

Prayer, Praise, and Proclamation

At Ardmore

* This winter and spring we will have a wonderful opportunity to have a mid-week spiritual boost, gathering Wednesday evenings at 6:15 to sing, pray, and proclaim the Word of God. Listed below are the topics from the Abraham stories found in Genesis which will be the basis for our proclamation.

Date	Text	Event	Contemporary Application
Ancient Stories			
Jan 9	Genesis	Introduction	
Jan 16	1:1-2:4	The Story of Creation	Our Faith Story of Beginnings
Jan 23	2:4-3:24	The Garden of Eden	Our Ongoing Disruption
Jan 30	4:1-16	Sin: The Sequel	You Have to Say Some Things Twice
Feb 6	4:17-27	The Beginning of Culture	More Art at Ardmore
Feb 13		<i>Ash Wednesday Service</i>	
Feb 20	6:5-9:17	The Story of Noah	Faithfulness is Possible Even in This World
Feb 27	9:18-10:32	The Sons of Noah	Why Do We Keep Trying to be God?
Mar 6	11:1-9	The Tower of Babel	Gift and Challenge of Language
The Abraham Narrative			
Mar 13	12:1-8	The Call of Abraham	What Would You Risk to Follow God?
Mar 20	13:2-18	Abraham and Lot	God's Control...When You're Out of Control!
Mar 27	15:1-21	The Covenant (Holy Week)	Believing God When it Seems Crazy
April 3	16:1-16	Birth of Ishmael	Does God Need a Hearing Aid?
April 10	17:1-27	Covenant of Circumcision	Godly Living is Covenant Living

April 17	18:1-33	The Lord Visits Abraham	When God Shows up, Will you Invite Him In?
April 24	19:1-38	Sodom and Gomorrah	Even God Gets Fed Up
May 1	20:1-18	Abraham and Sarah	Little White Lies Can Burn You
May 8	21:1-21	Isaac and Ishmael	Living with Life's Second Best
May 15	22:1-19	The Testing of Abraham	The Hardest Story in the Bible to Accept: Is God Too Demanding?
May 22	23:1-20	Abraham's Funeral Plans	Planning for your Death
May 29	24:1-67	Finding a Wife for Isaac	How Do You Find a Spouse that Pleases God?
June 5	25:1-18	The Death of Abraham	Life Goes On and On and On

Genesis: Introduction

I. Beginnings

- Genesis comes from the first Hebrew word of the book, *bereshit*
- it means "beginnings"
 - beginning of the world, history, and the people of Israel
 - it covers creation of the world
 - it moves to the creation of tribes and people groups
 - it moves finally to the creation of Israel, it's ultimate purpose

- it covers a huge period of time. From creation to Joseph and Israel in Egypt
- its essential that we (people who want to interpret the Bible) understand God as God of creation in order to understand God as God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- the rest of the Bible assumes Gen. 1. Assumes God exists and God created the universe.
- we can't understand any of the Bible unless we understand this.
- note: there is no apology. No defense of God's existence. It's assumed.
- Then we are told what God did through stories.

II. Thematic Center

- Gen 15:5-6 God's covenant with Abram
 - God promises and Abram believes
 - Paul's theology is driven by this promise. We are justified by faith (Rom 5:21-22)
 - this covenant of God creating life out of an old man and woman shapes our Understanding of God bringing creating out of nothing
 - everything is leading up to Abraham in Gen 1-14
 - and everything after Abraham is looking back on the promise (Land and Progeny)
 - at every point in Genesis "promise" undergirds the text.
 - sometimes its explicit (Gen 15), sometimes its implicit (Joseph story)
 - God has promised to stay with his called out/chosen partner until his purposes are completed

II. Stories

- Stories are the prime means for communicating these ideas about God carrying out his promises. We hear stories about God as creator of the world and God as creator of Israel. **Why stories?** Stories are the way a pre-literate society pass on their values and beliefs. Stories are the best way to pass along our beliefs, values, and history.

- The pre-literate societies passed along these stories, and during later times when education was elevated, writing and reading more wide-spread, economic and political conditions were ripe, then the stories were gathered and prepared for official use. They became canon. They became sacred scripture. It was probably most likely that these stories were finally recorded in writing in the time and David and afterwards.

- not made up/myth. Not historical literalism.

- Authentic Memory inspired by God.

(Authentic Memory vs. Historical Literalism)

- these stories are authentic memories of the how the early people of faith encountered God.

- Stories were the means to tell the faith story of the people.

- Jesus used stories to teach his disciples .

-Prodigal Son, Good Samaritan.

- My girls. Sleepovers at young ages.

- We played a game called “Monster.” There would be a home base, a safe place, then another safe place. Also a dungeon. I was the monster. The girls would run from one home base to another and I would try to catch them. If caught, to the dungeon they go.

- Then we would play dress up. I would let them dress me up, put make up own. Powder, rouge, lip stick, and ribbons or bows in my hair. Take pictures. Pre-Facebook, thank goodness.

Point: I’m going to play with my children when they want to play with me, b/c the day will soon come when they want to play with Johnny down the street rather than Daddy in the backyard! Turned out to be true. The point answers the question: How does a father prepare for the tumultuous teenage years with a daughter? The story is the answer.

The stories of Genesis are the same. They answer a question integral to the identity of Israel. So we have stories about creation, because descendants of Abraham wanted to know how things started. “Mommy, where did I come from?” “Mommy, where did you come from?” Genesis isn’t about just any ol’ stories. It’s about stories that we essential to the identity of God’s people. We don’t have questions about what’s the best GPS device. That wasn’t important.

- So what are the questions and what stories are told to address the questions?

A. Stories of Origin (chp 1-11)

- sometimes this is called “pre-history.” Chp 1-11 are about all the world, While chp 12-50 are about Israel/Abraham
- presupposition: underlying belief was that Israel believed God had specially chosen them to be a blessing to the world, to carry forth his message
- Gen 1-11 is a confession of faith by Israel. It’s a series of stories to give Israel its faith identity.

1. Creation (chp 1-2)

- Where did the world come from? (God)
- Where did man come from? (Ground + God)
- Is the world generally a good place or a bad place? (Yes, but....)
- What is origin of the two sexes? (God)

2. The Garden (chp 3)

- What is the origin of evil? (pre-existent)
- Why is there suffering? (Sin: Human and cosmic suffering)

3. Cain and Abel (chp 4)

- a more particularized and personal story of evil. Why is the world so evil that even family will kill one another?

4. Flood (chp 6-9)

- More than “Why there is a rainbow after flood?”
- Where did this idea of covenant come from? This covenant between God and Noah is the first one in the Genesis narrative. God enters into covenant with the earth. Not just Abraham
- the first sign of a covenant b/w God and people. The covenant is with all the people on earth. Not just the Israelites.
- the first of many promises in the OT. First of the covenants.
- God is in the promise-making business. This story reveals God puts some limitations on His wrath.
- Does God have a breaking point? Can evil get so bad he will zap everybody?

5. Tower (chp 11)

- Why so many languages? Why so much diversity (racial) among the peoples of the earth?
- Tower of Babel addresses

B. Stories of Abraham (ch 12-25)

- move from origins of all things to the origin of particular things.
- the stories of “a people,” the Hebrew people.
- Abraham, the one who left his home, country, and security to start a pilgrimage with God.
- stories of one who trusted the promise of land and offspring

C. Stories of Conflict: Jacob and Esau (chp 26-36)

- conflict in the nations. the lesser one becomes the greater one.
- deception, power, future

D. Stories of a Nation: Joseph (chp 37-50)

- move to Egypt and the growing population among the Hebrew
- Joseph is a representative of all Israel.
- Story about God's providence. They meant it for bad, but God meant it for good. Joseph's brothers intended harm for him when they sold him to slave traders but God meant it for good.
- The Egyptians meant harm or oppression for the Hebrew people, but God had good intentions for them. Promised land and freedom from tyranny.

III. Genealogies

- another form of instructing Israel about her identity
- more than just lists
- major portions of genealogies are woven into 7 chapters of Genesis
- Heavens and earth (2:4)
- Adam to Noah (chp 5)
- Noah's sons (ch 10)
- Ishmael (ch 25)
- Isaac (ch 25)
- Esau (ch 36)
- Jacob (ch 37)
- the genealogies are the appendices of the history of beginnings
- the stories give the history life. The genealogies give them anchors.

- the stories are undergirded by genealogical fact. This isn't made up history. It's real.
- There are stories about pastors and lists of pastors: Gordon, Ireland, Wilson, Shirley, Crouch.
- You have a heritage hall that combines stories and lists.

One Big Family

- the genealogies are reminded Israel is one big family.
- Further, it's a reminder that the human race is one big family. Israel has a special place. It is chosen and blessed. Israel is special. But it's special for a reason, to bear witness to God and his desire that all nations live according to his purposes.
- It's interesting to see how little animosity there is in Genesis between Israel and other nations
- Melchizedek is almost worshipped, or at least revered and deeply respected
- It's not until Egypt, then entrance to the Promised Land that conflict becomes primary
- In Genesis, Israel is special, but not postured in conflict with others so much
- Let's me know that God's intention is for all nations to live in peace with one another.

This was the intention in the beginning.

Man and woman were intended to be one flesh in the beginning

Man and woman were intended to obey and worship God in the beginning.

- Things went awry. Conflict, suffering, and evil found a place in the good world God created.
- Genesis is the first story that continues to retell itself generation after generation.

- God is a God of promises. His promises made to Abraham are promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We, as disciples of Jesus Christ, are given these promises, and we can bet our lives that Jesus will fulfill those promises in his life, death, resurrection, and final judgment.

How did it come to be written?

- commonly known as "books of Moses" (Pentateuch)
- if so, written about 1200BC
- If so, then it was written 100's, 1000's, or millions of years prior to the beginnings. How did Moses know about the beginning of time?
- I tend to think they were written during the reign of King David. Why then instead of Moses' time?
 - a. More leisure time
 - b. More exposure to various worldviews and other gods
 - c. More understanding, organization, and coordination of religious stories
- Regardless of whether these texts were written by Moses or a team of religious writers appointed by King David, they all were very distant from the center of these stories of beginnings.
- **So what happened?** As Israel was confronted w/ competing economic, political, and theological competition they set out to record their history, or better, to compile their history in a semi-coherent process. And of course God inspired this process from beginning to end.

Genesis 1:1-2:4

Creator Creates Creation

First Creation Story

- the second begins at 2:5
- the two stories complement one another
- *Elohim* in the first story, *Yahweh* in the second story

Creator Creates Creation: A summary statement

- each word is essential and can't be replaced
- the inverse is not true. Creation does not create creator.
- the statement evokes ongoing connection.
- We do not use maker or producer. We use creator.
- "Creator" connote an ongoing concern, care, love for the creation

- this is the presupposition for everything else in the Bible
- God, the creator, and the creation are bound together in a distinctive and delicate way
- this is assumed everywhere in the Bible

Context: Pluralistic Society

- Sumerian, Mesopotamian, Egyptian accounts unearthed in 19th and 20th century
- best known is Babylonian "Enuma Elish" (found 1876)
- good Bible readers are not threatened by these other accounts of creation
- the biblical account, our account is written by a theologian, a person of faith
- it is not an eye-witness account. How could it be? Only God was there in the beginning.
- This story is not journalistic prose. It is a confession of faith. A story of faith.

