

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Old Testament Literature, Lecture 7, Abraham

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Well, good morning. Have we learned how to say good morning in Hebrew yet? I can't remember. Have we done that? You don't think so.

Well, it runs like this. The word for morning is boker. Oh, that's splendid.

And the word for good, which you already know from what we were singing or trying to sing last week, is tov. Remember ki tov adonai leolam hasdo, right? Okay, so it's boker tov. You always put the adjective after the noun.

So, if I say boker tov to you, I'm saying good morning. Now, you don't just say boker tov back, although you could. The really polite thing to do is to say "boker or."

"Or" meaning light, morning light. All right, so this is your next lesson for when you go to Israel in 2010. All right, boker tov. Boker or. Splendid.

You can see these announcements up here, right? They all have to do with the exam, and I'm not going to insult your intelligence by reading them through, but let me simply stress the highlighted one.

If, indeed, you do want to take the exam in the Academic Support Center, please let me know by Wednesday so that I can make sure to have it up there, etc., etc., etc. Other than that, I think it's fairly straightforward. If you have time to read these, you can also read them on Blackboard.

The fire drill policy is there simply because there's always a chance that we'll have a fire drill during the exam, and we all need to be on the same page with regard to what happens because we lose 20 minutes from the hour if, indeed, we have a fire drill. So that's kind of how it's going to work. Here are a couple more things to think about.

As I said on Friday, the essay question is going to address issues with regard to sovereignty and elections. It's a 20-point essay question out of the hundred points on the exam, so do spend some time thinking about those things. That's going to mean reviewing some issues that you're reading in Youngblood's book.

It might mean taking a sneak preview of the theological primer that's on Blackboard, and then whatever we talk about in class might be helpful along those lines as well. So, get your thinking organized, and then my prompts in the essay question will

direct your writing for the essay exam. You'll also want to be fairly concise because there are no pages and pages and pages that you get to fill.

You have to compress it and make it fit on the answer sheet. So, I think that's fine. Matt's review session, Carrie's review session, all straightforward.

I would encourage you to go to them if you haven't been already and take advantage of those ways to study. Any questions about the exam? No questions about the exam? All straightforward. Everybody's ready to go. You will be by Friday. Well, let's... there.

Let's pray together as we start.

Gracious God, our Heavenly Father, Tender Redeemer, Most Holy Spirit of Truth, thank you as we begin this week together. We know you're with us and that you so carefully and tenderly guide us and direct us. Thank you for the protection that you give us, which we so often take for granted. Thank you for being able to get up this morning, walk, and just enjoy good health.

We ask your blessing on our study. We pray, Father, that you would, by your Holy Spirit, teach us. Teach us things we need to know to live better and be better servants in your kingdom.

Father, we would also pray earnestly, not only for ourselves but for those around us, for family members, and for your care and protection for them. We pray, Father, for peace in areas that are so torn apart. We would ask for the peace of Jerusalem as you encourage us to pray in the Psalms.

And God, that's sort of a marker for other areas that are so stressed as well. So, we pray in your sovereign goodness and power that you would overrule the forces of darkness and help us to be faithful to pray towards that end. We ask all these things. We ask in the name of Christ our Savior. Amen.

Well, we're moving on to Abraham today.

We've got lots and lots and lots of things to do. So, I'm trusting you to read the narratives, get the basic issues with regard to the narratives and the characters and so forth. 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 a question for us, presuming you've done all your reading for the day. At what point did Abram notice it was before the name change? If you know when that happens, at what point did Avram believe God, and it was credited to him as righteousness? Who goes for one when Sarah finally has a child? Is anybody voting

on one? Well, actually, we should read them all through first and see which one's the rightest one, right?

Second one, after he proposed that Eliezer would inherit his estate instead of an actual son, God responded by telling him to look to the heavens, count the stars, and believe that he indeed would have a son. That's the second one.

The third one was after he circumcised all the male members of his household and changed his name. Obviously, if you have the Avram and the question there, that's going to be kind of an interesting clue.

Or fourth, when he returned from the battle to rescue Lot.

Who goes for one? Nobody's going for one. How about two? Is anybody voting for two? Oh, we have about ten tentative votes on two. How about three? Yeah, we have about three tentative votes on three.

Anybody for four? There are about two there. And the rest of you are, I don't know. Right? Well, here it is.

Genesis chapter 15. We'll be talking about that in a little bit. This is sort of 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 won't answer them right now, but anything really jumped 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.

Or is Abraham just sort of there? Abraham and Sarah have a kid, and it's Isaac. Done, buried, gone. Not Susanna.

Yes, Susanna, good. That's great. Did you hear the question? She's wondering how you deal with these vicissitudes in Abraham's life, which are not exactly his most stellar moments in some of the cases.

