

Abraham Enters Canaan and a Meeting with Melchizedek (Genesis 12-14)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Genesis

I. Recap from the Previous Lesson

- a. We discussed how it can be useful to consider the insights of early Christian writers (especially those before 325 AD) when we read the Scriptures. To be clear: the Bible is the one and only standard, not the early Christians. However, their insights and perspectives can be valuable as we strive to understand original intent of the Scriptures, to restore “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”. (**Jude v.3**)
- b. Let’s not repeat the mistakes of those who built the Tower of Babel. As we strive to build the church, which also is likened to a great masonry structure, we must build only for God’s glory; not to “make a name for ourselves” (**Genesis 11:4**). We must follow God’s instructions.
- c. We introduced Abraham, explaining why he is important to us today:
 - i. He is father of all the Jews;
 - ii. He is the spiritual father of faith for all Christians (**Romans 4:16**);
 - iii. He lived a life that exemplifies ‘saving faith’ for us;
 - iv. His wife Sarah is held up as an example for Christian women; and
 - v. Story of his life includes prophecies and foreshadowings of Jesus.

II. Abraham and Company Leave Haran for Canaan (Read **Genesis 12:1-9**)

- a. Summary of God’s call to Abraham:
 - i. He is told to leave his country and his relatives.
 - ii. He is called to go to an unknown land that God would later show him. He takes his wife, his nephew Lot, and all his servants and possessions.
 - iii. God promises to Abraham:
 1. He will become a great nation (despite being an older man and childless).
 2. God will bless him and make Abraham’s name great.

- a. God would bless those who bless Abraham, but will curse those who curse him.
 - b. Important promise: “In you all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed.” (more on that promise later)
- b. Stephen indicates that this initial call actually came to Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia, before he came to Haran. (**Acts 7:2-8**)
- i. Stephen says that the call to depart his country and family actually came when they were still in Ur; but Abraham did not move on until after his father Terah died in Haran.
 - ii. Stephen points out that the promise of inheriting that land would not be seen by Abraham, but that his descendants would later possess it.
- c. Abraham travels to Canaan (land later to become nation of Israel). He builds an altar between Bethel and Ai, “calls on the name of the Lord”, and continues south.
- d. Abraham doesn’t really get started on his mission until age 75!
- i. One of the most destructive things that happened to American culture in my own generation was glorifying youth and rejecting the wisdom and contributions of those who are older. This is magnified by worldly movies, TV and magazines that place enormous focus on sports and entertainment figures and youth culture. Tragically, this attitude has even corrupted many churches.
 1. The rise of age-segregated ministries where young people are leading young people. The blind are leading the blind.
 2. Churches where the emphasis is overwhelmingly on youth and cultivating young leaders. Dynamic younger personalities without spiritual depth are put over older, more mature people.
 3. Churches that don’t have elders, or who have so-called ‘elders’ who are not really the ones who direct the affairs of the church.
 - ii. In our time, people in their sixties or older are often considered ‘over the hill’ in life, ‘washed up’. They may look back on younger years as their best years, or can feel like failures because of what they did not accomplish when they were in their twenties, thirties and forties.
 1. Many older Christians are just looking forward to retiring, relaxing, and vacationing when they hit their sixties.
 - iii. Yet many heroes of faith did their greatest work at an advanced age.

