who could give the increase. Further the flesh produces flesh and the Spirit produces spirit, so that Paul asked the churches of Galatia, *Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*

God's promise of a son to Abraham and His promise of salvation, to *whosoever will believe*, were (and are) accomplished by the Spirit of God and the Word of God, without the works of the flesh. Abraham and Sarah had a role in the plan and purpose of God: it was to believe God and be the vessels through whom God would express His power and fulfill His promise at the appointed time. Thus Paul brought up the matter of Abraham's faith so the Galatians could see that their faith was to be like Abraham's faith -- that their trust was to be in the power and promise of God and not in the energy of the flesh:

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are

## Even as Abraham Believed God

contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. (Galatians 5:17)

This verse and particularly the statement, *Ye cannot do the things that ye would*, requires an explanation. The key to the explanation is also found in Abraham's life (recorded in the book of Genesis) and those things recorded about Abraham and the flesh in the third through fifth chapters of the book of Galatians.

We know Abraham thought he was contributing to the fulfillment of God's promise by going into Hagar, but he was not. Thus, when Ishmael was about thirteen years old, God confirmed His covenant with Abraham and told him to change his wife's name from Sarai to Sarah, from one who was promised to *dominate*, to a *queen*, one who dominates:

... I will bless her, and give thee a son of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! (Genesis 17:16-18, emphasis mine)

It is evident from this, Abraham desired his efforts to produce Ishmael to stand. Consequently when God made the above promise, Abraham's initial response was a scoffing laugh because of the impotence of his aged body. He considered himself incapable of producing a son through Sarah. Thus he desired Ishmael (the son of his efforts) to be the heir rather than a son he felt he could not produce. This indeed was the flesh warring against the Spirit. Even so prior to the conception of Isaac, Abraham and Sarah both came to believe God, and it was accounted unto them for righteousness.

Ishmael hated Isaac. He felt Isaac's inheritance should have been his. This is the attitude of the world toward the true believer. The world believes it should attain to heaven because it is

## Even as Abraham Believed God

just as good, if not better than the average believer. Consequently the world sees no need for the grace of God.

No matter how the world feels about the believer or the grace of God, God still performs His work in this world through human instruments. Abraham and Sarah were the *earthen vessels* through which God produced Isaac, ... *that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us* [i.e., the earthen vessels]. Throughout the years of my ministry, I have been amazed at the emphasis many of my brethren in the ministry have put upon the efforts of Christians to bring the unsaved to Christ. They have made the process of witnessing the truth of the gospel very much like the selling of a used car. It is a matter of sales technique and not a matter of truth. Little emphasis is put upon the preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God, and a whole lot of emphasis is put upon human effort. You would think, from the personal evangelism techniques that are taught, it would be possible to save the lost of this world at will. This has not been my experience, nor does it agree with the Scriptures. As we have previously alluded, Paul wrote:

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. (I Corinthians 3:5-8, emphasis mine)

This evaluation is not a denial of the church's responsibility to the great commission. This evaluation stresses God's increase rather than man's. Consequently the church's efforts, like Abraham's, must be according to God's Word and purpose, in God's time. There is no place for human manipulation. It is God alone who gives the increase.

This is the truth that is borne out in Sarah's barrenness and Abraham's impotency. They

## Even as Abraham Believed God

could not produce the promised son until God enabled them to produce him, in God's time, by God's power and for God's purpose. This is one of the reasons the Scripture says:

That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (I Corinthians 1:29-31)

This being true, why did the Judaizers put so much emphasis upon ritual and law? The answer is quite simple. Their trust was not in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their trust was in the works of their own hands, through the traditions of the elders and their performance of Jewish rituals. Consequently they were religious, but they were lost. They had no capacity for the things of the Spirit of God. Therefore their conclusions were carnal and not spiritual.

In Abraham there is a very important lesson. Abraham believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness, but Abraham had nothing of which he could boast before God. The apostle Paul also wrote:

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (Romans 4:1-8)

What do we observe in Abraham? Abraham was a sinner just as we are. Abraham had periods of time in his life when he operated in the flesh, trying to fulfill the promises of God by the works of his own hands. Nevertheless God brought him to the place where he expressed his

## Even as Abraham Believed God

faith implicitly and emphatically in God's ability to perform His promises. Therefore Paul described the relationship of Abraham to the promises of God, when he wrote:

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all; (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

And being not weak in [the] faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. (Romans 4:13-25)

The New Testament view of Old Testament saints is a marvelous revelation of the grace of God, the judicial reckoning of God and the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. It reveals them as God sees them through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is a new covenant relationship. This covenant was put into effect with the sacrifice, burial and resurrection of our Lord for all that believed in the Old Testament era (under the sacrificial system) and for all who have come (and will come) to faith, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the only activities of Old Testament saints that are seen in the New Testament are the things they did by faith.

The Bible says, *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* It also says, *And their sins and iniquities will I remember against them no more.* Thus in Paul's testimony concerning the faith of Abraham

## Even as Abraham Believed God

(recorded in the fourth chapter of Romans) nothing is said about the unbelief of Abraham. Rather we read only of that which was done by faith, and nothing else is remembered. The testimony of Abraham, under the blood of Christ, is:

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

This is the sort of view God has of each one who is a believer in Jesus Christ. All of the believer's unbelief is reckoned under the blood of Christ. It is forgiven and it is forgotten. Every transgression of the law is also reckoned as forgiven and forgotten. Further Paul has shown the Galatians, in God's judicial reckoning: he (as well as they) *was crucified with Christ*. Consequently he (as well as they) was counted dead to the law. Therefore he (with the Galatians) was free from the law.

This is the reason Paul encouraged the Galatians that their faith should be, *Even as Abraham's*. This, too, is the reason all of the families of the earth have the potential of being blessed in Abraham, whether they are Jews or whether they are Gentiles -- so that Paul could write, *They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*.