Is that a fair way to rephrase what you've just said? Yeah, 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 go through the narratives again and look at those places where Abraham seems to, well, he kind of fudges it here and there.

All right, so that's exactly the way we're going to deal with it. Thank you, that's perfect. She's not a plant, but you could have been.

Are there any other questions that you want to start out with? It's another Chelsea. Yeah, go ahead. Yeah, 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, well, paying homage to them? I'm going to suggest to you that he recognizes something right away going on there.

Because obviously, you know, he's running to get this, and running to get that, and feeding them, and hospitality is a big issue in the Middle East, but I think there's something more going on. Good question, good question. One more? Oh my, is it? It's not Andrew.

It's Andrew. All right. Okay, can I save that till we send Abraham, well, till we send the servant back to get Isaac for a wife? No, to get a wife for Isaac, which will be Lord willing on Wednesday.

Good question, but yeah, we'll come back to that. Well, let's keep going and see what we've got. We need to do a little bit in terms of mapping stuff, and actually, to do that, I am going to read for you Joshua 24 because we have an interesting recital on the part of Joshua, referring back to the father of the Covenant, as Joshua is intent on renewing the covenant.

Joshua 24 starts out in verse 1 by saying that Joshua assembled the entire tribe of Israel at Shechem. I'm going to be saying the Shechem, you probably know Shechem, recognize those are the same place, all right? And again, Shechem is an important place. You can see it on the map up here.

I'll say more about it in a moment. In verse 2, Joshua said to all 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 worshipped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the river, the river means the Euphrates River here, and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants, so forth and so on.

But that sort of sets the stage for us. Our 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 who think that biblical Ur, in terms of Abraham's original stomping ground, may have been right up in here east of Haran. But for now, we'll just sort of stick with this Ur, which has been excavated, and lots of significant things have been found there.

We're going to stick with that as the place from which that whole family originates. They go, and they stay in Haran for a while. Terah, his father, dies, making their way right along these major highway areas past Damascus, and then here we're going to have an expansion of what's going on in the land of Canaan.

When we did our maps last time, one of the things I pointed out to you was a little green route, a dotted line in the center of the country, that I said was the way of the patriarchs. And here we're going to see it being used, if you will, by our first patriarch because Abraham is going to first show up in Shechem. That's his first place to appear on the scene.

That's why Shechem has such an important high profile for the rest of the Old Testament history, or at least until the splitting of the kingdom and the moving of the northern capital. But we'll get to that later. So Shechem, very important location.

Then he goes right down that ridge route, because although this map doesn't have topography, we can recognize these as all being along that route. Stops at Bethel, stops at the area of Hebron, goes down to Beersheba. We've got Gerar there, you'll recognize that as well.

And then he's going to go down to Egypt, at the end of Genesis chapter 12, when there's famine on the land, and finally come back and sort of locate himself on the fringes or 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 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 note, very quick note, that you'll notice at the bottom of the Dead Sea, south end of the Dead Sea, is where these particular mapmakers have put Sodom, with a question mark: Sodom, 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 here. In other words, this area right up in here. And one of the reasons for saying that is in Genesis 13, when Abraham and Lot go their separate ways, they're at Bethel.

That's where they are. And it says Lot lifts up his eyes and looks to the east and looks across the Jordan Valley and goes and settles in the Jordan Valley. To me, it's a no-brainer that he's kind of going east and settling down in here.

There's an interesting set of archaeological reasons why some people within the last century or so have tried to put it down at Sodom. Take Dr. Wilson's class in archaeology or my class in Introduction to Biblical Studies, where we deal more with that. Do you have any questions about the map? Before we move along.

Okay, carrying right along, a little bit to look at here. Shechem, I think we've seen this picture before, but I just wanted to give you a sense of what it looks like when there's water. This is taken in April, and so we see lots of wildflowers.

Here we see Mount Ebal. That's going to become important later on as we have our people coming into the land and renewing the covenant. Mount Gerizim over here, Shechem right down in that area.

As Abraham, or it's actually technically still Avram, journeys from Shechem going south, he's going to go past Bethel. And so, this is our area that looks a little rugged to the east of Bethel, looking down towards the Jordan Valley. Very, very, very faintly there in the background, we're going to see the hills of Transjordan.

Finally, the Negev. This is the area near Gerar. A dry riverbed, Wadi or Nahal Gerar, passes through it.

So, there's some vegetation. And then, to give us a little bit of a sense of what it would be like to live there, here is a dust storm kicking up. The soil in the Negev is very fine.

And so, when the wind blows, which happens quite often, and of course, if there's not a lot of rain, you've just got dust kicking up. There's a fascinating verse, I believe it's Isaiah chapter 20 or 21, that talks about how whirlwinds in the Negev are Israel's armies when they come. I'm kind of picking up on this particular phraseology.

