

Dr. Elaine Phillips, OT History, Lit., and Theology, Lecture 7

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Preliminaries and Prayer

Introductory Questions

We're moving on to Abraham today. We've got lots of things to do so I'm trusting you to read the narratives and get the basic issues in regard to the narratives and the characters. We're going to hit some highlights as we go through Abraham's life and I'll explain how that will work in a moment. But as usual, here's the question for us, presuming you've done all your reading for the day. At what point did Abram (this is before the name change if you know when that happens) believe God and it was credited him as righteousness? Who goes for 1 – When Sarah finally had a child? Anybody voting on 1? Well actually we should read them all first and see which one is the best. Second one – after he proposed that Eleazar would inherit the estate instead of an actual son and God responded and told him to look to the heavens count the stars and believe that he indeed would have a son--that's second one. Third one – after he circumcised all the male members of his family and changed his name. Obviously if you have "Abram" in the question, that's going to be an interesting clue. And finally, fourth – when he returned from the battle from rescuing Lot. Who goes for 1? Nobody's going for 1? How about 2? Anybody going for 2? We have about ten tentative votes on 2. How about 3? About 3 tentative votes on three. Anybody on four? We have about two there and the rest of you are "I don't know," right? Well here it is [the second choice] – Genesis chapter 15. We'll be talking about that in a little bit. This is one of the foundational issues in terms of our understanding of the narratives of Abraham and the importance of those narratives particularly as the apostle Paul is going to draw on them. So we're going to come back to this a little bit later on.

Any questions that came up as you were reading the Abraham narratives? I'm not going to answer them right now but did anything really jump to the surface as you were reading this stuff? (If it didn't, you're not reading with your intellectual antennas up because there should be a ton of questions.) And I'll raise a couple of them today.

Yes, a question from Suzanna. Did you hear the question? She's wondering how you deal with these vicissitudes in Abraham's life that are not exactly his most stellar moments in some of the cases. Is that a fair way to rephrase what you just said? Good! What I'm actually going to do – and Lord willing this will work - is to spend the first part of our lecture talking about God's promises and communications to Abraham and then we're going to come back and look at those places where Abraham seems to fudge it here and there. Thank you for the question. It's perfect.

And what other questions do you want to start out with? The question is: When the three visitors show up in Genesis 18, why does Abraham right from the get-go have this response that seems to be paying homage to them? I'm going to suggest to you that he recognizes something right away going on there because he's running to get this and running to get that in order to feed them. Hospitality is a big issue in the Middle East, but I think there's something more going on. Good question.

One more? OK, can I save that until we send the servant back to get a wife for Isaac, which will be, Lord-willing, on Wednesday. Good question. But we'll come back to that. Let's keep going.

Geographical Connections

We need to do a little bit in terms of mapping locations. And actually to do that for you I am going to read Joshua 24, because we have an interesting recital on the part of Joshua referring back to the father of the covenant [Abraham] as Joshua was intent on renewing the covenant. Joshua 24 starts out (verse 1) by saying Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. I'm going to be

pronouncing this “Shechem” – you probably know Shekem, but just recognize that those are the same place. Shechem is an important place; you can see it up on the map up here. I’ll say more about that in a moment. Verse 2: Joshua said to the people “This is what the LORD the God of Israel says: “Long ago your forefathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the river and worshiped other gods. But I took your father from the land beyond the river [“The river” means the Euphrates] and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants.” And so forth and so on. That sets the stage for us. These people have come from Ur. I may have said this to you last time – I think I did. There is a whole school of people that think that biblical Ur, in terms of Abraham’s stomping grounds may have been right up here east of Haran [see map]. But for now we’ll just stick with this Ur [in SE Mesopotamia], which has been excavated - there were significant things found there. We’re going to stick with that as the place where that whole family originates. They go and they stay in Haran for a while. Terah, Abram’s father, dies. And they made their way along these major highways [on map] past Damascus. Here we’re going to have an expansion of what’s going on in the land of Canaan [switch to Canaan map].

When we did our maps last time, one of the things I pointed out to you was a little green dotted line. Once they enter the country, this [the green route] is what I said was the Way of the Patriarchs. Now, we’re going to see it being used, if you will, by our first patriarch. Abraham is going to first show up in Shechem. That’s why Shechem has such an important high profile for the rest of the OT history or at least until the splitting of the kingdom and the move of the northern capital but we’ll get to that much later in the course. So, Shechem is a very important location.

