

Title: Who Do You Trust?  
Date: August 7, 2022  
Subject: Trusting ourselves to God when we know the future but really don't know the future.  
Scripture: Genesis 12 – 22 (accounts of Abraham)

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Therefore, whatever God has chosen to put into his Word is useful for instructing our spiritual lives.

That being said, there are parts of the Bible ignored by Christ followers. Several of the places into which we haltingly dip our toes are four of the first five books of the Bible. We're more familiar with Genesis because of the accounts of creation, the flood, the tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, people like Abraham and Joseph. Less is known about book number two but there's still a grasp of some of the story about people leaving Egypt led by Moses. As for the other three, our knowledge and appreciation is minimal.

I'd thought of doing a four-part series on hidden gems from Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, but they're part of a set, the Pentateuch, the first five books. We'll begin with Genesis to ease into the rest.

Read Genesis 11:31 - 12:3.

Abram lived maybe 400 years after the flood. It's possible he had contact with one of Noah's sons or grandsons. The situation on earth had again become wicked as it seems most everybody had turned away from following after the Lord God. The Lord chose Abraham to be his means of bringing to pass his salvation story.

Abram's dad Terah is given credit for beginning the journey from Ur to Canaan. It appears he put the wheels in motion after Abram received instructions from the Lord (12:1). Perhaps he thought the blessing was coming soon and wanted to be part of it. He only got partway and decided to settle down.

This is the first time the promise was given by the Lord to Abram. The promise involved becoming a nation, being a source of division among the peoples of the earth -- those who would bless and those who would curse. The promise would ultimately be fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah, the Christ.

The promise is reaffirmed several times. The next time is after Abram allowed nephew Lot to choose the land he wanted so the two men could separate their massive flocks and prevent quarreling among their workers. The Lord appeared to Abram and told him he'd give him land as far as the eye could see to the north, south, east and west and that his offspring would be as uncountable as dust of the earth (13:14 - 17).

Sometime later, after Abram rescued Lot who'd been taken captive during war, the Lord appeared. The purpose was to bring reassurance about the promise. Abram was wondering if he'd have to make his servant the heir. The Lord said he'd have a son. He took Abram outside and asked him to count the stars as his offspring would be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:1 - 19).

More time passed and there was no son. Abram turned 99. The Lord appeared again and instituted a name change from Abram to Abraham, from “exalted father” to “father of many.” The Lord promised to make him very fruitful so he’d become the father of nations, kings would come from him and the whole land of Canaan would be an everlasting possession for his offspring (Genesis 17:1 - 8).

A little later, just before the Lord was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord came to tell Abraham about his plans. There was more to the purpose of the visit. The Lord told Abraham that by the same time next year he’d become a father and his wife would have a son (Genesis 18:1 - 15).

There's one more reaffirmation of the promise. It comes after the Lord provided a substitute sacrifice for Abraham's son Isaac. “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (22:15 -18).

These aren't insignificant promises. God isn't promising Abraham that if he's a good little boy he can have ice cream. The Lord's sights are set on the entire planet and all people.

These six expressions of the promise are only the ones recorded in the Bible. They came over a period of 40 plus years. The fulfillment of the promise didn't unfold quickly. Abraham was 140 years old when Isaac married Rebekah. He was 160 when Rebekah gave birth to Esau and Jacob. He died when the boys were 15. Abraham only got to see the second generation of the promise.

Let's see how he responded to the Lord's promise. You can keep your own scorecard. When the initial promise was given by God, he packed his bags and left his home, his country. He traveled with daddy Terah, stopped in Haran and didn't continue the journey until his father died (Acts 7:2 - 4). At that point he was 75. He and his entourage traveled to the promised land and stayed for a while. Because of famine he went to Egypt. Nothing in Scripture tells us this move was wrong. The error came while he was in Egypt (Genesis 12:10 - 20).

Abram was 75 plus and Sarah was 65 plus. Abram concocted a plan because of the beauty of his wife. He felt the Egyptians would kill him so they could have her. Sarah was to say she was his sister. It was a half-truth because she was a half-sister -- same father, different mother (20:12). It sounds weird Abram and Sarah would have married, but the gene pool so close to creation was still good enough to not cause harmful mutations from near relatives marrying and it wasn't until later that God prohibited marriage of close relatives.