Okay, a little bit of stuff to get us going there visually. Let's do some definitions. First of all, I may have some things added in here from what you might have downloaded from the lecture outline from the web page.

So, I will be ready to add a few things if I don't get it all in there, first of all, patriarchs and matriarchs. Clearly, this refers to those people who are the head or the first, the first fathers.

If you're going to just pick that word apart from its Latin root, the fathers who are the first, who are they? Name the patriarchs. Obviously, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Splendid.

Who are the matriarchs? Sarah, Rebecca, and actually Leah. Okay, first wife, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and then Rachel's going to be in there as well. There are two wives, but it's going to be Leah, who's going to be married in the tomb right along with Jacob.

Covenant. We've seen this before, but we're going to do a little more to expand on it now, and then we're going to do a lot more to expand on it when we start talking about the covenant at Sinai. There are a series of covenants that God makes with his people, and 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, do you remember this from Dr. Wilson? *Berit*. B-apostrophe-R-I-T is probably the best way to say it. Spell it. It's transliterated: *Berit*.

Now, let me just finish the definition, and then I'll talk about that a little bit. An agreement between two parties establishes a relationship, entails obligations on both sides, and is accompanied by sanctions. In other words, rewards and punishments.

If you do the right things, God blesses you. If you don't do them, God doesn't bless, and in fact, he punishes you. Now, what are God's obligations? Notice it says obligations on both sides.

That's a little bit odd, isn't it? You know, the obligations on the people are to, well, as he's going to say to Abraham in Genesis chapter 17, be blameless, live an upright life, walk with God, circumcise your sons. What are God's obligations? *Berit*. Okay.

Yeah, God's going to keep his word, isn't he? So, 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 kind of hang on to that. Now, 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; it's used more widely to refer to treaties.

In fact, there are treaties in the Old Testament that are called *berits*. Abraham made one with Abimelech, and Ahab made one with Syria.

Okay? So, there is a covenant there, or a treaty, between two equal political parties. There are also covenants between rulers, sovereigns, if you will, suzerains, and people who will be vassals. And if you've read *Youngblood*, I think it's a second covenant chapter; I'm not really sure now because I know there are two chapters on covenant.

He describes these covenants that were made in the wider cultural context around our people of Israel. And some of those have overlords who are called suzerains, and then they're vassals. And, 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 of that? This will tap into some of your Youngblood reading. Now, why am I saying all that? Because some of these things, in terms of the wider cultural context, when we had, or when we know that they had arrangements or treaties that were made between these ruling figures who, generally speaking, were politically powerful, and they had conquered somebody and that somebody becomes a vassal. Now, here's the key.

Suzerainty treaties in which a major part of the treaty was a land grant. Hang on to that because land, as you probably know if you've read Genesis 12 and beyond, land is a major part of what God promised to Abraham and his descendants. And it's falling into this wider cultural picture of land grants from suzerains to their vassals if you will.

Now, we'll come back to this later, but just to kind of get that in your memory banks, if you will. So far, so good? All right. One other thing we have to kind of draw in, in terms of our wider cultural context, before we jump right into the Abraham narratives, is this whole business of covenant cutting.

As you may know, when the Old Testament talks about making a covenant, it doesn't say in Hebrew, making a covenant. It says cutting the covenant. Do you know why? Susanna? Yeah, the whole process involved, I mean, part of this taking the oath along with the covenant 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 with the covenant with God, as well as the wider cultural context.

Along with those oaths that were taken, sacrifices were made. And again, both with treaties, as well as covenants, that are made more theologically understood. This sacrificial animal was to represent what would happen to the vassal.

Whether this vassal might be an individual, a group of people, or whatever. So, I've got entities stuck in there. I.e., the vassal should look at those cut animals and say, uh-oh, if I don't keep the obligations of the covenant, this is incumbent upon what's going to, this is what's going to happen to me.

Now, hang on to that as well. The message was often acted out. The vassal walked between the cut-up parts, declaring that this should happen to him if the obligations were not kept.

Now, the minute you finish copying that, stop and think for a moment. Where do we see that kind of thing happening in Genesis, in the Abraham narratives? Anybody know? Kristen. And God, actually, in the smoking fire part, it's fire pot.

It's God who's the one who's going between these parts of the sacrificial animals, isn't it? That's what's so significant about this. It's not that Abraham is the vassal's got to walk; in fact, he's in a deep, dark sleep at this point. And it's God himself, who takes upon himself the promise to be destroyed, if you will, if the covenant is not kept.

Now, think about that as an adumbration of what we see happening in the crucifixion. Right? We'll come back to that too. But get the wider cultural context here.