It is proclamation of God's decisive dealing with creation.

- How do we know what happened? The same way the Israelites knew what happened. Faith. Heb 11:3

Scientific Rationalism vs. Historical Literalism

- unfortunately this text has gotten caught in a modernist battle
- rationalists vs literalists
- caught in a fight like the two mothers fighting over the baby in I Kings 3
- they are willing to have the text abused, even destroyed to control it
- I reject both views
- this was never meant to be a play-by-play description of what happened in history
- those who require such a meaning, miss the whole point of the text

- on the other hand, there are those who scientific and rational, who declare this is nothing more than myth.
- some would dismiss this text as untrue or mythical because it doesn't mesh with scientific rational discoveries
- this also misses the point of the text.
- this story is not a scientific text. It is a theological text. It's a proclamation of faith.

- science is concerned with the questions: **What? When? How?**

- The Bible is concerned with questions: **Who? Why?**

- there is no need to be anti-science in reading these biblical texts
- only when science oversteps its bounds and make theological statements posing as scientific statements do we need to challenge it.

Science: **What?** Consensus teaches there was a Big Bang.

- from a black hole, a big bang occurred.
- tremendous energy was released
- the universe is expanding, continue to expand

- **When?** Consensus is the earth is 1.4 billion years old

- **How?** Consensus is there is some ongoing moving, change, evolution
- there are stages in the world's geography
 - there are stages in the human development

Bible Faith: Who?

- the Bible is giving us a story that is making a faith claim
- God is the Creator. God is the Who?
- The God of Israel is the Creator.
- the only "when" addressed in the story is "the beginning"
- this is not a repeating story. This is not a universal myth or tale
- this story about God creating the world is affirming the historicity of God's activity In the world. It happened in a particular time.

Bible Faith: Why?

- we learn this over the course of the whole Bible
- culmination is John 3:16
- God's love erupted into creation
- God's love overflowed into something Other than God
- God's relationship in the Trinity – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – moved outside the relationship

Pre-creation:

- What happened before the world was created
- v 1-2. There was God and there was "other than God. "The deep/chaos/waters represent what was outside of God. There was no time. God preceded time.
- The story teller has no interest in telling us how the chaos got there.
- the chaos is signaling what life is like without God
- the chaos is showing the outside of life in God, there is only chaos

Important Truths

1. God is the Creator

- Contra-materialism. We are not accidents. There was a deliberate will that led to our creation. (How would you like to be told you were an accident? We didn't mean to create you.)
- This should bolster our self—esteem.

- Contra-transcendentalism. We are not divine. We are other than God. God is transcendent. There is a God above us, outside us, different from us, more powerful than us who created the world. The world is not divine.
- the world had no say in its creation. It wasn't up for debate.
- there was no vote
- this was an act of a sovereign God

Richard John Neuhaus, in his book The Naked Public Square, argues that this loss of transcendence portends the collapse of society. Without an appeal to a higher power we are doomed to smother in our own creations.

2. God has a purpose for creation.

- notice God has an ongoing relationship w/ the world. He didn't just zap it in place in a split second. it took 6 days. He talked. he evaluated. "It was good."
- he was concerned with Adam after he created him. He needed a partner
- he had conversations with Adam and Eve. Told them to "make babies"
- he gave them work to do. Be stewards of the earth

- Is 45:18-19 speaks of God's intentionality in inhabiting the creation

- ultimate purpose is found in the NT
- Eph 1:9—10 purpose is to unite all things
- Rom 8:22 The creation groans. The creation responds to God and mankind

3. God's creation is fundamentally good.

- a polemic against those who talked about the evilness of the world. The world is naturally evil. It's good. Very Good. 1:31. God intends good things for all creation.
- Good: Air, Water, Sun, Night/Day, Diversity, Food. Man and Woman

- the world is fundamentally good. It has fallen and is tainted, but it was originally good.

4. Creation has freedom to respond and be responsible.

- God lets creation participate in creating.
 - he lets the land produce vegetation v 11
 - he lets the land produce living creatures
 - he commissions man and woman to “be fruitful”
 - he gives man and woman dominion over the earth. “Rule”
- he lets man name the animals
- he lets man have dominion over the earth
- here we have both Freedom and Sovereignty.

- notice the call is “Let there be...”
- It’s sort of like “Let’s do name tags.” And there were name tags.
- God is giving creation some space. He allows for creation to obey.

Ex. Hannah can be made to stay in a chair for 15 minutes. I can hold her there or I can risk and trust that she will stay there. Either way, I’m still in charge, in control.

-In Israel's story, her response was a mixture of faithful obedience and willful self-assertion.

5. God creates through the spoken word.

- “create” 3 times
- “make” 5 times
- “speak” or some act of speaking 14 times.

- Ps 33:6 *“by the word of the Lord the heavens were made”*
- NT affirms this: Rom 4:17 *“calls into existence the things that do not exist”*

- 2 Cor 4:6 God speaks us into his "new creation"
- Rom 10:17 Faith comes from what is heard

- God's creation is analogous to what he does to each of us. He calls us into being!!

The Garden of Eden

Genesis 2:4-3:24

Intro:

- we move from poetry to prose
- we move from a poem about creation to a story about the created ones
- no doubt, this is a different author, a different story
- the name for God has changed from *elohim* to *adonai*
- this is another creation story focusing on the relationship of humankind to God
- notice how it starts: “*This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created*” (2:4).
- in this creation story man comes onto the scene before a single shrub has been planted.
- man is the first creation, then God plants a garden for him.

Theme:

- first creation poem is about the “Wow” of creation. It’s a poem of praise.
- there is no dialogue in the first creation poem. It’s all God. God speaks.
- this creation story is about human destiny. The focus is on the man and woman
- there is dialogue. There is plot. There is a storyline.

- the theme is human destiny. It’s a story to explain how humankind came to be what it is. How we got ourselves into this mess!

- Not a story about the origin of evil. The serpent just shows up.
- It’s a story about our anxiety and alienation.
- This story does more to explain your morning newspaper than anything ever written

- War in Afghanistan?	Terror, murder, revenge	Gen 2-3
- Debt and the fiscal cliff	greed, irresponsibility,	Gen 2-3
- Te’o and Armstrong	deception	Gen 2-3
- immigration issues	poverty, plight of poor families,	Gen 2-3

- It’s a story with definite scenes. So let’s look at the different scenes.

Scene 1: Placement of Adam in the Garden 2:4-17 (READ)

- man is completely dependent on God for his creation
- God forms him from the dust
- Hebrew word for “man” (*Adam*) sounds like the Hebrew word for “ground” (*Adamah*)
- God breathes into him the breathe of life
- God gave him everything he needed to live.

Confession: God made us and breathed into us the breath of life.

Every breath comes from God

We combine the poem of creation w/ the prose of creation to derive our beliefs that we are made in God's image and have the breath of life within us.

Every human life is sacred b/c of this.

- We are different from the beasts of the field. We are made in God's image.

We have the breath of life giving us life. Animals also get their existence from God, but Genesis makes a special point to teach us that God breathed into us to give us life.

The sanctity of Adam's life is the sanctity of every human life.

Danger

- there is a command that God gives Adam

- the first words God spoke to Adam were command

- there is paradise, but there is also peril

- peril awaits when disobedience enters

- there is a freedom built into Adam. "You must not," not "You can not."

- life continues with obedience. Death comes with disobedience

Scene 2: Formation of a Helper 2:18-25

(READ)

- God does not intend to be man's helper. Man is going to have to find help somewhere else. Help must come from earthlings.

- Man will not just be a spiritual being. He is physical (from the ground) and he is social

- comical in a sense. Adam sees all the beasts, but nothing seems right. At last, comes woman from his rib.

- comes from his rib. Protective. Intimate.

- for the Hebrews, the heart is the essence of man. The ribs protect the heart.

- Note: Eve does not come from (brain) intellectual partner
(foot) subordinate partner
(sexual organ) sexual partner
She is essential partner

- app: Man seems complete. He has a vocation. Work. He has almost unlimited freedom. He has a partner, helper.

- It's all good !!!

Scene 3: Disruption in the Garden (3:1-7)

-the serpent just shows up.

- the Bible never explains the origin of evil. Of course there are that obscure passage in Isaiah 14 and Ezek. 28 that refer to a fall of Satan, but the historical context has more to do with the kings of Babylon than Satan. So it's best not to spend too much time on what the Bible doesn't spell out very clearly. Bottom line: The potential for evil has been part of the world from the very beginning of history.

- **Doubt**

- entrance of serpent, brings in doubt, serpent's question isn't a question about trees. it's a question about authority and obedience.

- at first woman interprets God properly (v 2-3)

- the first theological conversation in the Bible

- dangerous conversation to have

- here the conversation is not to serve God, but to avoid the claims of God.

“The serpent is the first in the Bible...to practice theology in the place of obedience.”

- God is not a subject, a literary concept.

Walter Breuggemann

- how often do our theological conversations head this way. They are not grounded in seeking understanding and thus obedience. They are characterized by finding sly, clever ways to interpret God's Word to diminish its impact and import.

- **Motive**

- serpent moves from doubt of God's prohibition to suspicion of God's motives. God doesn't want you to be as powerful as him. The serpent is telling the truth isn't he? Yes. But factual truth not grounded in obedience to God, becomes the pathway to destruction. Here we are getting at the core of mankind's sin. We don't want anybody to tell us what to do. We don't want to submit to authority.

- kids: They don't want you telling them what to do.

- work: You get irritated when you're boss tells you what to do, when it isn't what you
Want to do.

- churches: Don't want the preacher to tell them what to do.

- preachers: Don't want the deacons, or this pushy woman to tell them what to do.

- First Sin: autonomy. I will do things my way.

- the suggestion becomes irresistible as Eve looks at the possibilities of complete freedom and autonomy. "*delight to the eyes*"

- she is looking from the serpent's perspective, not God's.
- she looks at the fruit not as dangerous, hideous, prohibited
- she looks at it with delight.
- then the sin. "She ate.....he ate." The sin.

Paradise Lost

- the first thing they notice after act of disobedience is they are naked. And they cover themselves up. Man's first attempt to hide mortality behind technology

- they make something to cover their vulnerability, mortality, and were ashamed.

- sin creates its own punishment

- God has not showed up. God has not condemned them. They have not been punished.

- Yet, note the change. They were given the task of stewards.

- Now, all they want to do is use the creation for self-protection. They are purpose-driven people now. They're purpose is to hide, protect themselves from something.

App: Our Story

When self, self-protection predominates it means sin is prevalent

Fear is driving us.

We're more interested in our image, than our stewardship.

Scene 4: Judgment and Expulsion (3:8-24)

- they wanted knowledge rather than trust. They got it.

- their sin is seen in there speech. I was afraid. I ate I heard you. I hid. Adam and Eve both built a world around their own needs, rather than God's commands.

- They have moved from "You commanded..." To "I was afraid. I ate."

- same answer as Abraham (pretended to be Sarah's brother)

- same answer as Isaac (pretended to be Rebekah's brother)

- same answer at Peter (pretended not to know Jesus)

Punishment

- not what was promised.

- Is God a liar?

- God is not bound strict codes of legal boundaries. God is free.

- God's freedom is grounded in his commitment to his creation.

- The serpent will not win. God is in charge of this garden

- God will not be usurped. The serpent will not dictate the future, even if he does Alter it.