Then Abram goes right down that Ridge Route [Way of the Patriarchs]. Although this map doesn’t have topography, we can recognize these cities as all being on that route. He stops at Bethel, stops at the area of Hebron, goes down to

Beersheba, and we've got Gerar there farther west. Then he's going to go down to Egypt, by the end of Genesis chapter 12, because there's famine in the land.

They finally come back and sort of locate themselves on the margins of Canaanite culture. Abraham is going to spend a lot of time in the Negev. That's a marginal area in terms of the water sources – but he's there and I'll have more to say about the water issues that go on in the Negev in a moment. But get a handle on the map because this is going to be important for us.

I will make a very quick note: you'll notice at the south end of the Dead Sea is where these particular mapmakers have put Sodom with a question mark. Sodom and Gomorrah - the five cities of the plain. I'll suggest to you that I think it fits the biblical text a little better if we actually locate them north of the north end of the Dead Sea - in other words, in this area right up in here. One of the reasons for saying that is in Genesis chapter 13 when Abraham and Lot go their separate ways, they're at Bethel. [Locate on map.] And it says Lot lifts up his eyes and looks to the east and looks across the Jordan Valley and he settles in the Jordan Valley. To me it's a no brainer that he's going east and settling down in here, i.e., north of the Dead Sea. There's a whole interesting set of archeological reasons why some people in the last century or so have tried to put it to the south. Take Dr. Wilson's class on archeology or my class on Introduction to Biblical Studies where we deal with that.

Any questions on the map before we move along? OK, carrying right along [with several photos]: Shechem - I think we've seen this picture before but just to give you a sense of what it looks like when there's water. This is taken in April and we see lots of wild flowers. Here we see Mount Ebal – that's going to be important later on for people coming into the land and renewing the covenant. Mt. Gerizim over here. Shechem right down [between Ebal and Gerizim].

As Abraham, or technically still Abram, journeys south, he's going to go past Bethel so this is our rugged area just to the east of Bethel. Looking down

towards the Jordan Valley, very faintly back there we're going to see the hills of the Transjordan.

Then finally the Negev. This is the area near Gerar. There is a dry riverbed Wadi or Nahal Gerar that goes through there so there's some vegetation. To give us a little sense of what it would be like to live there, here is a dust storm kicking up. The soil in Negev is very fine so when the wind blows, which happens quite often and if there's not a lot of rain, you've just got dust kicking up. There's a fascinating verse in Isaiah chapter 21 that talks about whirlwinds in the Negev as a fearsome image.

Definitions

Next, let's do some definitions. First of all, I may have added some extra things here from what you have downloaded from the lecture webpage so be ready to add a few things.

First of all: Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Clearly this is referring to those people who are the head or first. These are the first fathers, if you're going to take that word apart from its Latin root. Now, who are they? Name the Patriarchs: obviously, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Splendid! Who are the Matriarchs? Sarah, Rebekah, and actually Leah who was Jacob's first wife. Rachel is going to be in there as well. There are two wives but it's going to be Leah who was buried in the tomb right along with Jacob.

Covenant: We've seen this before. But we're going to do a little bit more with this now and we're going to do a lot more with it when we talk about the covenant at Sinai. There are a series of covenants that God makes with his people. This is a key time because Abraham now is going to be the father of a covenant people. So Covenant: an agreement between two parties – the Hebrew word is *berit*. Now let me just finish the definition and then I'll talk about that a little bit. Covenant is an agreement between two parties; it establishes a relationship; it creates obligations on both sides; and it is accompanied by sanctions, in other

words, rewards and punishments. If you do the right things, God blesses, but if you don't do the right things God does not bless and in fact he punishes. Now what are God's obligations – notice it says obligations on both sides. That's a little bit odd, isn't it? The obligations on the people as he's going to say in Genesis 17 are to be blameless, live an upright life, walk with God, circumcise your sons. What are God's obligations? Ginger. Yes, God's going to keep his word, isn't he? If God says something, that means he's going to keep his word. This is important for something we're going to do at the end of the hour, so hang on to that.