The incident showed a lack of trust in God. Abram doubted God could protect them even though he'd assured Abram he'd have many children. That wouldn't be a possibility if he were dead. Abraham decided to try things his own way. It was a miserable failure. Pharaoh took Sarah to be his wife. His mind was changed after the Lord inflicted Pharaoh and his household with serious diseases.

Abram and company moved back to Canaan. Abram and Lot separate. Abram hears God's promise and builds an altar to the Lord (13:18).

The Lord appears again to Abraham. READ 15:1. There's more to the blessing. It wasn't just about offspring and being a blessing to people. It was the fact God was going to be with him. God presented himself as the I AM, the King of kings, the one who ruled and reigned in the world, who controlled it. He would do the same in Abram's life, yet he was a personal king, one Abram could know. Abram raises his concern that his servant would become his heir. There must have been some questioning in his mind since he didn't see any progress – he didn't have a child. The Lord reviews the promise and Abraham believes God.

The next major obstacle comes more than 10 years after the initial promise. Abraham is 85 and Sarah is 75. Sarah states that God has kept her from having children. She didn't think the Lord was keeping his promise. Abram agrees to her plan for them to have a child by her maidservant Hagar. When she becomes pregnant, things go from bad to worse. She despises Sarah who blames Abram as being responsible for what she's suffering, even though she admits she put her servant in his arms. Sarah ends her tirade: "May the Lord judge between you and me" (Genesis 16:5).

Sarah mistreated Hagar to the point where the maidservant decided it was best to run away. The Lord interrupted her flight. He told her to go back and her child would be the ancestor of descendants too numerous to count. Hagar declares that she has seen the Lord who sees her. She understood he cared for her. She returned and eventually gave birth to a son whom Abraham named Ishmael. We don't know the conditions of the home. We can imagine... dueling wives, discord between Abram and the women.

13 years pass. Abraham is one year away from the century mark. The Lord appears and declares himself to be God Almighty. He instructs Abraham to walk before him in a blameless manner (Genesis 17:1). The Lord again reaffirms his promise. Besides changing Abram's name to Abraham, the Lord renames Sarah to stress she's going to be the mother of nations and kings. READ Genesis 17:17, 18.

Abraham laughs at the impossibility of what the Lord says. He suggests that maybe God should reconsider his plans. Ishmael could be the one who'd live under the terms of the blessing. The Lord offers more encouragement about his promise taking place, reassuring Abraham the son who was alive, would be taken care of. Abraham needed encouragement and more encouragement and more.

We move ahead in the narrative but we aren't told the time span. It wasn't very long. The Lord shows up with two angels to inform Abraham of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Before that news is dropped, the Lord brings up the matter of him becoming a dad. READ Genesis 18:9 - 15.

Sarah is eavesdropping as it wouldn't have been very hard to do as the conversation was happening just outside of the tent. When she heard her name mentioned, her ears probably perked up. When she heard the part about her becoming a mom, it was just too much for her. She laughed to herself. The Lord heard and knew what she was doing and thinking. The Lord directly addresses Sarah as she really was the focus of this meeting. "Why did you laugh?... Is there anything too hard for the Lord?"

Sarah tried to backtrack and hide what really had happened. She lied. She said she didn't laugh. But the Lord knew what was in her heart and mind. He has the last word: "Yes, you did laugh." The Lord knows all.

What's the difference between Abraham's and Sarah's laughter? Why did the Lord react differently? According to Ellicott's Commentary: "The Jewish interpreters regard Abraham's laugh as one of joy, and Sarah's (Genesis 18:12) as one of unbelief. We may, however, well doubt whether there really was this difference between them; but our Lord confirms the view that joy was uppermost in Abraham's heart (John 8:56). Still with belief there was surprise, and the feeling that what was promised was so strange as to be well-nigh incredible. One who was ready to sacrifice his only son at God's word (Hebrews 11:19) would not be staggered by this strangeness, and yet the thought of Sarah's bearing a child at the age of ninety might easily present itself to his mind in a ludicrous aspect. As for Sarah, there is no proof that at the time when she laughed she knew or even suspected that the three travellers were more than men. She overheard their conversation, and laughed, imagining perhaps that they did not know how old she was. Really, the idea brought out by this double laughter is that Isaac's birth was contrary to nature" (Ellicott's Commentary on Genesis 17:17).