- Amazing Thing: The punishment was less than promised. They don't die. They are expelled. Grace is found in more than v. 21 "God made garments."

- grace is found in the punishment.

- the punishment is not immediate death, though that is legitimate

- the punishment is labor, alienation, subversions, toil

- even banishment from the Garden.

- But even then, God goes into the world with them.

- All is not good, nor will it be. But God will travel into the bad world we have Envisioned and invited into our lives.

The Story of Cain and Abel

"The Danger of Sin: Part 2"

Genesis 4:1-16

Introduction:

- ask the congregation: "Name some well-known movies that have sequels."
 - Rocky 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
 - Jaws 1,2,3
 - Pirates of the Carribean 1,2, 3
 - Harry Potter
- the idea behind the sequel is usually the story was so good that people want more (economics) and there is interest in what happens next.
- the theme of "The Garden of Eden" was the destiny of humankind. Why are we in the mess we are in. The story of Cain and Abel continues that theme. Here is an example of the mess we are in. Here is an example of the power and pervasiveness of sin.
 - The Tower of Babel
 - Noah's Ark,
 - the power and pervasiveness of sin is ubiquitous that one story will not suffice in describing it.

The Theme of Cain and Abel

- Our sin against God leads to sin against our brother
- Adam and Eve sinned against God
- They disobeyed the Creator.
- Yet they still remained in relationship with one another.
- The relationship has now been skewed. She will be under the rule of her husband.
- But it hasn't deteriorated into outright hostility, anger, and murder.
- the story of Cain and Abel moves us from a stable family to unresolved alienation.
- we move from vertical sin to horizontal sin
- we move from the problem of living within God's boundaries to living with our brother
- this story is about "the brother problem"
- Other brother problems: Jacob and Esau
 - Ishmael and Isaac
 - Ammom and Absalom
 - Prodigal and the elder brother

So here's the story. (Read and expand)

I. The Characters of the Story: (Gen 4: 1 – 2)

1. **Adam:** name comes from Hebrew word for “ground.”
2. **Eve:** name comes from Hebrew word for “living”
3. **Cain:** name comes from Hebrew word for “produce or create” b/c the Lord helped "living" create this person.
 - tiller of the fields (farmer)
 - first born of a woman
 - like many other first-born in Genesis he doesn't fare well in the story
 - think of Esau and Jacob
4. **Abel:** name comes from Hebrew word for “vapor, nothingness” who would name their child nothingness? Remember this is a story written, inspired by the God of Israel to explain things. Remember that Israel was once called Jacob. Jacob was the second born, while Esau was the first born. God created the nation of Israel from nothing, just like God created the world from nothing.
 - keeper of sheep
5. **God:** regards Abel's offering and not Cain's
 - has extensive conversations w/ Cain
 - it's not readily apparent why God regards Abel's offering and not Cain's

II. The Conflict in the Story (Gen 4: 3 – 5)

- The question: Why did God not “regard” Cain's offering?
1. God prefers shepherds to gardeners
 - is not David, the shepherd boy the “chosen one” in Israel?
 2. Animal sacrifice is more acceptable than vegetable offerings.
 3. God's motives are inscrutable.
 4. God accepted Abel's offering b/c it was given in faith, and obviously, Cain's wasn't. We don't know what was in their hearts. Only God knows what people mean/think when they are worshipping and offering sacrifices.(based on Heb 11:4).
 5. Abel offering the “firstlings” or best and Cain simply offered “some produce of the land. 2 Sam 24:24. Offerings must cost you something, require sacrifice.

I happen to think 4 and 5 are most accurate. The NT does affirm the idea of 4 and the text leads us to consider 5.

- it is a curious exercise to determine why God looked with favor on Abel's offering, but not on Cain's. But that's not the thrust of the story. It's intriguing but not central. Central is the "brother problem," not the offering problem or the worship problem.

- conflict is inevitable in any relationship. The important thing is not the origin of conflict, but how do we deal with conflict.

III. The Universal Dilemma (4:6-8)

- God knows why Cain is angry. A rhetorical question. Just like when he asked Adam and Eve "Where are you?" when they hid following the eating of the forbidden fruit.

- Cain is angry b/c God has shown favor to Abel.

- God knows that temptation has come to Cain just like it came to Adam and Eve. The temptation is to let his anger become destructive.

- Sin has not happened yet, at least clearly happened.

Sub-themes: The power of sin

- notice how God describes sin

- "*sin is crouching at the door*"

- sin is not passive. Sin is not simply a breaking of the rules.

- Sin is active, aggressive, assertive. It is lethal

- notice "*it desires to have you*"

- the verb here could be translated "lust."

- it's the same word used in Gen 3:16 to describe the perverted desire the woman now has for her husband. It's a skewed, distorted desire. Sin lusts after us!

- Cain is in danger. There is a danger that his anger will become destructive.

- **Jesus:** noted how dangerous it was to be alienated from brother

Mt 5:21-24

- it's so important that we reconcile, we can't really worship when we are alienated from our brother. We must stop worship and go reconcile.

Why? Because sin lusts after us. It wants to devour us !!!!

What this text is saying is that anger can become destructive. It can get loose, if we allow it. The text implies some ability on our part to fend off sin and overcome it. Giving in to sin is not inevitable.

Sub-theme: The power of choice

- Post-fall. This is after the fall of Adam and Eve.

Still Cain has a choice. He is not predestined to sin or kill his brother.

"If you do well."

"You must master it."

- the Hebrew verb here is *timsel*. It means "to master or to rule over"

- God is commanding Cain to master himself in a world filled with temptation

- It is the great gift and power God has given to man.

God is warning Cain not to play around w/ this anger. He must let it go before it consumes him.

- *"East of Eden"* by John Steinbeck, 1952

- the main character is contemplating the difference b/w the KJV and the RSV which had just come out in 1952. The KJV had translated this phrase "Thou shalt rule over him", a promise that man would conquer sin and rule over it.

- the RSV was more ambiguous, translating the phrase "you must master it"

- it was not a promise, but a command.

- We are not promised we will rule over sin. We are commanded to rule over it.

- there is space to fail. Of course, Cain is an example of that failure

Steinbeck writes: It is easy out of laziness, out of weakness, to throw oneself onto the lap of the deity, saying, "I couldn't help it; the way was set." But think of the glory of the choice! That makes a man a man. A cat has no choice, a bee must make honey. There's no godliness there.... This is not theology. I have no bent toward gods. But I have a new love for that glittering instrument, the human soul."

Steinbeck ends his novel with Adam, the main character, struggling with death, uttering one last word:

Adam looked up with sick weariness. His lips parted and failed and tried again. Then his lungs filled. He expelled the air and his lips combed the rushing sigh. He whispered word seemed to hang in the air. "Timsel!" His eyes closed and he slept.

Timsel. The Hebrew word for "master, rule." Steinbeck offered this word as a blessing to humankind. God has given us the freedom to choose good over evil, though evil is lurking around the corner, ready to pounce and devour us.

- Universal dilemma and gift. The power of sin and the power of choice.

- Cain chose murder, death, and alienation

- Without fanfare, the text tells us Cain murdered his brother. (v 8)

IV. The Confrontation with God (4:9-10)

-after the murder God shows up in the story again. He didn't prevent the murder. He allowed Cain the freedom to open the door of evil and allow the lurking lion of sin come into his life.

-once again he asks the rhetorical question.

- "Where is your brother Abel?" God knows the answer.

-Cain responds by lying to God. Notice the progression of depravity from Adam to Cain. Adam and Eve tried to hide. Cain doesn't. Adam and Eve don't lie to God. They pass the buck and try to lay the blame on someone else. Adam passes it to Eve and Eve passes it to the serpent. Eve admits then serpent tricked her. But Cain simply lies to God.

Where is Abel?"

"I don't know!"

And then he tries to divert the question. *"Am I my brother's keeper?"*

Abel was a sheep keeper. Cain asks, "Am I to watch over him like he watches over the sheep?"

- God sharply rebukes Cain. *"Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."*

App: God's response affirms we are our brother's keeper.

We are to look out for our brother. This goes beyond not harming him.

We are to protect him.

This is as contemporary as today's headlines.

I think of the angst this country is going through as we come to grips with our need to **protect our children**. For too long, we have looked the other way when a powerful man -- a coach, a priest, a teacher -- abused a child. We acted as if we were naïve children ourselves, when we watched another adult male befriend a teenager, take him into his home, into his basement under the guise of teaching him, mentoring him, guiding him. Powerful people observed this, knew something was not right, and kept their mouths shut. The Catholic church didn't want to hurt its image. Elite football universities didn't want to disrupt the flow of money from donors. Communities didn't want to believe a prominent member of their community could do that.

"Am I my brother's keeper?"

"Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."

- God will not look away. God cannot look away. Even if God can't see Abel lying dead in the field, he can hear his blood crying out.

V. The Verdict: Guilt and Grace (Gen 4:11-16)

- **Guilt**

- God places a curse on Cain. His guilt will be published. He is exposed
- He toyed with the prowling lion of anger and is now wounded.
- the ground will no longer yield crops for Cain
- this is worse than Adam's curse. For Adam the ground was laden with thistles. He would cultivate through the sweat of his brow.
- For Abel, toil and sweat will no longer produce fruit
- He will be a wanderer, like the people of Oklahoma during the great dust bowl of the 1930s. There is no place where they can be fruitful.

- **Too much:** Cain protests. His guilt and punishment is more than he can bear.

He believes he will be removed from God.

People will recognize his vulnerability and attack.

They will smell weakness, and try to murder him.

The murderer is afraid of being murdered.

He is like Osama Bin Laden. A fugitive wherever he goes. He will always be on the run, always have to hide. The murderer is afraid of being murdered.

- **Grace:** God will not allow this.

Cain is a murderer, who must face up to his crime,

But God will not abandon him.

God will give him a mark.

The mark will protect him from harm.

* What is the mark? A tattoo? It doesn't matter

- the mark is a sign of grace. God will not abandon Cain the murderer, just as he did not abandon Adam and Eve, the boundary breakers

- God is invested in his creation. Even when it is pushing against his will and his patience, he can't leave it alone forever.

- Cain went "East of Eden" away from the Lord's presence. God is not out there.

- But God has his signals that work in Eden and outside of Eden.

- The mark is a sign of God's grace even when God is not present.

- The sign is a mark of guilt and grace. In a simple, elegant way the story teaches us the universal dilemma for humankind. We are guilty b/c we have not been our brother's keeper. We have harmed him or looked the other way when he was harmed. Our souls are stained. Our

consciences are marked with guilt. But there is a reality of grace that God goes with us into those places God doesn't belong –prisons of cement and prisons of the soul. God hears the blood of Abel crying out from the cry, and God prepares Cain to go into the desert. The murdered and the murderer can never escape the ear and eye of God.

The Story of Cain and Abel

"The Danger of Sin: Part 2"

Genesis 4:1-16

The Theme of Cain and Abel

- Our sin against God leads to sin against our brother

I. The Characters of the Story: (Gen 4: 1 – 2)

- 1. Adam:**
- 2. Eve:**
- 3. Cain:**
- 4. Abel**
- 5. God**

II. The Conflict in the Story (Gen 4: 3 – 5)

- God favor's Abel's offering and not Cain's

III. The Universal Dilemma (4:6-8)

The power of sin

- *"sin is crouching at the door"*

- *"it desires to have you"*

- **Jesus: Mt 5:21-24**

The power of choice

"If you do well."