It's fairly significant in terms of understanding what the process is in Genesis 15. All right, got all that? That was some extra stuff I threw in there for you, I think. Here we go.

There are a couple more things we need to say before we actually jump into Abraham himself. This is lifted straight out of a small textbook that I use in one of my upper div classes called, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Who, when the author of that chapter, Doug Stewart, teaches up at the seminary up here, when he starts talking about Old Testament narratives, he says we need to keep in mind that there are actually three levels that we're supposed to have our thoughts working at.

First of all, we need to realize that every narrative, no matter what it is, is teaching us something about God and his universal plan. You know, from Eden back to the restoration of Eden, if you will. Eden and Genesis, the restoration and revelation.

Something about the narrative is going to fit in that big, big picture. It's also worked out throughout human history, particularly in the tribes of Israel, and then there are going to be individual narratives as well. Okay, chosen people, their relationship with him, and teach us about the sovereign universal plan.

So, individuals, God's chosen people, God's plan. Every narrative is going to give us a little bit of a feeling for this kind of thing. We won't turn to Romans 4 now.

We're going to do a little bit 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 in verse 11, he says, Abraham's the father of all who believe.

Again, we're going to come back to Romans 4 in a bit. Are we ready to carry on? Here we go. As I said, our first section is going to deal with God's communications, increasing in specificity to Abraham.

And again, I've misspoken because it really is Abram to start with. If you've got your Bibles, we really do want to look just briefly at chapter 12, verses 1 through 7. Here it all is. But I'd like to read it as well.

The Lord had said to Abram, and we're going to come back to that name thing in a moment. The Lord had said to Avram, leave your country, your people, your father's household, and go to the land I will show you. Again, if he's 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 emphasis on blessing in this next section, okay? I'll make you a great nation. I'll bless you. I'll make your name great.

And then, interestingly enough, if you look at what I've got up here, this should actually not be translated, and you will be a blessing. I mean, that's nice, but it's better to be read as an imperative. Be a blessing.

That's what God's telling Abraham and Abram to do. Be a blessing. All right? I'll bless those who bless you.

Whoever curses you, I'll curse, and all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you. This is a tremendous declaration in terms of Avram's position in terms of not only covenant and covenant people but also the fact that covenant people have a mission, and that is to be a blessing. Now, I've also noted that we need to look down at chapters I'm sorry, verses six and seven as well.

Avram traveled throughout the land as far as the site of the great oak of Moreh at Shechem. Okay, so we know Shechem is the first named place that he comes to in the land. The Canaanites were then in the land, but the Lord appeared to Avram and said, to your offspring, I will give this land, and Abram built an altar and then, in verse 80, went to the hills east of Bethel.

We saw that photograph a little bit earlier. Now, just a quick political note, and I'm not going to wax long on this, but it's important to notice that if you're following anything that has to do with the Middle East, think back on that map that I showed you, Shechem, Bethel. They're right smack dab in the middle of what's now called the West Bank, or occupied territory, or Palestinian Authority, or whatever terminology you decide to use, and it's Avram standing there when God says these things, and we'll reiterate them in chapter 13 as well.

I'm going to give this land to you and your offspring forever. That's why, and I don't, you know, wherever you come down on this, that's why the people who are Orthodox, or ultra-Orthodox Jews, are so intent on hanging on to that land and building settlements, and all those kinds of things, because they're reading these not

as temporary statements, but as permanent statements. So, this is a factor that comes into their perception of their belonging there.

Now, again, there are lots and lots of different ways of dealing with this from our perspective, but I just want you to know how they're thinking and why that's such an issue. Well, again, we're not going to turn to Galatians chapter 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. And of course, in Galatians 3, he's noting this particularly, and here he's saying that God announced the gospel ahead of time to Abraham.

And then of course, we're going to pick up on chapter 15 in a moment. All right, so that's our first declaration. Let's carry on to a number of reaffirmations and developments and increasing specificity in God's word to Avram.

First of all, in chapter 13, we're going to come back to the beginning of this a little bit later on. I'm sorry, but it's at the end of chapter 12. But in chapter 13, as you may know, they've come back from Egypt.

They are increasingly wealthy. Bethel, and the area around Bethel, is not sufficiently well supplied with agricultural produce to manage all their flocks, 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 up your eyes from where you are and look in 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.

The 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.

This is the passage that I quizzed you about at the beginning of class. Let's look at it just briefly. Avram is still wondering, you know, by the way, how old was he when this first promise was made to him? Chapter 12 promises? How old is Abram? He's 75.

All right, he's 75. Already, I'm getting up there, you know. Already 75, and now waiting, and waiting, and waiting.