1. Abraham just getting started on his trip to Canaan at age 75 (**Genesis 12:4**). Isaac would not be born until 25 years later, when both Abraham and Sarah were described as “old, well advanced in age”. (**Genesis 18:11**)
 2. Moses received the call to go on his great mission at age 80 (**Acts 7:23-30**). (He had been a prince in Egypt for 40 years, then spent 40 years in the wilderness tending sheep.)
 3. Caleb was ready for his greatest conquest at the age of 85. In **Joshua 14:10-12** he said, “Now behold I am 85 years old today. I am still as strong today as when Moses sent me (*almost 40 years prior*), as strong now to go out and come in for war. Now therefore, I ask you for this mountain, as the Lord said in that day, since you heard this word in that day. For now the Anakim are there with large and fortified cities; therefore if the Lord is with me, I will utterly destroy them, as the Lord said to me.”
- iv. God’s plan is for the church to be led by overseers, also called elders (literally: older men) in **Titus 1:5-9**.
1. The point is reinforced by the qualifications provided in **1 Timothy 3:1-7** which include, “not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.”
 2. In **1 Peter 5:1-5** the apostle Peter calls the older men, the elders, to be the ones who lead the church by their lives, providing the pace-setting example for all the others to follow.
 3. Question: *How old* do you think a man be (minimum age) in order to serve as an *elder*?
 - a. We see young men in their late teens or early twenties, Mormon missionaries wearing white shirts with engraved plastic nametags that say ‘*Elder Jones*’ or ‘*Elder Smith*’. Obviously this is violating the plain meaning of the term *elder* taken from the Bible!
 - b. In Book 2 Section 1 of the *Apostolic Constitutions* (compiled c. 375 AD, but reflecting earlier church practices) it states that where possible, bishops/shepherds should be at least 50 years old. However, that guideline was not a hard-and-fast rule; in some cases a younger man with unusual wisdom could be considered. (ANF v.7, p.366)

v. For the women:

1. Paul calls the older women to be teaching the younger women how to live godly lives. He writes in **Titus 2:1-5**, “the older women...that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.”
2. In **1 Timothy 5:9-10** Paul notes that a special ministry of intercessory prayer and service is reserved for widows who are over the age of 60, who have spent their lives in service, hospitality, good works and godly child-rearing.

vi. Conclusion: Have God’s perspective regarding age and maturity.

1. The world today worships youth and sees little or no value in age (think of sports, entertainment and media figures).
2. Reject this worldly, shallow notion of pop culture (which has crept into some churches) that superficially talented and flashy youth is the highest value. Those who devote years in laboring for the kingdom of God, studying the Scriptures, praying, refined in trials and striving for righteousness, can be ready for even greater work ahead for the Lord.
3. What Jesus said about money, also is true about the other things the world values highly (youth, good looks, fame, outward appearance): “what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God”. (**Luke 16:15**)
4. God’s plan is for older men to be leading in his church, and the older women to be guiding those who are younger.
5. View your life to date as preparation. Those who are older should be prepared to lead the way in knowledge, wisdom, holiness, boldness and faithful vision. Abraham was *just getting started* at age 75!

III. Abraham Goes to Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20)

- a. Severe famine in Canaan sends them to Egypt seeking food.
- b. Abraham fears that the Egyptians will kill him to get Sarah his wife, because of her great beauty (she had to be at least age 65 here). So he asks Sarah to tell the Egyptians that she is his sister, instead.
 - i. Actually she is his half-sister, so they are not lying. Abraham explains later to Abimelech, in **Genesis 20:12**, “she truly is my sister. She is the

daughter of my father, but not of my mother, and she became my wife”.

- ii. While I can't justify Abraham's strategy here, God protected him and Sarah. Also, he ends up gaining a lot of wealth from Pharaoh!

IV. Conflict Between Herdsmen of Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13)

- a. (Read **Genesis 13:1-9**). Storyline of the conflict:
 - i. Abraham and Lot rich: herds, flocks and herdsmen
 - ii. Strife between their herdsmen
 - iii. Abraham yields: “If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or if you will go to the right, then I will go to the left.” (**Genesis 13:8-9**)
- b. Question: is there a lesson for us here? Consider a similar attitude of yielding to our brothers is held up throughout the New Testament.
 - i. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (**Matthew 5:9**). Also, “If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.” (**Matthew 5:40-41**)
 - ii. Paul calls Christians to be “submitting to one another in the fear of God”. (**Ephesians 5:21**)
 - iii. James warns against fighting and strife among Christians. He says, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (**James 3:17-18**)
 - iv. Paul said it would be better to be willing to be cheated by another Christian than to initiate a lawsuit against a brother in the government courts. (**1 Corinthians 6:1-8**)
 - v. Conclusion: God wants us to follow Abraham's example with Lot, in being willing to yield to our brothers for the sake of peace, rather than pushing for our own interests and rights.
- c. **Genesis 13:10-13** Lot sees that plain of Jordan is well watered, and he goes east toward Sodom.
 - i. Some people criticize Lot for picking the land toward Sodom. However, nothing in the text to indicate his decision was a bad one.
 - ii. More to come on the wickedness of Sodom!