"You must master it." (timsel)

IV. The Confrontation with God (4:9-10)

"Am I my brother's keeper?"

“Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”

V. The Verdict: Guilt and Grace (Gen 4:11-16)

The Chamber:

- story of a Mississippi bombing of a civil rights’ attorney's office in 1967. The attorney's 2 young children were in the building when the bomb went off and were killed. Gene Hackman plays the man who planted the bomb, a 4th generation klansman. 30 years later his grandson, that he never met, comes to win an appeal in the Supreme Court or win clemency from the Governor for his grandfather. It is the 26 year old grandson's first death row appeal. In 28 days his grandfather will die by lethal injection. |

When they meet, the grandfather acts like a jerk. He belittles his grandson and the young man's father. He refuses to cooperate and share information that could be vital to his own defense. All he can exhibit is hatred and diatribes against blacks, Jews, and Communists, even his own family that he calls spineless and gutless.

But the young attorney won't turn his back on this bitter, pathetic old man about to die. Through hard work and ingenuity he uncovers a conspiracy that implicates many leading pillars in the community in the 30 year old murder. Despite this new evidence, however, the governor does not grant clemency and the capital punishment is carried through.

Just before he enters the chamber to die, the old man tells his grandson that he thought his whole life was wasted. He had never done anybody any good. All he had done was hate, kill, and spurn people. But as he looked at his grandson, who refused to hate niggers, but also refused to hate his grandfather, he concluded that maybe there was something good that had come out of his life — his grandson. Maybe something in him, something good had made it's way out.

The movie concludes, following the capital punishment, with the grandson hugging his aunt and saying, “Maybe now the ghosts will die too.”

app: the way out of the vicious cycle of death, hate, and estrangement is confronting evil head on and defeating it with love (hard work that won't quit).

National Reconciliation Day

Cain’s curse:

- 1) field will no longer yield its strength
- 2) You will be a fugitive

The Sign of Grace (w 15-16)

- the Lord put a mark on Cain
- the Lord gave Adam and Eve clothes
- the Lord gave Noah a rainbow and a promise
- the Lord put the mark of circumcision on Abraham and the Israelites
- What is the mark? Some say 1) hair 2) tattoo 3) both 4) one commentator said it was a dog. We don't know. But we do know it's function. It was the mark of protection. Although Cain murdered, God would protect him from receiving equitable punishment. It was a sign of grace

-God would not turn his back on Cain. The cold-blooded murderer remains his creation, his human child. Cain is still a fugitive, but God protects him wherever he goes.

Conclusion

This story is about the danger of sin (part 2). Adam and Eve's sin led to their banishment from the Garden. Cain's sin led him to banishment from any home place. Adam's sin was simply from the wrong tree. Cain's was killing his very own brother.

This story warns us about letting our jealousy and rivalry rule over us. It warns us about the power of sin to overwhelm us if we don't nip it in the bud, face it and bring it to God. God desires, not that we kill our brother, but that we be reconciled to him

Our world is filled with fragmented nations, communities, and. The role of Xtns is to allow God to reconcile us with one another and then for us to be forces of reconciliation in our families and communities and world. We are our brother's keeper. We will determine whether he lives or dies.

Additional Information

-1 Jn 3:12 "was from the evil one and murdered his brother Abel."

- Jude 11 equates Cain with covetousness, lust, and lechery

- Heb 11:4 calls him a man of faith. That's all the NT says about Abel.

Worship: Our worship and sacrifice, to be pleasing to God must be based on faith and sacrifice. Only God knows our hearts. When we worship and give with genuine spirits and our inner hearts match our outward expressions then we please God.

Micah 6:6—8 is one of the most important passages in the Bible about how God wants us to worship.

- 1) Justice
- 2) love kindness
- 3) walk humbly w/ God

app: the importance of dealing w/ our anger. Talking it out. Saying what needs to be said. Saying it face to face. Individuals and churches can become pathological, they can become distorted and twisted if they don't confront their anger and their disagreements.

Stats:

- 1 in 40 males b/w 15 and 35 dies a violent death
- men in their 20s are 4 times more likely to die a violent death than young women are
- the US has the highest murder rate of all developed nations
- over 1/3 of adult women are battered by their husbands or men friends
- 1 of 3 women are victims of rape or attempted rape during their lifetime, mostly by persons they know

app: We must learn as a nation, church, and individuals to confront one another in dialogue. Sin lurks at the door and wants to consume us, as it already is.

Psalm 133

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity.

It is like precious oil upon the head,
running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of the robes!

It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life for evermore.

Back to Jesus: notice how he turns our attention on our brothers at the moment of sacrifice, the moment of worship. (Mt 5:24).

We are our brother's keeper. Black, white, rich, poor. Especially when there is trouble or pain or injustice. God especially cares for those who have been unjustly treated or murdered.

Bridge to Troubled Waters **Gen 4:17- 6:4**

Introduction

- remember the hit song “Bridge Over Troubled Waters”
- written by Paul Simon and sung by Art Garfunkel in 1969

When you're weary, feeling small,
When tears are in your eyes, I will dry them all;
I'm on your side. when times get rough
And friends just cant be found,
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down.
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down.

- thought about that song as I was reading this text
- text is a bridge to troubled waters
- a bridge to Noah and his ark
- a story that will take an incredible 3 chapters to tell

- these verses are a bridge to these troubled waters
- not a lot going on.
- we've got 3 things.
- I don't want to say everything is fascinating in the Bible. Some things are just odd. Nevertheless, there's a reason they are here.

1. Beginning of Art
2. Beginning of Genealogy
3. Beginning of Strange Marriages (6:1-4)

I. Beginning of Art (4:17-26) READ

- in the midst of this genealogy we have some interesting “firsts” in the Bible

We have the first city –Enoch

We have the beginning of the nomads, the wandering herdsmen - Jabal

We have the beginning of music — Jubal

We have the beginning of art-- Tubal-Cain

We have the beginning of corporate worship (v 26).

A. The first artists

- Jubal is the father of music
- Tubal-Cain is the father of art – forging tools of bronze and iron

- the Bible will soon refer to many art forms

1. - Song of Miriam (Ex. 15:21), sister of Moses

- many scholars believe this is the oldest art in the Bible
- has an expanded form in 15:1-5)

“Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.
The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.”

2. Singing at new wells (Num 21:17-18)

In the wilderness where water was sparse and as valuable as gold, the Israelites would sing when they discovered a new source. Num 21:17-18, the song of the well goes

“Spring up, O well!
Sing about it, about the well that the princes dug,
That the nobles and the princes sank.”

3. Loud singing (1 Kings 1:40)

And the Israelites must have sung loud. 1 Kings 1:40 tells us that “the earth quaked” the music was so loud when Solomon was coroneted King of Israel.

4. David playing, singing, dancing (1 Sam 16:23, 2 Sam 6:14)

And who could ever forget David's ability to play the harp to calm the nerves of King Saul. The story tells us that "whenever the spirit of [torment] came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

- doesn't music make you feel better?
- Can you imagine worship without music?

- music becomes a way not only to make us feel better, but to give expression to how we are doing.

- 2 Sam 6:14 David danced with all his might when the Ark returned

5. Hebrew hymnal (Ps 98:4-6)

Singing became such an integral part of the Israelite experience that they could not imagine worshipping the Lord God without hymns. They even produced a hymnbook which we now call the Psalter or the Psalms. Ps 98:4-6 is a classic text which exhorts the people to worship God through the gift of voice and musical instrument.

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn——
shout for joy before the LORD, the King."

B. The first artists with their hands

- notwithstanding the 2nd Commandment
- *"you shall make no graven images"*
- this was a warning to not try to put God in a box.
- You can't make God out of bronze and carry him around
- nevertheless, it was God who gave detailed instructions about making sacred things

1) Tabernacle (Ex 35-38)

That mobile sanctuary the Hebrews carried around in the desert for 40 years, took up 3 chapters of the book of Exodus just to be described. Ex 35-38 describe in detail every feature of the tabernacle. For example Ex 36:8-13 (Read)

2) Ark (Ex 37:1-9)

The same kind of minute detail covers the description of the Ark of the Covenant. Ex 37:1—9.

3) Temple Furnishings (1 Kings 7)

Skilled craftsmen became so important the King Solomon when building the Temple imported some of the best craftsmen in the known world. Hiram of Tyre, north of Israel, was summoned to cast the bronze pillars of the temple 27 feet high and 18 feet around. He made many things of bronze in the temple that are recorded in 1 Kings 7.

4) Excesses (Amos 3:5)

As with anything, excesses cropped into the life of Israel. Amos, the prophet condemned the excesses of the wealthy who had homes made of ivory (a very expensive product)

"I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished," declares the Lord. (Amos 3:5)

- NT Summation

- Paul was a tent-maker
- Lydia was a maker and seller of purple cloth
- John wrote a literary classic when he recorded his vision we now call "Revelation"
- all For the Glory of God

II. Beginning Genealogy (5:1-32)

- the first of 2 extended genealogies in Genesis
- this genealogy from humankind from creation to the flood,
- the second genealogy will trace humankind from flood to Abraham
- genealogies are difficult to interpret, and are best to try to understand not in a strict, historical lineage, but rather giving larger theological meaning to the story of God and man
- the 10 generations in both genealogies represent the completeness in the life of Israel from beautiful/wholesome beginning to shameful arrival at the flood.

- just a couple of insights

Question: What about these extraordinarily long lives

- | | |
|--------------|---------------------------------|
| - Adam | 930 years |
| - Enosh | 905 |
| - Enoch | 365 years (died just a kid !!) |
| - Methusaleh | 969 years (grandfather of Noah) |
| - Lamech | 777 years (father of Noah) |

- they suggest that lives were longer before the flood
- all of these lives are "after the fall"
- therefore they didn't live longer b/c they were pure
- remember Jesus lived only 33 years

Response: Greater historical reality

- this biblical list has multiple sources (none of them agree in detail)
- there were other lists from other cultures of long lives
- Mesopotamian Kings' List has much longer lives of their kings
- 10 generations and 432,000 years (kings lived over 4000 years)
- this biblical list may counter that with numbers that are more realistic in comparison

Question: What happened to Enoch? (5:24)

- he “walked with God”
 - only he and Noah (6:9) are characterized this way
 - seems to be a special bond. Not a moral designation but spiritual one
 - doesn't mean he was necessarily more upright, but was more intimate
- there is a book in the Apocrypha that details God's secrets revealed to Enoch about the end of history.
- Heb 11:5-6 tell us Enoch did not die b/c he pleased God
 - Jude 14-15 reveals Enoch prophesied

Lamech the father of Noah

- names his son “Noah” which means “comfort” (5:29)
- the ground has been cursed
- man comes from the ground
- now the place of cursing becomes a means for future comfort
- from the worst possible places, comfort appears

III. Beginning of Strange Marriages (6:1-4)

- one of the strangest passages in all the Bible, certainly in Genesis
 - a strange marriage b/w the “Sons of God” and the “daughters of men.”
 - what is this about ?
 - who were the Nephillim ? Giants?
- reminder. Israel is creating its story in a pluralistic culture
- She is not the only culture, nation, with a religious history
 - the story of giants and intermarriage b/w gods and men was very prevalent in those cultures
 - the important interpretive principle is to see what is different about the Israelite memory of these ancient stories. Israel interprets these ancient stories through its special relationship with Yahweh.
- ***“Nephilim”***
- mentioned in Joshua's demographic report on the Promised Land
 - “we seemed like grasshoppers to them” (Num 13:33)
 - Goliath would have come from this lineage
 - Augustine said, “They served a divine purpose in that they reveal to anyone who is wise that mere bodily magnitude and might have no more value than bodily

beauty.” (City of God)

- Ambrose said the Nephilim were generated by angels and women

- **“Sons of God”**

- “*the sons of God*” was a common way of referring to lesser divine beings in a polytheistic understanding of the world.