And finally, he says, you know, I'm not, I'm not bearing any children. Is my servant Eliezer going to inherit this? And the Lord says, verse 5, chapter 15. Look at the heavens.

This is obviously a night vision. Count the stars, if indeed you can count them, so shall your offspring be. And then verse 6, which is, of course, the key verse here.

Abram believed God, and he credited it to him as righteousness. That, too, is something that Paul's going to pick up on later on. Abram believed God, and God credited him as righteousness.

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's the issue again, and then Avram 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? Right? You know, he believes, verse 6, he's believing, it's credited him as righteousness, but then he says, how can I know? This is a perfectly legitimate question in the context of faith, and this is where we have the cutting of the covenant animals and chapter 15, verse 13, after Avram has settled into a deep sleep.

This is the second time this word is used, by the way, in the Hebrew Bible. The first time is when Adam falls into a deep sleep, and the rib is taken out from him, right? Here's the second time. The Lord says, 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 and not going to come right away. In fact, it's going to be 400 years.

But then he says, in verse 16, in the fourth generation, your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. We're going to pick that passage up again when we talk about the conquest, so don't lose sight of that. All right, and then we have the thing I mentioned a moment ago, the smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appears and passes between the pieces.

It's God himself who's passing between the pieces, which, again, has incredible adumbrations in terms of what we're seeing with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who does take the broken covenant on himself. All right, taking on himself the curses of the broken covenant. Well, Genesis 17 is likewise important.

Again, we're coming back to 16. Avram is 99. A generation has gone by.

The first thing we have are the statements for the covenant and the requirements for the covenant people. Verse 1, I'm 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 his name. What does Avram mean? What do the footnotes in your Bible tell you? What does Avram mean? Does anybody have those handy-dandy study Bible footnotes? Exalted father. Good.

And what does Avraham mean? Father of many. All right, both very, very positive kinds of names, but just think for 10 seconds about what it would mean for Avraham to walk out the door of his tent the next morning and announce to people that they're supposed to call him Avraham. Doesn't have any kids.

He's kind of setting himself up for a little bit of, perhaps, ridicule. Oh, yeah, father of a multitude. Haha, that's pretty funny.

Are you talking about all your servants? So that, even changing his name, and I'm presuming to make a public declaration of it, is a faith statement, if you will. Well, then God goes on and says, every male among you must be circumcised. You're to undergo circumcision.

It will be the sign of the covenant, symbol of promise. Okay. Now, children were circumcised in cultures roundabout.

This wasn't a totally unusual thing, but usually, those were circumcisions that took place at puberty. Here, it happens on the eighth day, and it's a declaration that this is going to be God's child and be part of the covenant. All right, a lot more we could say about that.

A lot more, but we need to keep moving. Isaac is also promised by name, and we're going to come back to chapter 16 in a moment. But chapter 16 is that little aberration in terms of maybe some other woman going to be part of this.

And so here we know it's going to be Sarah. Verse 16 of chapter 17, I will surely bless her and give you a son by her, and I'll bless her, so she's going to be the mother of nations. And, of course, Abraham laughs at this point, and he says, will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at 90? He asks on behalf of Ishmael, who's already been born, and the Lord says, yeah, Ishmael's going to have. It's going to be a blessing too, but Isaac is the son of the promise.

And then we have that fulfilled. Interestingly enough, Isaac's name sounds a little bit like Isaac in English. Do you know what it is in Hebrew? Yitzchak.

Do you like that? Yitzhak. It almost sounds like a derisive laugh, doesn't it? It's the, oh, yeah, kind of thing. Yitzhak.

That's his name. And so, Abraham has laughed incredulously. Sarah will also laugh with a fair amount of incredulity, the Yitzchak sign, and then when he's born, they name him that, and it kind of carries that on a little bit.

At any rate, one of the things I want you to notice about this is that there's an emphasis here on the Word of God being fulfilled. Let me read this 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 a son to Abraham in his old age at the very time God had promised him. Do you get the point? Yeah, 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 just spend a couple minutes there, because what Paul has to say picking up on this whole episode is extremely important, I would suggest, for us as well. And I'm trying to find my way to Romans.

I'm actually going to pick up a little bit earlier than verse 21. In verse 18, Against all hope, Abraham in hope, believed and became the father of many nations, just as it said to him, So shall your offspring be. That's chapter 12.

Verse 19, Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead. He's about a hundred, 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, right? Abraham was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded. Here's the beginning of the punchline for us.

Being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised. That's the key. Now he's going to go on, and we're going to read in a moment, to say that in essence, that's our faith, too.

It's just that we have a lot more details. We've got 2,000 years between Abraham and Jesus in which the picture gets fuller and fuller and fuller. And now, of course, we've got the 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's, in essence, the substance of our faith, too.