The next thing I need to say, and you probably know this if you've done some of the reading, is that the word *berit* is not only used to refer to God's covenant with us in a theological context but it's used more widely to refer to treaties. And, in fact, there are treaties that are made in the Old Testament that are called "*berit*". Abraham makes one with Abimelech. In the time of Ahab, the king makes one with Syria. So there is a covenant there or a treaty between two equal political parties. There are also covenants between rulers, sovereigns if you will, and vassals.

Cultural Contexts

If you've read Youngblood [*Heart of the Old Testament*], he describes these covenants made in the wider cultural context. Some of those political entities have overlords who are called suzerains and then there are vassals. Interestingly enough, the treaty that God makes with his people – especially the Sinai covenant - is going to follow that particular model. Am I making sense with that? This will tap into some of your Youngblood reading. Now why am I saying all that? Because in the wider cultural context, they had arrangements or treaties that were made between these ruling figures who were politically powerful; they had conquered somebody and that somebody became a vassal. And now here's the key: A major part of the suzerainty treaty was a land grant. Hang on to that because land, as you probably know if you've read Genesis 12 and 13, is a major part of what God is promising to Abraham and his descendants. That's all part of

this wider cultural picture in which land grants were given from suzerains to their vassals. Now we'll come back to this later – but just get that into your memory banks.

One other thing that we have to address in terms of our wider cultural context is this whole business of covenant cutting. As you may know, when the Old Testament Hebrew talks about making a covenant it doesn't use the expression, "making a covenant." It says "cutting a covenant." Do you know why? Yes – the whole process involved the slaughter of sacrificial animals and cutting those was part of this. Let's get this picture: an oath was articulated along with the covenant obligations. Again, this is true of the covenant with God but also within the wider cultural context. Along with these oaths that were taken, sacrifices were also made. This was true both with treaties as well as covenants. This sacrificial animal was to represent what would happen to the vassal whether this vassal might be an individual or a group of people. The vassal should look at those cut animals and say "If I don't keep those obligations of the covenant this is what's going to happen to me."

The message was often acted out. The vassal walked between the cut apart sacrifices showing that this is what would happen to him if the obligations were not kept. Where do we see that type of thing happening in Genesis in the Abraham narratives? Good - And God's Presence was manifested in the smoking fire pot. It's God who is going in between the parts of these sacrificial animals, isn't it? That's what's so significant about this. Abraham is, in fact, the vassal, but he's in a deep dark sleep at this point. It's God who takes upon himself the punishment - to be destroyed if the covenant is not kept. Now think about that as an adumbration of what we see happening in the crucifixion. We'll come back to that, but get the wider cultural connection here. It's fairly significant in terms of understanding what the process is in Genesis 15.

Literary Issues

There are a couple more things we need to say before we jump into the Abraham narrative. This is lifted right out of a small textbook that I use in one of my upper level classes; it's called *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth*. The author of the chapter [on Old Testament narrative], Doug Stewart, teaches up at the seminary here. When he starts talking about Old Testament narratives, he tells us that there are actually three levels that we need to keep our thoughts working in. First of all, we must recognize that every narrative no matter what it is, is teaching us something about God and his universal plan - from Eden back to the restoration of Eden, if you will - Genesis to the restoration in Revelation. Something about every narrative is going to fit into that big picture. It's also worked out through human history and particularly the tribes of Israel; this is the second level of narrative. And then there are going to be individual narratives as well – the third level. Every narrative is going to give us a little bit of a feeling for not only the specific named individuals but also their place within God's chosen people and how all of that informs our understanding of God's working out His grand plan.

We won't turn to Romans 4 now; we're going to do it a little later on. But Romans 4 is a tremendously important chapter in terms of how Paul is helping us think about Abraham as the father of the covenant people. In verse 11 he says Abraham is father of all who believe. Again we'll come back to Romans 4 in a bit.

God Pronounced Blessings for Abram and His Descendants (Genesis 12)

As I said, our first section is going to deal with God's communications increasing in specificity to Abraham or Abram initially. If you've got your Bibles I really do want to look just briefly at chapter 12, verses 1-7: "The Lord said to Abram, [and we're going to come back to that name thing in a moment.] 'Leave your country, your people, your father's household, and go to the land I will show you.'" If he is from Ur of the Chaldees, big Ur, then he's leaving a major cultural development and heading west with a stop at Haran. Now notice the big emphasis on blessing in this next section. "I'll make you a great nation; I'll bless you and

will make your name great.” Then, this next clause actually should not be translated, “I will make you a blessing.” I mean that’s nice, but it’s better to be read as an imperative “be a blessing”! That’s what God is telling Abram to do. Be a blessing. “I will bless those who bless you; whoever curses you will be cursed, and all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.” This is a tremendous declaration in terms of Abram’s position. It is not just a matter of covenant and a covenant people; that covenant people have a mission and that mission is to “be a blessing.”