- there are some who believe these were fallen angels, though this is not explicitly stated in Scripture

- there are some who believe these are “sons of Seth” who became arrogant and haughty, taking wives in a aggressive, abusive manner

- probably some grafting of ancient stories of semi-gods of demi-gods in the regular world. Remember the Japanese believed their leader was a god

- the North Koreans think like that about their leader

- notice they see the “*daughters of man*” and believe they are beautiful

- the same verb “take” (NIV translates it “married”) is used in the Garden of Eden when Eve saw the beautiful fruit and took it.

- these kings/demi-gods take women for their wives, at their own pleasure

- here’s my best interpretation:

- in other cultures these giants were the heros, the means for salvation

- they were the first superheros (Superman, Batman, Spiderman)

- there was this idea that gods and humans were intermarrying, having babies.

- these offspring were semi-divine. Some attached this to stories of giants

- the Lord is preparing us to learn that we will be saved through normal men, men from the ground, men with a human mother and a human father

- in fact, I’m getting ready to tell you about the first hero, Noah

- man is going to be limited. He’s not going to live forever. He will be given a limit of 120 years. But it will be through limited, sinful man that comfort will come.

- limited, sinful men will be used to rescue limited, sinful men

- God isn’t going to use giants or demi-gods. God is going to use regular people to comfort and rescue the world.

Additional Material

Which makes sense doesn't it. Can we imagine worshipping without the expressions of art that enrich it. The Bible work of art, divinely inspired literature whose power has been, nor ever will be matched. Music and the uniting of directed by the stringed or piped instruments allow us to the nomads, the wandering herdsmen God is a never voices praise God in beautiful ways. The sight of a menagerie of stained glass, the wood carvings of the doors of the baptistery, the golden plates which received the money dedicated to the God of all creation surround us with the texture of God's world.

It's no surprise then, that after the fall of man and the expulsion of Cain we are told civilization began to take shape. A culture evolved that lured the human instinct for creation out into the open. The need for self-expression was released among people fallen away from God, yet still attempting to hear, follow, and obey God. Just as God had revealed his creativity in the 6 days of creation, man, his greatest creation, follows suit. Humankind, made in the image of God, could not but help create as well. Sir Thomas Browne said, "Nature is the art of God." And so man, looking out into the art of God, began to imitate God's creation. Humanity began to create art for art's sake, as a mode of self-expression and interpretation of the image that flooded the mind.

The Bible is filled with the tales of art being created and used for the glory of God. Take music for example. Tubal was the first musician as we see here. Music soon became one way for non-literate people to pass on stories. Just as our Bible Drillers learned songs to remember the books of the Bible, so to did the Israelites pass along campfire songs to tell their history. The oldest song in the Bible, most scholars venture, is a simple song about the deliverance at the Red Sea. The song of Miriam (Ex 15:21)

Miriam sang to them:

Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.

The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.

The song was expanded and takes up most of Ex. 15

(Read Ex. 15:1—5)

In the wilderness where water was sparse and as valuable as gold, the Israelites would sing when they discovered a new source. Num 21:17-18, the song of the well goes

“Spring up, O well!

Sing about it, about the well that the princes dug, that the nobles and the princes sank.

And the Israelites must have sung loud. 1 Kings 1:40 tells us that “the earth quaked” the music was so loud when Solomon was coroneted King of Israel.

And who could ever forget David's ability to play the harp to calm the nerves of King Saul. The story tells us that "whenever the spirit of [torment] came upon Saul, David would take

his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

Singing became such an integral part of the Israelite experience that they could not imagine worshipping the Lord God without hymns. They even produced a hymnbook which we now call the Psalter or the Psalms. Ps 98:4-6 is a classic text which exhorts the people to worship God through the gift of voice and musical instrument.

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn——
shout for joy before the LORD, the King."

Application:

Music isn't simply a means to soothe the savage beast. It's a gift from God who created a world where vibrations and movement of waves through the air could end at the receptacle in the human ear and cause unutterable joy. Music is therapeutic. Making joyful noises enables us to transcend the moment and be caught up in another dimension.

For more than 300 years we Baptists have been singing and making joyful noises to the Lord. And I have no doubt that through those songs, The lost have heard and accepted the good news of Jesus the grieving have sense the mighty fortress of God while dealing with the loss of a loved one the children have experienced the joy of learning songs of Jesus, which they in turn teach to their own children. A mother has quieted a baby, the cold in heart have been warmed by the fires of God's Word, and all the while God has leaned back in his rocking chair and smiled at the beauty of it all.

Other Art Forms

But music certainly is the only art form introduced in the Bible. If Jabal was the father of music, then his step-brother Tubal—Cain was the father of art. And while Ex. 20:4, the 2nd commandment put limitations on how the people could view images created by man,

" You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below "

the Israelites did create art, —not to worship — but to create an environment where worship to the only God was enhanced and made beautiful.

1) Tabernacle

That mobile sanctuary the Hebrews carried around in the desert for 40 years, took up 3 chapters of the book of Exodus just to be described. Ex 35-38 describe in detail every feature of the tabernacle. For example Ex 36:8-13 (Read)

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The same kind of minute detail covers the description of the Ark of the Covenant. Ex 37:1—9.

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As with anything, excesses cropped into the life of Israel. Amos, the prophet condemned the excesses of the wealthy who had homes made of ivory (a very expensive product)

"I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished," declares the Lord.

Conclusion

Yet, God continued to gift people with skills and inclinations to create things of value and beauty. Paul was a tent—maker and Lydia was seller of purple cloth. And God gave John a literary vision of heaven which to this day informs our concepts of what heaven will be like streets of gold pearly gates singing hallelujahs by the choir of heaven. God has made us in his image and thus we are exercising this image when we create things: poetry and pottery, music and melodies, drawings and designs, stories and scenic paintings, buildings and benches, floral arrangements and melon carvings. We don't have to be Michelangelo with the Sistine Chapel to do this. You can see here, that in our own church people are creating things for pleasure, for fun, for sale, for relaxation, but all

FOR THE GLORY OF GOD !!!

Noah's Ark:
The Tattered, Wounded, and Stubborn Promises of God
Gen 6:5-9:17

Introduction:

- Gen 1 and 2 can be understood by young parents. The joy of creation
 - Gen 1 is a poem about creation
 - Gen 2 is a narrative about creation
 - they reflect the wonder of creation and the sublime majesty of humankind as the pinnacle of all creation
 - then it begins to go downhill
 - Adam and Eve aren't willing to live within God's boundaries. They chart their own course
 - Cain kills his own brother Abel
 - then we have genealogies which are moving us from Adam to Abraham
 - the writers of this early Israelite history are connecting the beginnings of the world with the beginnings of the faith of Israel which will be showcased in Abraham.
 - but before we finally come to Abraham we've got to deal with what every tribe has dealt with – the flood
- the popular understanding of the flood has to do with animals and an ark. It's a children's story and memorable one at that. It's mostly a sweet story with warm fuzzy koala bears, chimpanzees, and deer going on a prom date, two by two. Noah and his family save the world, and save the animals. Noah is the first animal rights activist.
- but the major theme according to the Israelite faith perspective is the tattered, wounded, stubborn promise of God. God made this world, and dog gone it, he will not utterly destroy it, though it did not turn out as he planned. This is a story that can best be understood by a parent whose child is a prodigal, one who has moved away from the values, hopes, and dreams of the parent. The great joy at birth has become the great angst of adulthood. And yet, the parent just can't give up on the child. There are times when the parents thinks, "Well, this has been more pain than joy. Perhaps it would have been better if we had not started down this road. As horrendous as it sounds, the pain and suffering of the parent brings them to the point where they say, 'I regret having given life to this child.' He has brought me and himself, more pain than I can bear."
- This is the mindset of the writer of Israel's story. He has captured the angst, pain, and suffering in God's relationship with Israel. He has given us into the window of God's own soul. We see God not only as powerful creator, but wounded parent. God does suffer. God took the risk to love his creation and his creation has not returned that love. So God suffers, weeps, and yes, even God regrets.

(This answers Ray Freeman's question).

Jer 3:19

I thought how I would set you among my sons,
and give you a pleasant land,
a heritage most bounteous of all nations.
And I thought you would call me Father,
and I would not turn from following me."

But Israel refuses the destiny envisioned by God:

"Sure, as a faithless wife leaves her husband,
so have you been faithless to me,
O house of Israel, says the LORD" (Jer 3:20).

Israel's authentic memory of her beginnings carries this kind of relational angst. It is greater even than Israel, and expands into all creation. The fracture b/w Creator and creation is at the heart of the Noah story. God intended for creation to move in one direction, but it refused. So now, the whole relationship is in jeopardy. That's what this story is about.

I. Some interpretive guidelines

1. Don't get distracted chasing the boat

- it's always interesting to hear about scientists, archaeologists finding artifacts that could be Noah's ark.

- it's fascinating

- but that doesn't help us with the meaning of this story very much

- "proving" the historical narrative through scientific means doesn't help us.

- there is no doubt there were narratives in many ancient cultures about a flood

- what's telling, and crucial in Israel's rendering of the flood story is what it reveals about God.

- so to figure out if the ark is somewhere today or to address questions like, "How could two of every species in the world fit on this boat?" is to miss the point.

- the point is about Ray's question. Did God regret making man and if so, why?

2. Don't call it a myth

- myths are ways to make universal claims about ongoing experiences

- The Myth of Sisyphus, rolling a huge stone up a large mountain only to have it roll down to the bottom when he reaches the top, is a myth that teaches about the futility of life. It's one endless task after another.

- Noah's Ark is not a myth. It doesn't teach us universal truth. It teaches us a peculiar truth, about a peculiar God, who has a peculiar relationship with a peculiar people. It's not a universal story about judgment or rainbows, though those are elements of the story. It's a story about God's relationship with his people, and his crisis in maintaining relationship with them after ongoing disappointments.

3. This is proclamation

- this is a sermon
- it's an interesting, narrative sermon
- it takes the authentic memory of Israel's people and makes a sermon out of it.
- Like any good sermon, it has a point to make.
- The sermon is about how God engages a fractured, broken world
- God has taken action that has preserved the creation and decisively changed it's future.
- The sermon is a warning.
- You can't just live anyway you want, creating your own rules and boundaries w/o consequences. The consequences can be deadly and disastrous, but they will not ultimately thwart the plans and promises of God.