Let's read on. Verse 23, the words that was credited to him were written not for him alone, but also for us. To whom God will credit righteousness.

For us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. Hang on to that. That's what God said he would do.

He did it. And then, of course, in 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 the same in terms of who we are believing in or in whom we are believing and what we believe about God. And that is he's got the power to do what he says he's going to do. Okay, well, we now have 20 minutes to go back and pick up the other stuff in terms of the more challenging aspects of Abraham's life.

Ready to go? Don't worry. We're getting to chapter 22. I'm not skipping 22.

Trials and tribulations, vicissitudes, whatever you want to call them. This one's the first one. If you read chapter 12, and as a matter of fact, the same kind of scenario in chapter 20, you probably thought, now, wait a minute.

He doesn't love Sarah very much, right? Let's see what we've got going on here. And let me get away from Romans and back to Genesis. Famine and land.

Abraham goes down to Egypt. I'm in chapter 12, verse 11. He says to his wife, Sarai, I know what a beautiful woman you are.

When the Egyptians see you, they'll say this is his wife. So, they're going to kill me, and they're going to let you live. Say you're my sister, so I'll be treated well for your sake.

And my life will be spared, and I'm going to change 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.

Now, let's look and see what's going on here. You know, if you're any kind of a concern for women's rights and so forth, you're really mad at this point. Because he's basically jeopardizing her sexual purity, right? Not very nice.

Traditional view. A serious moral lapse on the part of bvrarn. I'm going to suggest something else.

I have lifted this straight from Gordon Hugenberger, pastor at Park Street Church, who has done an excellent study on this. If you want a lot more details on it, you can go to the Park Street Church website. because he, and I wish he'd publish it, publish it.

But he hasn't done that yet, but he's got it on the Park Street website. His suggestion, and we're going to go through it in a moment, is that Avram isn't handing Sarah off to protect Avram's life. Avram's trying to protect their marriage.

And in doing so, he uses this practice, and we're going to talk about it in a moment, and what goes wrong is that Pharaoh and Abimelech are such heinous, odious people that they transgress this when they shouldn't. Are you excited to find out what's going on here? Well, let's look at it. First of all, the traditional view.

The one is that I just told you, this is Abraham slipping up, and he's just saving his skin and getting, you know, getting Sarah into trouble. Problems with this view. There are some problems.

There are some logical, biblical, theological problems with it, and I've got them kind of lined out here. Notice that God punishes both Pharaoh and Abimelech. 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 both Pharaoh and Abimelech are the ones who are reaping the consequences of something? Because there are plagues on the Egyptians and Pharaoh. There's the closing of the wombs of the women in Abimelech's little kingdom.

They're punished. In Genesis 26, the biblical text itself affirms Abraham as a person of moral rectitude. He's a good person.

Well, if you've got this major thing where you're jeopardizing your wife's sexual purity, isn't that a little bit of a black mark on your moral character? The third thing that Hugenberger points out is. The ancient Near Eastern cultures, that's what A.N.E. stands for, have built into it a much, much stronger emphasis on shame and honor than we would ever imagine. We have little bits.

They've got a lot more. No man in that kind of context would give his wife to another man. It just wouldn't happen.

So, something else must be going on here. Okay. Well, then, when you move to the New Testament, it is interesting that when Peter is writing in chapter 3 of 1st Peter, I've got one there.

It should say, oh, there isn't a 3 there. Oh dear. You know, put in 1st Peter 3 verses 1 through 6. That's a mistake.

I'll have to correct that. Peter says that women should be like Sarah, who obeyed her husband Abraham. And this is, of course, the key place where she's doing this.

It's kind of hard to think that Peter would be enjoining women to do something that would put them into the kind of situation we've described, I would suggest. And then, you know, a final thing. We don't have any record of Abraham, who is a friend of God, repenting of this.

So maybe it's not the way we've been reading it. Maybe. Maybe there's another way to look at this, and let me run through it.

Oh yeah, I forgot this one, too. When Abraham leaves, boy, he's going away wealthy. And that's an adumbration, of course, of the Israelites, 400 years later, leaving Egypt as well.

But let's see what we can do. Again, I'm lifting this from Gordon Hugenberger. You can get it on the Park Street website if you need more details.

The first thing that we notice is that kings in the ancient Near Eastern cultures, and we're talking about, you know, smaller kinds of little kingdoms. We don't have great big empires at this point in time. And so you build your wealth and your status by kind of getting for yourselves increasing wealth through marriage.

So, kings in ancient Near Eastern marriages increased their wealth and their power. This is going to continue well into David and Solomon's time. If you've read those narratives, you know that particularly Solomon has a whole pastel of wives and concubines.

Many of them are political capital. It's already happening before that. Sarah's name means, what does Sarah's name mean? Princess.