Now I’ve also noted that we need to look down at verses 6 and 7. Abram traveled down to the site of Moreh from the site of Shechem. So we know that Shechem is the first named place that he comes to in the land, “The Canaanites were in the land but the Lord appeared to Abram and said ‘to your offspring I will give this land’” and so Abram builds an altar. In verse 8 he goes to the hills east of Bethel; we saw that photo a little bit earlier. Now, just a quick political note: I’m not going to wax long on this, but it’s important to notice it if you’re following anything that has to do with the Middle East. Think back on that map that I showed you of Shechem and Bethel. They’re right smack dab in what’s called the West Bank, and Abram is standing there when God says these things. And he’ll reiterate them in chapter 13 as well, “I’m going to give this land to your offspring forever.” That’s why some Orthodox Jews are so intent on hanging onto that land and building settlements, and all those kinds of things. They’re reading these as not just temporal statements, but as permanent statements. This is a factor that comes into their perception of their belonging there. Now again, there’s lots and lots of different ways of dealing with this from our perspective; I just want to let you know the biblical basis for their thinking on this issue.

We’re not going to turn to Galatians 3 right now, but let me encourage you to do this because not only in Romans 4 but in Galatians, Paul is addressing the issue of faith and what faith and belief involve. In Galatians 3 he’s noting

particularly that God announced the gospel ahead of time to Abraham. We're going to pick up on chapter 15 in a moment. So, that's our first declaration.

God Reaffirms His Covenant with Abram (Genesis 13 and 15)

Let's carry onto a number of reaffirmations and developments and increasing specificity in God's word to Abram. First of all, in chapter 13 (we're going to come back to the beginning of this chapter a little bit later on), they've come back from Egypt and they are increasingly wealthy. Bethel and the area around Bethel are not sufficiently supplied to manage all their flocks, and so, this is where Lot heads east and settles in the Jordan Valley. And after that's done, just notice, I mentioned this a moment ago, verse 14, "Lift your eyes up from wherever you are and look every direction. All the land you see I'm going to give to you and your offspring forever. I'll make your seed like the dust of the earth, if anyone could count the dust." Same thing that he said in chapter 12. Again, think of contemporary politics and why this becomes such an issue for the populations that are there.

Genesis 15 is the passage that I quizzed you about at the beginning of class. Let's look at it just briefly. Abram is 75 when this promise is made to him. Already 75, and now waiting and waiting and waiting. Finally he says, "I'm not bearing any children. Is my servant Eliezer going to inherit this?" And the Lord says (Gen 15:5), "Look at the heavens; count the stars if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be." And then verse 6 which, of course, is the key verse here, "Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." That too is something Paul's going to pick up on, later on.

Now, what's fascinating is that God goes on and says you're going to get the land; you're going to possess it, so land continues to be an issue. Then Abram gives us a nice little model that faith is not blind, dumb, unquestioning faith. Because what does he say next? What does your text say? "How can I know?" A perfectly valid question within the context of faith. And this is where we have the cutting of the covenant animals. Chapter 15 verse 13 - after Abram had fallen into

a deep sleep [this is the second time that phrase is used; the first is with Adam], the LORD said “know for certain your descendants are going to be strangers in a country not their own.” In other words, the land isn’t going to come right away. In fact, it’s going to be delayed 400 years. But then he says in verse 16, “but then your fourth generation descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” And then we have the event I mentioned earlier, the smoking fire pot with a blazing torch. It’s God himself who is passing between the pieces. This again has incredible adumbrations in terms of the ministry of Jesus Christ who does take the punishment for the broken covenant on himself.