II. The Story

1. The Indictment 6:5

- God has concluded the world has betrayed his intent
 - This is not what God intended.
 - evidence is: wickedness, corruption, violence
 - there are no examples or specifics given to support this conclusion. It's simply stated.
 - we remember the problems: Adam and Eve, Cain killing Abel, Lamech's murder
the sons of God
 - basic problem: The creation has refused to be God's creation
 - Rom 1:25 *"Creation has exchanged the truth about God for a lie, worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator."*
 - the indictment is harsh.
 - Judgment will impact the whole world
-
- God is resolved to destroy the world
6:7 *"I wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth"*

- 7:4 “I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made”
- 7:23 “Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out”
- 6:13 “ I am surely going to destroy both them [people] and the earth.”
- 6:17 “I am going to bring flood waters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has breath in it.”

2. The grief/pain of God (6:6)

- God is “grieved”
 - God is grieved that even their imaginations are turned against his creation
 - God is not angered, but grieved
 - We are learning of the pathos of God
 - the pain he bequeathed to woman (3:16), is the pain he experiences now
 - the Hebrew word “asav” is the word used in 3:16 and 6:6
 - the NRSV has the word “sorry.” This is not a very good translation
 - not like “I’m sorry I order the cheeseburger, instead of the chicken wrap.”
 - this is grief. Pain. Like child labor.
-
- this is a story, not about heavy rainfall, but heavy tears
 - it’s not the world that is primarily in jeopardy, but God’s heart
 - God’s heart is broken.
-
- God is not stoic. God is not static. God is emotional.
 - God feels. God is affected by us.
 - God responds to what we do. We impact God.
 - We can bring joy or sorrow.

The Sons of Noah or Why Do We Keep Trying to be God?

Gen 9:18-10:32

Context: Post-flood. Everyone has been wiped out except Noah and his family

Noah is the new man. There is a new creation, but there is still connection with the old.

- all sin has not been wiped out as we will see
- We're starting over. God has a new covenant with Noah and his descendants.
- It's the first covenant in the Bible b/w God and humankind.
- This is a covenant with the world, not just Israel.
- God has promised he would never again curse the ground b/c of man, nor would he destroy the earth by flood, nor would he destroy every living creature,
 - and the earth would continue to produce -- cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.
 - The rainbow was God's signature. Just like you sign a contract, God signed his name on the world

9:17 - 12:1: is an in-between time in which the new creation is underway and Israel's pilgrimage has not yet begun.

- 9:18-29 Story of Noah after the flood
- 10:1-32 Genealogical map of Noah to Abraham
- 11 Story of Babel
- 12:1 The call of Abraham.

I. Noah's Sons (v 18)

- Shem, Ham, Japheth
- Japheth isn't given much attention here or elsewhere.
- Gen 9:27 gives rise to the idea the Philistines came from Japheth.
 - “Live in the tents of Shem.”
- this story is prelude to the political and theological conflicts that lie ahead
- Canaan vs. Israel = Ham vs. Shem
- interesting that text points out that Ham is the father of Canaan. It mentions no other offspring at this point. That always means something is about to happen. This is a hint that the author has a bias against Canaan.
 - Shem is the father of the Shemites.
 - from Shem will eventually come Israel
 - In Hebrew there is a letter for “S” and a letter for “SH”
 - it is “sin” (pointed on the left) or “shin” (pointed on the right)
 - ש/שׁ
 - thus we get the term “Shemites” or later “Semite” and the Semitic race, which is really not a biological race, but a political/tribal/religious group of people

II. People scattered over the earth (v 19)

- in part, an answer to the question "Who did Cain marry?"

Reminder that the story of Adam and Eve is representative of the human race.

- one could ask the same questions here. "Who did the sons of Noah marry?"

- a statement preparing the way for Abraham to be the Father of all nations

- an ecumenical statement.-

- **Theological point:** The whole world is getting a new start.

- The whole world comes from God.

- see NT affirmation (Acts 17:26-28)

III. Noah the Tiller (v 20)

- we only thought he was a boat builder. He was in fact, a tiller.

- this fulfills the mandate of Gen 1:28 and 2:1 "subdue the earth" "till the land"

- again, we see there is a starting over.

- Noah is shown as living out the decrees that had been given to Adam

IV. The Episode (v 21-23)

- Noah plants a vineyard. Then gets drunk.

- the moral of this story is not against drunkenness. This is the context

- the real issue is supplying a historical setting to the divide b/w Canaan and Israel

- remember that when Ham is introduced he is described as the father of Canaan

- notice Ham's being the father of Canaan is noted again

- "*saw his father's nakedness*" (v 22)

- what does this mean?

1. Literal interpretation

- Ham accidentally saw his father naked.

- his two brothers walk in backwards to cover his father's nakedness

- the problem with this interpretation

* It seems severe, when there is no known prohibition against this.

Nowhere in the Bible do we have this prohibition

* It must assume evil intention.

Perhaps Ham was going in the tent to coverup his drunken father

* Ham was not punished. Only his offspring, Canaan

2. Incestuous homosexual rape

* Ham seems to be inside the tent. He went outside to tell his brothers. It was more than a peek inside the tent.

* “what his youngest son had done to him” (suggests more than a glance. Ham DID something to his father

* Lev 18:6-18, 20:11, 17-21, 18:19, all use the phrase “uncover the nakedness of”

* Egyptian myth of Horus and Seth. A means to emasculate, humiliate and show one’s power over a rival. By raping his father and alerting his brother, Ham hoped to usurp the authority of his father and elder brothers, establishing his right to succeed

* Explains the severity of the curse
- according to Lev 18:24-30, this was the reasons God decided to “vomit out” the Canaanites from the land

* the worst possible sexual act
Not just sex, but rape
Not just rape, but incestuous rape
Not just incestuous rape, but homosexual incestuous rape
Not just homosexual incestuous rape, but HIR against his own father
The person who should receive supreme honor, was given the worst shame !

V. The Curse (9:25)

- Canaan, not Ham is cursed

- the crime:

seeing?

castrating?

having sex w/ his mother?

- it was shameful, no matter which one it was

- same problem as Adam and Eve

- Ham saw something that was forbidden.

- Adam and Eve saw the fruit, took it, and ate it

- they were cursed for doing it.

- Ham’s descendants are cursed for seeing and taking what was forbidden

VI. Power grab

- Adam and Eve were told they would be like God if they took the fruit
 - they would have knowledge and power like God
 - they wanted to get rid of the space b/w God and humanity
 - they couldn't or wouldn't accept
-
- There is a divine mystery we can't usurp. Can't overthrow.
 - That's why we're told again and again, not to look directly on God, lest we die

- that's our problem. That was Adam and Eve's downfall. That's what Ham did. He looked upon the forbidden fruit. He penetrated the ultimate personal mystery of the parents by probing their most vulnerable action or condition.

The indictment of Ham in our text is a rejection of a whole way of life which presumes the mystery of life can be taken into human hands and managed
This was sexual misconduct + Misconduct in observing the mystery of life.

Illustration: article in News and Observer.

When should you stop taking baths with your children ?

- there comes a time when you just stop- it's more than simple a sexual thing, when they start to answer questions you don't feel comfortable answering.
- it has to do with the mystery, privacy of the sacred. We are not to step over the threshold of mystery. Thus we have lock on our bedroom door.

The Human problem: We want to be God

- we want to rid our lives and the world of mystery
- we want to serve God on our terms
- we want to make the rules. We don't want God to inconvenience us with commandments, laws, and decrees.

And what is our Curse?

- 1) We are stressed out
- 2) Our relationships are in turmoil b/c we do not honor God with them
- 3) Our families are crumbling
- 4) We are in conflict day in and day out.

We will not honor God and respect the mystery of life/God

Canaan and Israel

- Ham against his father
- would forever be in conflict

Isaac and Ishmael

Jacob and Esau

Ephraim and Mannaseh

- not ethnic or racial
- it's political and theological
- it's a symbol of the conflict between those that would honor God and the mystery of life and those who dishonor God and have no place in their lives for honoring him.

The Call of Abraham

Genesis 12:1-8

"What will you risk to follow God?"

Intro to new section

- moving from creation of the world to creation of Israel
- purpose is to fashion an alternative community
- this community is to embody the hope and promises of God
- God's purposes are to be carried out through this community
- it will be carried out through the faith of an old man and old woman. The nation isn't dependent on power, wealth, guns, and ingenuity. It is totally dependent on the creative power of God.

Introduction:

Risk is the one common denominator for faithful obedience to God. Following God is risky business. And yet it is the risk takers in life that not only live life to its fullest, but they are the ones who become blessings for others:

- Columbus traversing the unknown seas in the west to find a new land
the pioneers who blazed the trails from Kentucky to Calif.
- William Tyndale who translated the Bible into English for which he was burned at the stake for "tampering with the word of God."
- or it could be something as simple as risking a change of lifestyle and priorities b/c you sense God calling to you to follow him and make him the priority in your life.
- or it could be taking on leadership an area of church life where you feel inadequate and ill-prepared. Join the club. Every person used by God in the history of the church have had two things in common:

- 1) Inadequate for the task
- 2) Ill prepared to accomplish the goal

Question: What will you risk to follow God?'

Will you risk your security? Your future? Your family?

Will you risk letting go of that which makes you comfortable in exchange for the insecurity of the journey of faith and new beginnings and experiences with God.

Context: The story of Abraham's call is the story of a man risking all he had for the God who had spoken to him. It's the story of the creation of a nation through the call and faithful response of one 75 year old man. Abraham had been born in Ur of the Chaldeans (modern day Iraq). At an earlier point in his life he had left Ur with his father Terah, his nephew Lot, and his wife Sarai to go to the land of Canaan. However they settled down in Haran (north of Canaan) before they got there.

It was while Abraham was in Haran that he heard and heeded the call of God. While in Haran, Abraham had been successful in accumulating things: herds and slaves particularly. Things were evidently going quite well. He was 75, with strong connections in the business world and in building a family (although he had no children of his own). It was time to retire and enjoy the fruits of his labor.

As we look at Abraham's story I would like for us to see the ongoing story that God has with us. I want us to find ourselves in the story. In this particular story I would like for us to identify with Abraham and ask ourselves the question he had to ask himself: What will I risk to follow this God who has laid claim on my life? (Let's read the story of his call and ask ourselves some questions. (Read text)

I. What does God want us to do? (v. 1a)

- "Go"

- another way to say it is "leave."

- when God calls us he calls us to action

- the NT counterpart of this is "Follow me." This was the short, terse command Jesus gave to his disciples. The first thing they needed to do was to drop everything and follow. They had to leave family and friends, jobs and security, the status quo, and risk an adventure with Christ.

App: What do you need to leave?

- a place? a community? a job? Do you need to leave a physical location OR

- an attitude. Are you bitter about something or someone? Has there been a half-heartedness about your life with God that needs to be left. OR

- friends. Are you friends keeping you from a deep relationship with Christ. Sometimes we can allow old relationships that we know aren't healthy to prevent us from following Christ. We may know that a relationship is not helping either of us grow in Christ, but we still hold on for security.

- Level of maturity. Have you come to that point where you understand that in order to grow in Christ you're going to have to move to another level of commitment? You understand that you can't live your faith the way you have in the past and discover a newness in relation to Christ. You have to step outside your comfort zone.

* This is what God calls us to do

II. What do we have to risk/give up to follow God? _

- we've already answered that to some point. But let's look more specifically at what Abraham had to risk/give up to follow God

1) Country.

— go from Haran where his roots were. We learn later in the Bible that Abraham would send Isaac back to Haran to find his wife Rebekah.

— a country represents your culture, a common language and government and land mass.