Now, you know, in our day and age, we name people Sarah because it's a nice biblical name. You know, it meant something back then. The suggestion is that by virtue of her very name, it's representative of 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 on this and say, that looks like somebody I'd like to have.

Increase my wealth, increase my power. Now, here's where the punchline starts. There is a Hurrian custom, and 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 was such a thing as adopting a sister. Okay, it's a whole legal process, and in this legal process, there would not be a dowry because the person that is the brother, in other words, that is adopting this woman as sister is not going to get a dowry.

He's not a husband. Now, the place where Abraham is not fully presenting the truth is that he's also her husband, right? 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 a sister so that he can say everywhere we go, say you are my sister, then it's going to mean that she's no longer a fair game for someone who wants to get her for her wealth. Brother or killed, the wealth wouldn't go to the sister, right? No dowry, and therefore the rulers, the Pharaohs, the Abimelechs, the who-elses shouldn't want her because they don't want the wealth.

I shouldn't have been tempted by Sarah, and this is the translation 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, and he'll like you a lot, and he'll keep me alive. It'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.

Our marriage will be intact, and 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, by creating that legal protection, he had no idea that somebody would be so awful as to actually come in and take her anyway. The Hebrew word there is take, suggesting abduction, all right? Didn't imagine that Pharaoh and Abimelech would abduct his sister without asking permission.

Of course, he'd never give that for all the obvious reasons, and they should have been asking permission as a brother. Does that make sense? By the way, I'm about 90% convinced of this. There are a couple of 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, which has so many real holes in it that I pointed out a little bit earlier. A couple more things to notice. Whoops.

Yeah, here we go. God does indeed punish Pharaoh in terms of the end of Genesis chapter 12, and that, as I said a moment ago, is going to be an adumbration of what's going to happen 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 Street website. 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've got a ways to go yet.

Are you good with this so far? Yeah, Becca. Yeah, but if they wanted her, they should have asked the brother. In other words, this is a brother-sister adoption thing.

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. Okay, that's the way the scheme is supposedly working. Now, what's fascinating is that in the context of Egypt, it says she's beautiful.

She's only 65 at that point. And by the way, you know, just let me just say this, so we'll kind of get it all out on the table. 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 your mother is a beautiful woman. She is.

And she's probably in her, what, 40s, 50s, something of that sort? You know, that doesn't rule out Sarah's beauty just because she's 65. I know some people scoff at that. I don't think so.

Notice the second narrative. When she's 90, the text doesn't say that anymore. Now, Abimelech simply is going to abduct her, take her, probably for the wealth that would have been part of it.

But yeah, good question. Again, there is a lot more that we could deal with on that. But guess what? We have other things we need to talk about.

Well, here are some major issues. Lot will go settle in Sodom. We've talked about that already, and I'm suggesting that's just sort of north of the north end of the Sea of Salt or the Dead Sea.

In chapter 14, and again, we could spend a whole hour here, so please go back and read it with your antennas up for this stuff. There is a war, and there's a war between four kings and five kings, and in the process of it, and this, by the way, is a typical picture of major kinglets coming from the area of Mesopotamia trying to take over some things in our land between, because they see some advantages down there. At any rate, in the course of this, Lot gets abducted, and they go racing off with him, and Abraham has to follow after.

An indication of how wealthy Abraham is by this time is that he's got 318 men that he can muster from his household and army and go chasing after these kings and rescue Lot. When he gets back, and here's our point, when he gets back,

Melchizedek, an interesting individual, whose name means king of righteousness. Melchizedek means king of righteousness.

He is the king of Salem, and we learn from reading Psalm 76 that Salem is true; I don't have that up there, but Psalm 76 equates Salem with Zion. All right, so when it says he's king of Salem, that's going to be the Jerusalem area, and you'll want to have that in mind. All right.

This king of righteousness, the king of Salem, comes out to meet him. He's called God Most High. He's a priest of God Most High.

I shouldn't say not called God Most High. He's a priest of God Most High, and he will come out, bless Abraham, and Abraham is going to give him a tithe. Now, the name Melchizedek shows up in three places in Scripture.

Here, it shows up in Psalm 110, as I've noted for you, where it says, in a remarkable psalm, we're going to look at it when we study the psalms. You shall be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Okay, 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 mention, not just going to mention, he's going to work up the idea of Melchizedek, and basically, Melchizedek being kind of a precursor in a literary context of Jesus, who is, of course, our great high priest.

Now again, we're going to do more of that when we do Psalm 110, but don't lose sight of the importance of Melchizedek here. Extremely significant. Well, still, with regard to Lot, we have the very sad and tragic narrative in Genesis 18 and 19, and you know it as well as I do.