Requirements for a Covenant People

Genesis 17: Abram is 99 and a generation has gone by. The first thing we have are God’s requirements for His covenant people. Verse 1 - “I am God Almighty,” God says, “walk before me and be blameless.” That kind of summarizes everything, doesn’t it? “Walk before me and be blameless.” But then he goes on and changes Abram’s name. What does Abram mean? “Exalted Father.” And what does Abraham mean? “Father of many.” Both very, very positive kinds of names. But, just think for a second what it would mean for Abraham to walk out of his tent the next morning and announce to people that they are supposed to call him Abraham. He doesn’t have any kids. He’s setting himself up for ridicule. Oh right! “Father of multitude,” that’s pretty funny. So even changing his name is a faith statement if you will. And then God goes on and says, “Every male among you will be circumcised. It will be the sign of the covenant” and a symbol of promise. Now children were circumcised in cultures round about. This wasn’t a totally unusual thing, but usually those circumcisions took place at puberty. Here, it happens on the eighth day. It is a declaration that this is going to be God’s child and be part of the covenant people. There’s a lot more we could say about that, but we need to keep moving.

God’s Promise Fulfilled

Isaac is also promised by name. (We're going to come back to chapter 16 in a moment.) In chapter 16, Abram and Sarai tried to engage some other woman [Hagar] to be part of this. Here we learn that it's going to be Sarah. Verse 16 of chapter 17 says, "I will surely bless her and give you a son by her." She's going to be the mother of nations. Abraham laughs at this and says, "Will a son be born to a man who is a hundred years old and Sarah bear a child at ninety?" He asks on behalf of Ishmael, who has already been born. And God says, "Yes, Ishmael is going to be a blessing too, but Isaac is the son of promise."

Abraham has laughed incredulously and Sarah will also laugh with incredulity, and when Isaac is born they name him that - "laughter." One of the things I want you to notice about this is that there is an emphasis on the word of God being fulfilled. Let me read it to you. Chapter 21 verse 1 and following, "The Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had promised, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore Abraham a son at his old age, at the very time that God had promised him." Do you get the point? What God has said, is coming true, even though it's been 25 years. God's word is being kept by God himself.

With that in mind, now let's turn over to Romans chapter 4, and spend a couple minutes there. What Paul has to say, picking up on this whole episode, is extremely important. I'm actually going to start a little earlier than verse 21, with verse 18. "Against all hope Abraham with hope believed. Just as it was said to him, 'so shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he realized that his body was as good as dead and Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet, he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God." Again, the word of God is what's so significant here--God's promises. What God says, God will bring about. Abraham "was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised." That's the key and he's going to go on in a moment to say that in essence, that's our faith too. It's just that we have a lot more details. We have 2000 years between Abraham and

Jesus in which the picture gets fuller and fuller and fuller. And then, of course, we have revelation in the New Testament. But the point is that Abraham believed what God said he would do. Abraham believed that God had the power to do what he said he would do. And that, in essence, is what our faith is too. Let's read on. Verse 23, "The words, 'it was credited to him' were not written to him alone, but also for us to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead." Hang onto that. It's what God said he would do, and He did it.

And then of course verse 25: Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification." That's the substance of our faith. But it's a matter of the Person in whom we believe and what we believe about God. That is that He's got the power to do what He says He's going to do. Now, let's go back and pick up the more challenging aspects of Abraham's life.

Abram and Sarai in Egypt

Trials and tribulations, vicissitudes, whatever you want to call them. The first one appears in chapter 12 and, as a matter of fact, the same kind of scenario recurs in chapter 20. You probably thought "now wait a minute. He doesn't love Sarah very much." Let's see what's going on here. There's famine in the land; Abraham goes down to Egypt. Chapter 12, verse 11. He says to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are and when the Egyptians see you they'll say this is his wife! So they're going to kill me and let you live. Say you're my sister so I'll be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared." I'm going to change the translation of the Hebrew here just a little bit: "my life will be spared *for you*." Not because of you. It can go both ways and it makes a difference.

You know, if you've got any a kind of concern for women's rights and so forth, you're really mad at this point because he's basically jeopardizing her sexual purity. The traditional view is that this is serious lapse on the part of Abram. I'm going to suggest something else. And I've lifted this straight from Gordon Hugenberger, pastor at Park Street Church, who has done an excellent

study on this. If you want more details you can get it on the Park Street Church website. His suggestion, and we're going to go through it in a moment, is that Abram isn't handing Sarah off to protect his own life. Abram is trying to protect their marriage! And in doing so he uses this practice [sister/wife adoption] and what goes wrong is that Pharaoh and Abimelekh are such horrendous, odious people that they transgress this when they shouldn't. Aren't you excited to find out what's going on here?