2) Your People/tribe

-the larger extended family. The "tribe". The people who protected one another through military alliances.

- the clan was more than those who came to the family reunions. The clan was those who worked in the fields together, made tents, raised each others children and then married them off to one another. We can't comprehend this today. It would be like a large family reunion where people not only ate together but stayed to live, work, and defend one another.

3) Your father's house

- this is the interior family. Those of your immediate family.

- Note the progression of specificity from country (widespread), to clan, to close family.

- In short, we see the call for radical obedience: Give up security

NT reminder: Matt. 10:37

- Following God means risking our family relationships by putting them in obvious second place to God.

Negative Example:: a grandmother who saw her granddaughter make a commitment to become a missionary, but immediately began to talk to her about being a missionary where ever you are. "You can be a missionary right here in Emporia." It was the selfishness of this woman that became an undermining factor in the granddaughters pursuit of the call.

Positive Example: JW leaving a very close knit, happy family in Mexico for 2 years. Jennifer had never even been away from her parents in college, much less leave the country to follow God's call. That's why it was so hard for her. But JW could not do the wonderful things she is doing in Mexico here. She is a role model for us to see in this passage.

Bottom line: If there is any person, thing, or attitude that is preventing you from following the call of God, then you will not be able to experience the Amazing Grace he has in store for you.

4) To a land I will show you

- God didn't tell him where he would go yet
- God didn't give him all the answers
- It's often one step at a time isn't it?
- God doesn't lay out the whole picture for us, before we are to commit to go
- I don't know what lies ahead at ABC? What I am to do is practice daily faithfulness.

III. What will happen when we follow God?

- Let's look at what happen to Abraham
- "*He went*" (v4). Just as simple as the call is Abraham's response. God said "Go" and Abraham "went".
- he was 75. He took Lot his nephew and Sarai his wife and their possessions (herds, slaves).
- He went through Shechem, 27 miles north of Jerusalem. Was the center of worship in Canaan until David and Jeru.

- then he went to Bethel (further south) and finally it says he went to the Negeb, the furthest point south in Canaan.

- What happened? Blessings

1) Make you a great nation (Israel)

- this was totally dependent on God. Abraham had no capacity for greatness
- he was an old man. His wife was an old woman and barren.
- this was a unique promise to Abraham. God doesn't begin new nations with every person.

- what we can do is contribute to the greatness of the people of God, through faith

- app: our offspring are blessed by our faithfulness

2) Bless you

Make you prosper

- again we need to be careful and not believe we will be made materially prosperous by our faithfulness

- Abraham finds God's favor

3) Make your name great (prominent).

Unlike Babel where the intention was to create their own prominence. Here Abraham's prominence is a result of his faithfulness

Billy Graham's first question to God: "Why he allowed a country boy from the hills of NC to preach the gospel to so many people around the world."

4) You will be a blessing.

(others will be enriched by your life and your existence)

- I think at the end of my life this is what I most desire.

- Not on account of what I have done. But on simply being faithful.

Believing in God, even when it seemed impossible.

5) Protection

- blessings to those who bless and cursing to those who curse.

- doesn't mean we will not be killed or persecuted. It means we will find life (Mt 10:39)

- Of course, Abraham didn't achieve all of this in his lifetime. Israel was not a great nation at the time of his death. he was not all that prominent. Heb 11:8-9,13

- What happened? "Canaanites were in the land"

Abraham went to the promised land and took residence there. But he never captured it. It was already inhabited by those who didn't believe the promise, by those who lived self-sufficient lives. Brueggemann says, "The promise of God is never easy to believe and practice. It must always be believed and practiced in the midst of those who do not believe it or practice it."

App: We too will receive blessings if we follow God. We will receive the peace and security of living in the will of God and we will thus become a blessing for others. But we must not think that the blessing only comes after we have captured something or conquered something completely for we are on a pilgrimage.

Conclusion

Surely Abraham wistfully looked back and wondered why he ever came to Canaan, a place filled with false idols and no good women to become daughter's in law. He lived in tents, never settling down.

And so it is with those who would follow Christ. We do not have to have the assurance of quick results, only that our direction is right. Every ordinary person who is here tonight has the awesome possibility of taking risks for God in order to be a servant of that city whose builder and maker is God". We only need to follow as best we can the spiritual light and leading that takes us out of Ur of the Chaldeans, out from the stodginess of accepted habit, out from laziness and complacency of soul, into some difficult obedience at the call of God.

Those who will risk to follow God will be builders of the Kingdom of God. It will be scary and costly, but it is the pathway to the abundant life of which Jesus spoke.

Faith in the Real World
Gen 12:10-20 and 13:1-18

Intro:

- we've heard the call of Abram. "Leave your country"
- we've seen the faith of Abram. "He went."
- it's very simple and clean
- Abram is called by God and Abram goes to a land he knows not.
- Today Abram is the father of 53% of the world's population (Xtn, Jew, Muslim)

- that's how faith in God is supposed to work. God calls. We go.
- God sends. We go.
- God asks. We give.
- God demands. We submit.
- God acts. We follow.

But

- faith isn't always so clean and easy is it.
- the good thing about the Bible is that it gives us these great stories of faith – the call of Abram – and then fills in the stories with details that reveals it's not so clean

- Gen 12:10-20 is a story revealing a chink in the armor of Abram.
 - the story of Abram and Sarai going down to Egypt

- Gen 13:1-18 is another story revealing the difficulty of living faithfully in the real world
 - the story of Abram and Lot dividing up the land of Promise

- Two questions:
 - 1) Will God keep his promises?
 - 2) Will Abram be able to trust the promises?

- Those are 2 very different questions.
- Yes, God will keep his promises. That's certain.
- Will we trust those promises? Well ,... that's another story isn't it. That's our story.

(Read Gen 12:10-20)

Abram in Egypt

- Abram is in the Negev, southern Canaan
 - there is a famine in the land.
 - He goes down to Egypt.
 - God's people always seem to be going down to Egypt when there's trouble
- Joseph goes to Egypt
Joseph and Mary go to Egypt with Jesus
Egypt seems to be a place of escape. But it's not a place of promise !!

Abram and Sarai

- Abram is 75, Sarai is 65.
- He still thinks she's beautiful. Isn't that sweet !
- She is so beautiful, Abram's afraid the Egyptians will kill him and keep the wife
- Sort of like the movie "Taken." Where the teenage girl goes to Europe, and is taken by sex traffickers, and sold into sex slavery. Her father chases the traffickers and rescues his daughter.

- Abram has this promise from God that a great nation will come from him, yet at the first sign of threat he is willing to sacrifice his wife for his own survival
- he acts in unfaith, cowardly, cunningly
- notice this test comes immediately after this bold step of faith
- now his faith hits the real world

- similar to the baptism of Jesus. What follows? The Temptations.
- similar to Peter being named the Rock.then The Denial

- easier to be baptized than live baptized
- easier to receive a call than fulfill a call
- easier to say wedding vows than fulfill the wedding vows

Sarai the sister

- Abram tells Sarai to say she is his sister
- he believes this will keep him from being killed
- he is willing to lie to save his own skin
- evidently he doesn't trust the promise. He feels he has to lie to help God keep the promise

Egypt the Empire

- it happens like Abram suspected
- the Egyptians see Sarai's beauty and want her.
- she is taken into the palace of Pharaoh.
- the 65 year old woman is that beautiful
- of all the beautiful women in Egypt, Pharaoh wants this 65 year old woman
-
- the Empire gets what it wants.
- the Empire is like King David seeing Bathsheba bathing on her rooftop
- the Empire takes what it wants. It doesn't have to explain. It doesn't have to pay.
- Imminent Domain is how we talk about this in our country.
- if the empire wants your property, they can have it. They will take it.
- Abram doesn't have any resources. No attorney. No power. Just a promise.
- And he doesn't trust the promise enough to speak truth.

Mystery of the Power

- Abram is cared for b/c of Sarai
- his flocks and herdsmen increase
- he becomes wealthy and powerful
- remember the promise? God will bless those who bless Israel,
- Abram is being blessed by God and the Empire
- there is a mysterious entanglement b/w God and the Empire
- but then notice that serious disease is cast onto Pharaoh and the empire
- having his way with Sarai is damaging to Pharaoh
- he finds out Sarai is the wife of Abram
- How? We don't know.
- So he chastises Abram and releases them both
- Something powerful is at work here
- Pharaoh is being cursed here. Taking Abram's wife has harmed her.
- we're not told explicitly this comes from the promise, but it's subtly there
- those who bless Abram will be blessed, those who take his wife will be cursed
- and part of the curse is the result of Abram's faithlessness
- when Abram acts in faith the world is blessed.
- when Abram acts in faithlessness, the world is cursed
- when Israel acts in faithfulness, the world is blessed

- when Israel acts out of faithlessness, the world is cursed

Application: We are the new Israel, the people of God

- the promises still hold true for us.
- when we act out of faithfulness, the world is blessed
- when we act out of faithlessness, the world is cursed
- as the commissioned people of God, we have a great impact on the world
- what we do matters. We have the capacity to bless or curse the world.

- Illustration: Gen Norm Gaddis
- he could've given up on God and the promises of God
- but in remaining faithful to God, he has now inspired 1000s of others

Faith in the Real World: Part Two **Gen 13:1-18**

Connection

- Abram returns to the Negev
 - his testing in Egypt has been telling
 - our 2 questions have been answered
1. Will God keep his promises? Yes.
 - God will bless Abram and bless those who bless him
 - Abram's life will impact the world
 2. Will Abram and Sarai trust the promises? No
 - still God will bless Abram, in spite of Abram
 - "The bearer of the promise is the greatest enemy of the promise." Von Rad

Land

- back in the Negev, we run into the problem of land
- there is not enough of it
- Abram and his flocks have grown. So have Lot's.
- this mentions but doesn't focus on the other people in the land as well
- at this point we just are told there is a problem between Abram and Lot
- Abram is the older uncle, Lot the nephew
- it would seem appropriate that Abram tell Lot what to do
- Abram is more magnanimous
- he lets Lot chose what land he wants. He's take what's left.

- perhaps he's learned a lesson
 - he acted with guile to protect his life.
 - now he acts in trust to secure his land. Lot is the one who must learn
 - Abram is willing to "let go" of the land, to let go of control of the promise.
- He is willing to live "out of control."

I. Abram overcomes anxiety by giving up control.

- if you can't get along, the next best thing is to part amicably.
- Abr had been given the promise of land and descendants.
- It is Ab who gives control of the land to Lot
- Ab in essence gave up control of his future. This will be the distinguishing mark of his life -- giving up his future confident that God will take control.

Just awhile earlier he had given up his country, his tribe, his father's household to go to a land that God had yet to reveal.

Ab gave up control of his future.

- we have seen Ab, can be wishy-washy. He can act in unfaith
- now he acts in faith.
- He's complicated.

Ab believed it was better to live in harmony w/ his nephew than (whom he had power over) than to possess the land that was rightfully his.

Illustration:

I'm reminded of this same issue being brought before Jesus in Luke 12:13ff. (Read)

-Jesus sees through all the legal maneuverings. He does not intend to determine who technically has a right to what. He cuts through to the greed that tainted man's ability to view right from wrong. He could see how possessions could become the possessor of the soul, rather than being possessed by the body.