The people of Sodom are shot through with sin. Okay, I know that as we read that narrative, the high-profile sin is homosexual practice, same-gender sexual practice. That's the high-profile sin in that narrative.

But everything else is wrong, too. And we need to keep that in mind. When Sodom is condemned, it's for everything that is wrong.

Sexual sins are right up there. Notice the fact that Lot's going to offer his daughters. That doesn't say much for any of the ways of thinking that are part and parcel of this.

But when we read the book of Ezekiel, we find out that there's an interpretation that tells us that every kind of sin is part and parcel of the Sodom context. I'm not trying to minimize the implications of the sexual aberration that's there because that's going to come back, and we're going to see it later on. But what I will say is that we can't solely focus on that.

And one more 30-second soapbox, if I may. I'm well aware that in our context here, there are people who wrestle with this. We need, as a community, to help them wrestle with it and not be ridiculing, persecuting, saying ugly, unkind, horrifying things.

And I know those things are said. So, you know, you be good brothers and sisters, and watch out for your other brothers and sisters. All of us, all of us, have terrible frailties and flaws in our fallen human character.

And so, people who wrestle with us need help in their wrestling. Okay? Now, enough said on that. Lot's descendants, through his daughters, again, see all the mixed-up nature of what's going on here, such as the fact that his daughters will get him to father their children.

And, of course, Moab and Ammon will be the names of the children, and they're going to be the forefathers of the Ammonites and the Moabites. Genesis 16, well, this is where Hagar comes into the picture because Sarah says, I'm not having a kid. 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 some family distress that we can only begin to imagine.

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 said, Abraham, here I am, Abraham replies, and God says, 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. We've got this incredible binding of Isaac and near sacrifice of Abraham's only son, his beloved son, son Isaac, taking place in that same location. The place is important here.

Now, what's the test? What is Abraham facing? Think of what we said in terms of the implications of covenant man. Right, and he's got two words from God, doesn't he? He's got the one word that says, you're going to have so many descendants, you're not going to be able to count them all. And then, 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's faithful, how do you put those two words together? That's the test. Does Abraham pass the test? Well, let's look at what Hebrews chapter 11 says about this because it's a pretty significant passage. We'll be visiting Hebrews chapter 11 many times throughout the course of 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 one and only son.

Even though God had said to him, it's through Isaac your offspring will be reckoned. The author of Hebrews knows exactly what the test is, and he's seeing the apparent disjunct between these two words. And here comes the punchline, verse 19.

Abraham reasoned. Okay, it's built off the Greek word *logos*. That's a noun, but it's the word.

Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead. That's strong. Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and I know your NIV says, figuratively speaking, literally, it's in a parable.

He did receive Isaac back from death. He did receive Isaac back from death. We're going to do a little more with that in a moment.

It was a very quick moment. Isaac, by the way, at this point, is probably about your age. It uses the Hebrew word *naar*, which can go, you know, from a young kid all the way up through early 20s.

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 a thicket. As you know, you know, Abraham and Isaac are walking towards the mountain, and Isaac says, you know, 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, of course. Abraham, sorry, Isaac is already bound on the altar, and the knife is just about over there to slaughter him. And then there's the ram in the thicket.

Do you know what Deuteronomy 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 with regard to Jesus on the cross.

But we see it right here in this substitutionary ram. It's caught in the thicket. I don't think it has any symbolism.

Well, and 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 that Isaac will carry the wood as they're walking up to Mount Moriah. And then let me just tell you this, and with this we'll stop. In Jewish legend, and I'm not saying this is it, but interestingly enough, as the Jewish rabbis read this narrative, and they read it carefully, they read every word and mined every word.

As they read this narrative, there was a small strand of Jewish interpretation, not the majority, but a small preserved strand of Jewish interpretation that said that the blood of Isaac was actually shed on the altar. Isn't that interesting? The ashes of Isaac were there, and they served to provide merit, if you will, for the following generations of Jews. Now, you may ask, where is 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 are going to return. After it's all over and done with, what does it say? Abraham returned with no mention of Isaac.

The rabbis read that carefully. And then there's a very interesting proposition. It's the Hebrew word for under, or after, or instead of, and it can mean any one of those things.

And so, when it says the ram was sacrificed, your NIV says instead of, this little strand of rabbinic interpretation says no, that means after. And again, these little, it's not a majority view, but some of the Jewish rabbis said Abraham indeed sacrificed Isaac. Afterward, he sacrificed the ram.

Isaac came back from the dead. Isn't that fascinating? It's probably, I think, by the way, and I'll let you go with this because it's after time, I think that's in response to Christian teaching. These rabbis worked in the second and third centuries of 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 their scene, too.

We need to stop. I've raced through all this stuff. Have a great day, and I'll see you on Wednesday.