First off, the traditional view: this one is the one that I just briefly mentioned. This is Abraham slipping up; he's just saving his skin and getting Sarah into major trouble in the process. There are, however, some logical and biblical problems with this view. I've got them outlined here. Notice that God punishes both Pharaoh and Abimelekh. Now generally speaking, as justice unfolds, people who are guilty get punished. Isn't that true? Especially as God's justice unfolds. Maybe not right away, but in this case isn't it fascinating that it is Pharaoh and Abimelekh who are reaping the consequences of something. There are plagues on the Egyptians and Pharaoh. There's the closing of the wombs of the women in Abimelekh's little kingdom. They're punished. Second, in Genesis 26, the biblical text itself affirms Abraham as a person of moral rectitude. He's a good person. However, if you've got this major incident where you're jeopardizing your wife's sexual purity, isn't that a little bit of a black mark on your moral character? Third: Ancient Near Eastern cultures (that's what ANE stands for) have built into them a much, much stronger emphasis on shame and honor than we would ever imagine. We have little bits, but they've got a lot more. No man, in that kind of a context, would give his wife to another man. It just wouldn't happen. So something else must be going on here.

Well then when you move to the New Testament, isn't it interesting that Peter says (1 Peter 3:6), "and women, be like Sarah, who obeyed her husband Abraham." This is, of course, the key incident where she's doing this. It's hard to think that Peter would be encouraging women to do something that would put

them into the situation we've described. I would suggest one final thing: we don't have any record of Abraham, who is a friend of God, repenting of this. And when Abram leaves, he goes away wealthy. That's an adumbration of course, of the Israelites 400 years later leaving Egypt with lots of wealth. So maybe it's not the way we've been traditionally reading it. Maybe there's another way to look at this.

Again, I'm lifting this from Gordon Hugenberger. Kings in the ANE cultures, and we're talking about smaller kingdoms because we don't have great big empires at this point in time, built their wealth and status through marriage. So kings in the ANE entered into marriages to increase their wealth and their power. This is going to continue well into David's and Solomon's time. If you've read those narratives you know that Solomon in particular has a whole passel of wives and concubines and many of them are political capital. It's already happening before that.

What does Sarah's name mean? Princess. In our day and age, we name people Sarah because it's a nice biblical name, but it meant something back then. Her very name represents somebody with substance coming from a family with substance - coming from a family probably with lots of property. Coming from a culture where people would look at this and say "Mmmm. That looks like somebody I'd like to have to increase my wealth and increase my power."

There is a Hurrian custom that may help us understand this. I know that there are some people who discount this, but Hugenberger is saying, "no, don't discount it quite so fast" We need to think about it. There is such a thing called adopting a sister. It was a whole legal process. And in this legal process there would not be a dowry because the brother is adopting this woman as sister. He is not going to get a dowry because he's not her husband. Now the place where Abraham is not fully presenting the truth is that he is also her husband. But if he is her half-brother already (and we know that from Genesis 20) and if he creates this legal situation, by adopting her as sister so that he can say "everywhere we go say you are my sister," then it will mean that she is no longer fair game for

someone who wants to get her for her wealth. If the brother were killed the wealth wouldn't go to the sister – right? No dowry. And therefore the rulers - the pharaohs, the Abimelekhs, the who-elses - shouldn't want her because they could not get her wealth even if Abraham “just happened” to die. They shouldn't have been tempted by Sarah. And this is the translation that I just changed for you a moment ago: rather than saying “my life will be spared because of you” (in other words, “you go into Pharaoh's turf” is the traditional interpretation, he'll like you a lot and he'll keep me alive), that's not necessarily the only way you can translate it. Rather, “My life will be spared for you. They'll let us live together, they won't take you away, and our marriage will be intact.”

Here's the final thing to keep in mind here. Abraham, by creating this legal protection... because he's adopted her as his sister, in addition to being married to her... in creating that legal protection, he had no idea that somebody would be so awful as to actually come in and to take her anyway. The Hebrew word there is “take,” suggesting possibly abduction. Abram didn't imagine Pharaoh would abduct his sister without asking permission and, of course, he would never give that, for all the obvious reasons. And they should have been asking his permission as her brother. Is that making sense? By the way I'm about 90% convinced of this. There are a couple holes in it, and if we had time, we could go through the holes in it, but it makes a lot more sense than the traditional interpretation.