- d. (Read **Genesis 13:14-18**). God's promise to Abraham:
 - i. His descendants will inherit that land, forever.
 - ii. His descendants will be numerous "as the dust of the earth" which cannot be counted.

V. Lot is Captured in War, then Rescued by Abraham (Genesis 14:1-16)

- a. Five local kings (including kings of Sodom and Gomorrah) rebel and wage war against four kings under Chedorlaomer.
- b. Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah defeated in battle, flee. Abraham's nephew Lot and his goods are captured.
- c. Abraham finds out that Lot is captured; takes 318 armed servants and pursues. They rescue Lot, the cavalry of Sodom, and other people who had been captured and their goods.

VI. Melchizedek the Priest for Abraham (Read Genesis 14:17-24)

- a. Summary of the story line:
 - i. After the victory, Melchizedek the king of Salem "the priest of God most high" offers bread and wine.
 - ii. Abraham gives Melchizedek a tithe (10%) of all the plunder of war.
 - iii. A grateful king of Sodom offers Abraham the spoils of war, but Abraham declines the offer.
- b. Question: What is the significance of Melchizedek?
 - i. Melchizedek is mentioned by name only once in **Genesis**. His entire story is within three verses (**Genesis 14:18-20**). Yet in the New Testament he is discussed extensively (mentioned by name 8 times) in **chapters 5-7** of the book of **Hebrews**.
 - ii. Melchizedek is mentioned one other place in the Bible, in an extremely important reference: **Psalms 110:4**.
 - 1. Read **Psalms 110:1-4** (Note: designated **Psalms 109** in the LXX numbering.)
 - 2. Key verse: **Psalms 110:4** says, "The Lord swore and will not repent, you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."
 - a. Note: term '*repent*' as used here literally means, 'He will not change his mind'.

- iii. **Psalm 110** includes two very important prophecies about the Christ, or Messiah, who was to come.
1. Prophecies:
 - a. Genesis written approximately 1400 years before Christ.
 - b. Psalms written approximately 1000 years before Christ.
 2. Note that 'Christ' (Greek term, in New Testament and LXX) = 'Messiah' (Hebrew term) = 'the Anointed One' (English).
 3. Where in the Old Testament does it say that the Christ (Greek term, in the LXX) would come?
 - a. **Psalm 2:2**, which is quoted by Peter (in **Acts 4:25-26**, where the LXX is quoted) "The rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Christ."
 - i. In **Psalm 2:6** it says he would be a king established by God who would rule from Zion.
 - ii. In **Psalm 2:1-2** it says his rule would be opposed by the kings and rulers of the earth.
 - iii. In **Psalm 2:7** God refers to him as "My Son".
 - b. **Daniel 9:25-26**, in the prophecy of the 'seventy weeks' speaks of 'Christ the Prince' appearing in Jerusalem and then being put to death.
 - c. In **2 Samuel 7:12-16**, David is told that one of his descendants in the future would reign over an eternal kingdom. He would be referred to as God's son.
 - i. This story also in **1 Chronicles 17:11-14**.
 - ii. This is confirmed in **Psalm 89** and **Psalm 132**, where God *swears* that he will keep this promise made earlier to David.
 - iii. Peter alludes to this prophecy given to David during his speech at Pentecost, in **Acts 2:30**.
 4. Peter connects this to the **Psalm 110** prophecy in **Acts 2:34-35**. "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (from **Psalm 110:1**).
 - a. Jesus had quoted the same passage earlier, saying it applied to the Christ. In **Matthew 22:41-46** he asked

the Pharisees, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” and then “If David then calls Him ‘Lord’, how is He his Son”? (See also **Luke 20:41-44**.)