Fast forward a few days. Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed. I've never thought about the distance between where Abraham lived and the doomed cities. It seems like it wasn't that far and Abraham would have been able to see the smoke rising from the destruction.

Competing emotions would have torn at Abraham. He had bargained with God for the lives of people, that God wouldn't destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if he could find 10 righteous people. Abraham probably felt pretty good. His conversation and prayers had been effective. And then the crushing blow when the earth shook and smoke rose. But at the same time, he would have felt good about Lot being saved.

Abraham moved to a new location. He and Sarah reverted to the plan they'd previously implemented in Egypt with the same results: Abraham thinks he prevented himself from being killed, Sarah is taken into the king's household and the king and his people suffer severe consequences. The Lord appears to the king and tells him he is as good as dead because he has taken a married woman as his wife. The king is enraged and confronts Abraham. In spite of the way Abraham and Sarah acted, the Lord protected the soon to be mother of the son through whom the promises would begin to be fulfilled.

Isaac is finally born when Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90 (Genesis 21:5). It was a few, brief years later when Abraham faced his ultimate test of trusting the Lord. By then he was over 110 years old. The Lord asked him to sacrifice his one and only son. Wouldn't you like more of the conversation than God simply telling Abraham to go to the region of Moriah, to one of the mountains that he would be shown when he got there so he could accomplish the assignment? It would be nice to have some insight into Abraham's reaction.

What's recorded is Abraham gathered the necessary things and set out on his journey. We have a clue as to his mindset as he tells his servants to stay with the donkey while he and the boy go farther: "We will worship and then we will come back to you" (22:5). When his son asked about the lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (22:8). The New Testament gives insight into this test "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead" (Hebrews 11:19).

Abraham is revered for his trust in the Lord. He is regarded as the father of those who have faith in the Lord. [This is found in several books of the New Testament (Acts 7, Romans, Galatians 3, James)]. This doesn't mean he perfectly exhibited faith.

What about us? Here are some words from God's Word about trusting his promises, about trusting him: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5, 6); And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28); being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

We need to be careful we don't try to guide our lives by what our minds can concoct and dream but what God clearly says in his word. We use his truth as our guide and don't attempt to make it conform to what we want. Like Abraham, we know the future (heaven and God's promises) but we don't know the future (how it will work out). Our lives are a matter of trust. We won't be perfect in the way we follow the Lord either. We may wonder how long God's promises will take. We may think "what's the use?" We may want to try things our own way. We may try to help God out with our solutions. We certainly need more encouragement. Do we trust ourselves to God?

Andrew T. Walker has written an insightful book about one of the issues of our day (God and the Transgender Debate). He discusses how "our worldview comes to the surface whenever we need to decide how to live in some way" (p. 40). To make decisions, he says people "are looking for a source of: Authority: Who has the right to tell me what to do?; Knowledge: Who knows what is best for me to do?; Trustworthiness: Who loves me and wants what is best for me?" (p. 41).

He quickly shoots down the ideas of science or the individual being the answer by saying none of us is clever enough to predict the effects of our decisions, able to know ourselves that well and can't be trusted to want what's best as shown by the fact we've spoken unkindly or failed to study for a test (p. 44).

He points to a better story (the Bible) with a greater source (the Creator God). "A crucified Creator is a God who has the authority to tell us what to do, who has the wisdom to know what is best for us, and who proved that he can be trusted to tell us what is best for us. And so the Bible reveals to us a God who has the authority to demand your obedience, and who has the character that deserves your respect. This God really does know what's best for me and he really does want what's best for me...This is why Christians hold views or believe things that go against what may come to us naturally or instinctively. Christians have found a better source for authority, knowledge, and trust than our own reason or feelings—or our own traditions or assumptions...The Christian answer is to locate authority, knowledge and trust where it can find a firm, stable, fulfilling foundation—in the crucified Creator. He may not always agree with our feelings or reason—but he can be trusted, and he knows what he's talking about, and he has the right to tell us how to live. His words are good to listen to and to obey" (pp. 46 – 48).