God does indeed punish Pharaoh (the end of Genesis chapter 12). And that, as I said a moment ago, is going to be an adumbration of when God wreaks havoc through the plagues on Egypt when the Israelites are down there. And then Abraham will leave Egypt wealthy; Israel will do that some four centuries later. Again this doesn't solve all the problems. If you need to think it through a little bit more – get on the Park St. website and you'll see some more of the interesting details there. I'd love to entertain some questions – but we've got to get to Genesis 22 and we got a ways to go yet. Are you good with this so far?

[Question] Yes, but if they wanted her they should have asked the brother. In other words, this is a brother-sister adoption. If they wanted her as a wife or for the harem, permission should have gone through him and of course, he wouldn't give it. That's the way the scheme is supposedly working. Now what's fascinating is that within the context of Egypt, it says she's beautiful – she's only 65 at that point. Sarah lives to be 127. So when she's 65 she's middle-aged, probably the equivalent of our 40-something, and you better believe that your mother is a beautiful woman. She is. And she's probably in her 40's or 50's. That doesn't rule out Sarah's beauty just because she's 65. In the second narrative, when she's 90, the text doesn't say that anymore. Now Abimelekh is just going to abduct her, take her, probably for the wealth that would have been part of it. Again, a lot more that we could deal with on that but we've got other things to talk about.

Abram and Melchizedek

Well, here are some major issues. Lot will go settle in Sodom. We've talked about that already, and I'm suggesting that Sodom was just north of the Sea of Salt or the Dead Sea. In Genesis 14, there is a war between four kings and five kings. This, by the way, is a typical picture of major kinglets coming from the area of Mesopotamia trying to take over places in our "land between" because they see the advantages of doing so. At any rate, in the course of this war, Lot gets abducted by the kings from Mesopotamia and Abram has to go chasing after them. An indication of how wealthy Abram is by this time is that he's got 318 men that he can muster from his household (army) to pursue these kings and rescue Lot. When he gets back, Melchizedek comes out to meet him. Melchizedek is an interesting individual; his name means "king of righteousness." He is king of Salem, and we learn from reading Psalm 76, that Salem is equated with Zion. When it says he's king of Salem, that's going to be the Jerusalem region. This "king of righteousness," king of Salem, comes out to meet him. He's called a priest of God Most High and he comes out and blesses Abram and Abram gives him a tithe.

Now the name Melchizedek shows up three places in Scripture. The first is here. It also shows up in Psalm 110, where it says, “You shall be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 are the only places it’s mentioned in the Old Testament. But the author of the book of Hebrews at the end of chapter 5 and in chapter 7 is going to develop the idea of Melchizedek as being a precursor of Jesus who, of course, is our great high Priest. We’re going to do more with that when we do Psalm 110. But don’t lose sight of the importance of Melchizedek here.

The Tragedy of Sodom

Still with regard to Lot, we have the very sad and tragic narrative in Genesis 18 and 19. The city of Sodom is shot through with sin. I know that as we read that narrative the high profile sin is homosexual practice--same-gender sexual practice. While that’s the high profile sin in that narrative, everything else is wrong too. And we need to keep that in mind so that when Sodom is condemned, it’s for everything that is wrong. Sexual sin is right up there; notice the fact that Lot is going to offer his daughters! That doesn’t say much for any of the ways of thinking that are part of this. But when we read the book of Ezekiel, we find out that every kind of sin is involved in the Sodom context. I’m not trying to minimize the implications of the sexual aberration that is there, because that’s going to come back, but what I will say is that we can’t solely focus on that. Let me say one more thing.

I’m well aware that within our context here there are people who wrestle with this. We need as a community to help them wrestle and not be ridiculing, persecuting, and saying ugly and horrible things. And I know, by the way, those things are said. So you be good brothers and sisters and watch out for your other brothers and sisters. All of us! All of us have terrible fragilities and flaws in our fallen human character and so people who wrestle with this particular challenge need help in their wrestling. Ok? Now, enough said on that!

Lot’s descendants through his daughters - again, we see all the mixed up

nature of what's going on here in the fact that his daughters will get him to father their children. Moab and Ammon will be the names of those children and they're going to be the forefathers of the Ammonites and the Moabites.