- b. **Psalm 110:1** is used to show the significance of Jesus (being greater than the angels) in **Hebrews 1:13**; again alluded to in **Hebrews 10:13**. (Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God, waiting for his enemies to be made His footstool.)
- iv. A major theme of **Hebrews chapters 1-10**: Jesus is the faithful high priest over the household of God.
 1. He offered the one perfect sacrifice for all time;
 2. He can fully relate to us, being tempted fully as we are;
 3. He is over the house of God;
 4. He entered heaven itself, the ultimate Most Holy Place, and has prepared the way of entry for us.
 - v. Jesus was a different type of priest than those descended from Levi and Aaron. As foretold in **Psalm 110:4**, the Christ would be a high priest of a more ancient type, like Melchizedek. Melchizedek’s priesthood was a ‘type’, with that of Christ being the ‘antitype’. This is explained in **Hebrews chapters 5-8**:
 1. Read **Hebrews 5:1-11**. Jesus’ priesthood described: He was fully human, could relate to our weakness, was tempted, and was made perfect through suffering.
 2. Read **Hebrews 7:1-10**. How Melchizedek foreshadowed Christ’s priesthood:
 - a. King of righteousness (= name ‘Melchizedek’)
 - i. Jesus taught the highest standards of righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount, touching on: anger, lust, forgiving others, permanence of marriage, how we treat the poor, money, prayer, fasting and worry. Jesus is indeed the king of righteousness.
 - b. King of peace (= ‘Salem’)
 - i. **Isaiah 2:4** says regarding the time of the last days, “they shall beat their swords into plows and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall

not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Similar in **Micah 4:3**.)

- ii. **Isaiah 9:5-6** (LXX) says, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given...I shall bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health by Him. Great shall be His government, and of his peace there shall be no end. His peace shall be upon the throne of David and over His kingdom...” (Note than in translations based on the Masoretic Text, he is called “Prince of Peace”)
 - iii. Jesus taught peace and nonresistant in the Sermon on the Mount. In **Matthew 5:38-48** he taught that we must not resist an evil person. Instead, his disciples are called to love our enemies and do good to them.
 - iv. Early Christians took the teachings of ‘the king of peace’ literally. In the beginning, (first 300 years) Christians already in the military were taught not to kill others, and Christians not in the military were forbidden to join. For more on this, see *What the Early Christians Believed about War*, and audio lesson by David Bercot, available through Scroll Publishing.
- c. Priesthood not based on genealogy (not descended from Levi), but “on the power of an endless life” (**Hebrews 7:16**)
 - d. Greater than Levitical priesthood, since Melchizedek was priest to Abraham (from whom all the Levites are descended). Abraham (and Levi through him) paid tithes to Melchizedek. (**Hebrews 5-7**)
 - e. His priesthood is eternal: “having neither beginning of days nor end of life...remains a priest continually”. (**Hebrews 7:3**)
 - f. Change of priesthood brings in a new and better covenant for us. (**Hebrews 7:12-22**)
 - i. Melchizedek offers bread and wine (**Genesis 14:18**), foreshadowing Jesus offering his body and blood (a better covenant), which we remember when we participate in the Lord’s Supper.

VII. Recap of This Lesson

- a. Abraham was just getting started at age 75. Don't give in to worldly attitudes about youth. God is looking for mature men and women who have been prepared and refined, to do greater things in their later years.
- b. Jesus is hidden throughout the Old Testament. Abraham's adventure to rescue Lot set up his encounter with Melchizedek, through which God presented a type of priest foreshadowing Jesus Christ, the great High Priest for all of us.