Genesis 16 is where Hagar comes into the picture. Because Sarah says "I'm not having a son; why don't you sleep with my handmaid Hagar?" But that results not only in the birth of Ishmael but in some terrible friction and family distress that we can only begin to imagine.

The Command to Offer Isaac

I know I'm going quickly but we need to spend the rest of our time on Genesis 22. "Sometime later God tested Abraham and he called to Abraham who replied, 'Here I am.'" God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah." 2 Chronicles chapter 3 verse 1 lets us know that the region of Moriah is where the temple was going to be built later on.

So notice we've got Melchizedek coming from Jerusalem and all the implications of that. Now we've got this incredible binding of Isaac and the commanded sacrifice of Abraham's only son, his beloved son Isaac, taking place in this same location. Place is important here.

Now, what's the test? What is Abraham facing? Think of what we said in terms of implications of covenant. He's got two words from God, doesn't he? He's got the one word saying you're going to have so many descendants you're not even going to be able to count them all. And, on the other hand, he's got this word that says, "Take your only son, your beloved son, Isaac, and offer him as a burnt offering." How do you put those two words together? If God is faithful how do you put those two words together? That's the test. Does Abraham pass the test? Well, let's take a look at Hebrews chapter 11 and see what it says about this because it's a pretty significant passage. We'll be visiting Hebrews chapter 11 many times throughout the course this term. "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice." Did you catch that? Offered Isaac as a sacrifice. "He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his only son even

though God had said to him, it is through Isaac your seed will be reckoned.” The author of Hebrews knows exactly what the test is and he is seeing the apparent disjunction between these two words. Here comes the punch line, verse 19, “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead.” That’s strong. “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead.” And, I know that your NIV says, “figuratively speaking” (this is a parable), “he did receive Isaac back from death.” We’re going to do a little more with that in a moment, a very quick moment. Isaac, by the way, at this point is probably about your age. It uses the Hebrew word *na’ar* which can go from a young kid all the way up through early twenties. So, Isaac is not a squirming little two year old on the altar; he’s willingly doing this. And that has some parallels of course.

The other thing that’s notable about this narrative is simply this: we have a ram caught in the thicket as Abraham and Isaac are walking towards the mountain and Isaac asks, “What about the sacrifice” and Abraham says, “God will provide.” And the provision is a ram in the thicket. It doesn’t happen right away though. Isaac is already bound on the altar and the knife is just about over head to slaughter him. And then there’s the ram. Do you know what Deut. 21:23 says? “Those who are hung on a tree are under God’s curse.” We don’t have time to do it in this class, but as you read through the Old Testament look for the number of times that people are hung on, or in, trees. Paul’s going to pick that passage up in Galatians chapter 3, and obviously make an application to Jesus on the cross. But we see it right there with this substitutionary ram, it’s caught in the thicket. Don’t think it doesn’t have some symbolism.

Well, of course, in closing there are some obvious parallels with Jesus, the only son of God, the beloved son of God. John 3:16 is picking up on that very terminology from this passage. Notice Isaac will carry the wood as they are walking up to Mount Moriah. And then let me tell you this, and with this we will stop. In Jewish legend, interestingly enough, as the Jewish rabbis read this narrative (and they read every word very carefully), there was a small strand of

Jewish interpretation, not the majority, but a small strand of Jewish interpretation that said that the blood of Isaac was actually shed on the altar. Isn't that interesting? And the ashes of Isaac were also there and they serve to provide merit, if you will, for generations of Jews. Now, you may ask, where's that coming from? I'll tell you two places it's coming from in the text. When Abraham's walking up there with Isaac, he says to his servants "you wait here. The boy and I will return." After it's all over and done with Abraham returned and there's no mention of Isaac. The Rabbis read that carefully. And then there's a very interesting preposition; it's the Hebrew word for 'under' or 'after.' And so when it says the ram was sacrificed, your NIV says "instead of." This little strand of rabbinic interpretation notes that this is "after." It's not a majority view but some of the Jewish rabbis said that Abraham indeed sacrificed Isaac. Afterwards, he sacrificed the ram. Isaac came back from the dead. Isn't that fascinating? It's probably in response to Christian teaching. These rabbis were living in the second or third century A.D. I think they're responding to the Christian teaching about Jesus who was raised from the dead, and this is their own little paradigm in the scene too.

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