Coveting

Illustration: Even children seem to have it etched into their psychological makeup. You don't have to learn how to covet. I remember hearing about one child at birthday party. It wasn't his party, it was for his older brother's party. Nevertheless the younger boy who was about 4 years old said as they gathered around the cake, "Moma can I have the biggest piece." The mother a bit embarrassed in front of the children and parents said, "Brian, it's not polite to ask for the biggest piece of cake." To which Brian retorted, "Well, then how do I get it?"

Who is immune to it?

- the answer lies in “being rich toward God.”— that is what Abraham did. He trusted God and his promises even to the point of allowing another to take the best land.

- covetousness and lack of faith lead to anxiety
- when we want what others have, and lack the faith that God will care for us, we become very anxious
- our age is riddled with anxiety, b/c of the marriage of coveting and lack of faith
-

II. Lot seeks to control his future by profit over goodness.

- a more noble man would've deferred Ab's offer. Ab is the one who seeks to be the peace maker. He offers Lot first choice. Lot could've said, “No, you go first.” But he doesn't. He looks over the land and sees the bounty and economic potential to the east, toward the Jordan river, “the plain of Jordan.”

- it looked like the garden of Eden. Listen to how Walter Bowie describes the situation:

“He looked about the land and chose what pleased the eye. All the country in the valley of the Jordan was green and well watered; it was as inviting as a garden but in its human aspect it was not garden. It was the territory adjacent to Sodom, and the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.” A fine country to make fat sheep, but a poor place for a man to risk his fate. Once he got to Sodom, Lot had an unhappy conscience. He didn't like the corrupt things that went on there but his dislike was never virile enough to make him get up and leave. Instead, he stayed in Sodom, complaining but also compromising until the wickedness of Sodom led to its destruction and he lost all his possessions and barely to away with his life.

- reminded on the NC Lottery
- we decided we needed more money, instead of needing more goodness
- we chose to ask “What will bring the most money?” instead of “What will bring the most good?”
- never bought a lottery ticket b/c
 1. it exploits the poor
 2. it promotes the get rich quick ethic that undermines a strong work ethic
 3. it inevitably leads to corruption
- Abraham gave up control. Lot seized control and chose to live near Sodom.

III. When we give God control, he gives us all things.

- We can see what happened to Ab and Lot

1) Lot chose the East (like Adam and Eve, Cain, Babel) and he reaped destruction. he barely escaped and his wife who was lured by the seduction of the city became a pillar of salt.

2) Ab got it all. North, South, East, and West

- and the promise was made more explicit

- he had been promised to become a father of a great nation, but now the promise includes the possession of all the land he could see.

- Martin Noth has discovered there is a mtn near Bethel where it is possible to see the Mediterranean in the West, the mtns of the across the Jordan river in the east, Mt Hermon in the north, and the Dead Sea in the South.

- all of this was now Abraham's.

- the man of faith, acted out of faith this time.

Conclusion

- these 2 stories give a realistic view of Abram

- the man of faith is also a man of faithlessness

- he's willing to give up his wife to save himself

- then he's willing to give up land to foster peace

- in one he's anxious about his life, what he will eat and drink (Mt 6:25)

- in the other he risks for the sake of the promise

- he's complicated.

- like us

- like us, the promises of God are sure regardless of our actions

- what finally matters are the promises of God

- we are like Abram with weak faith, which brings problems

- like Abram we have strong faith, which brings blessings

- these stories call us to faithfulness. The world is better that way.

- these stories also remind us that God's faithfulness is not dependent upon ours. God will fulfill his promises despite us. He is always faithful.

Left Overs

God's Control...When You're Out of Control!

Introduction: Have you ever had a sense of being out of control?

Was there a time when the outcome of a situation you cared about no longer was determined by your wit or effort or skill? For most of us, if not all of us, those are frightening times. Losing control is one of the most frightening things we face. And to the degree that we demand control, desire it; it is to that degree that we plummet into a state of anxiety when control slips out of our hands like water running from a creek.

Hospital: Stay in one room. One bed. They determine when you go home, when you go to the b.r. Anesthesia is the climax of this control. As the gas goes on the face, you slowly lose control, you know you are being put in a physical state where you are completely at the mercy of a few other human beings.

Children Growing Up:

- Simply having kids means you are no longer in control of your life.
- Your schedule is automatically fixed by their needs
- Still you don't control them. The greatest hope parents have is that they might influence their kids. Control is impossible and those who desire are in for a traumatic experience. When the driver's license comes, the parents go into cardiac arrest, for this 16 kid now has a machine of death now at her control. You no longer can tell her she can't simply drive safely, she must drive aware of the druggies and drunks that are on the road and will not obey the rules.

The President: (even the powerful)

- every president has complained about the lack of control he has had.
- the Fed. Reserve Board has more control over the economy than the President
- congress has to approve all expenditure of money
- putting more cops on the street still won't force parents to become responsible and keep their children off the streets without supervision.

We have a tremendous need to control our lives, events, and the future. Which reminds me of what John Chancellor of NBC News said when commenting on his cancer surgery a few years ago, "When we tell God what our plans are for the future, he simply laughs."

Sometimes things get out of control. We simply can't control what happens.

This story of Abraham and Lot tell us something about control,

Abraham's giving up control

Lot's seizing control

God's ultimate control of all creation.

Let's read the story and see what it says about our efforts to control life

I. For awhile, everything comes up roses.

- someone has said, everyone has their day in the sun.
- certainly this universal truism doesn't apply in every situation for some live a perpetual hunger and pain.
- but most of us have experienced, if we're not experiencing them now, good and wonderful days. Days of prosperity and health.

Abraham:

- became prosperous in Egypt
- herds, silver and gold.
- the nearly adulterous affair Pharaoh had w/ Sarah probably led to a large booty given by Pharaoh to Ab.
- Ab. became the John D. Rockefeller of Egypt
- In fact things were so good w/ Ab and Lot that the land couldn't contain them (v 6). There herds had grown so large.

Application: For awhile everything goes great. The marriage is strong. The kids are making you proud. You've got all the money you need and more. Like Jerry McGuire in the movie. You're on top of the world and can't see that it has a bottom.

But then, something happens. In Ab's case, his caused growing pains, his wealth came into conflict with Lot's wealth. There herdsman became to argue and fight over watering holes and grasslands. It was an ancient version of power struggles that take place in Govt's, churches, and families.

Let's notice the 2 approaches offered here.

One by Abr and one by Lot

Do you see? He gave up control of that which was rightfully his and thereby gained more than he had ever hoped. This is the great truth of the Christian faith. When we give our lives up to be controlled by God, we shall have all these things that we desired in the first place.

Money: when we begin to let God control what we spend, then he will provide for those things that we have been seeking. Of course, what God may do is give you a complete new understanding of what you want. If you will begin to budget and tithe, not out of a legalistic duty but as a devotion and offering to God, you will begin to see how transformative it is.

Family: If we will give up trying to control our families destiny and happiness through bombarding them w/busy distractions and devote them first and foremost to Christ's Kingdom, you will see amazing things happen in your midst

Worry: if you will figuratively hand over your state of health to God and stop worrying about the coming ailments, you will discover that cleansing power of an uncluttered mind.

All of these involve risk, letting go of those things we believe we can control. It is a difficult thing I am calling for. But one way lead to slow destruction and the other leads to the Kingdom of God. Think about it.

Genesis 15:1-21

"Believing God When It Seems Crazy"

I. Introduction

- Sometimes it seems absolutely crazy to believe in God.
- examples:

1) Church Conflict: Christians speak about love, then draw lines in battlefield and throw stones at one another. Theological wars rage. Budget battles in church (do we spend it on paint or programs?). Who gets to be on the Finance Committee or who decides when we vote on a measure?

How can you believe in God when the God believers seem so much like the godless.

2) Secular Age: Two dominant ideologies have existed for the past 300 years.

a. Enlightenment: an emphasis on reason, the human mind is the starting point for all knowing. All true knowledge is factual, value-free, and neutral. Any other knowledge is only opinion, a matter of taste.

b. Post-modernism: all knowledge is biased and untrustworthy. Relentless consumerism
Permissive society without norms or a center or absolute truth
Pluralism, multiple truths, whatever is true for you
In such a world, a firm belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Jesus seems, if not crazy, at least arrogant.

3) Death: Someone in a casket. Cold. Lifeless. At that moment, more than any other moment, we are confronted with the audacity of believing in God.

II. Abraham confronts the craziness of believing (v 1-6)

- Pivotal chapter in Abraham narrative.
- Most important chapter theologically
- is used by Paul and the NT more than anything else in the Bible
- Paul used it to explain his great doctrine "justification by faith"
- Abraham and Sarah have nothing more than the promise of God (land, descendants, great name). At the time, Abraham had no land, no descendants, and no possibility for a great name. Present reality doesn't give a hint that God's promises will be fulfilled.
- they have a promise from God, but barrenness is their reality

III. Abraham confronts God (v 1-6)

- "after this", after Abraham and Lot separate (ch 13)
after Abraham rescues Lot who is a victim of an international war
- God tells Abram not to be afraid
- God has given Abram the promise (Gen 12: great nation, blessings, name great)

- the promise is followed by crowded land and consequent separation
- then it's followed by realpolitik, reality of war all around him
- all Abram has is a promise

- Abram's protest

- He's not a passive faith holder. He meets the promise with questions, resistance
- he reminds God he is childless. How can he be the father of a great nation if he is childless
- the child of a slave girl is his heir. What kind of nation is that?
- a slave is no sign for a future. A slave bespeaks coercion, necessity, compulsion
- so Abram protests "*You have given me no children*" (v 3)

- God's response (v 4)

- God responds with a word
- just as God spoke and the creation came into being out of nothing
- God speaks and a son will come out of nothing, from barrenness
- notice God doesn't argue. He doesn't use logic or biology
- He offers Abram a vision
- He tells him to look at the stars. His descendants will be the same
- This is not an argument. It is revelation.
- God is implicitly saying, if I can create all these stars out of nothing, I can create heirs for you out of nothing.

IV. Abraham believed (v 6)

- this is the central verse of the Abraham narrative
- some would say it's the central verse of the OT
- Paul would focus on this verse to provide theological foundation for the Xtn faith
- Martin Luther would begin a reformation around this verse
- the entire Xtn fellowship is grounded in this verse
- what changed? Why does Abram now believe God?
- does he believe a prescription of Viagra will put new energy in his loins at old age
- does he believe Sarah, in her old age, can be given a creative womb
- no, this belief has nothing to do with flesh and blood
- this is not biology, this is theology
- God is no longer a hypothesis.
- God's promise is the truth around which his life is organized !!!!

- he has repented. Abram has changed.
- he has abandoned a reading of reality based on empiricism, what can be seen and touched
- it's not a generalized religious idea "everything is going to be OK"
- No, Abram's faith is quite specific. It's driven by a particular promise of God
- "He believes that God can cause a break between the exhausted present and the buoyant future."

- see Mt 16:15-17 Peter's great confession of faith
 - flesh and blood did not reveal this
 - it's revelation
 - it's a miracle

- faith doesn't come by argument, logic, persuasion
- I can't persuade anyone to become a Christian
- The only way for someone to become a Xtn is for a revelation to take place so they come to believe the promises of God
- people don't become Xtens b/c of the persuasive voice of the preacher, but through revelatory word of God

V. Revolutionary moment in the history of faith

- God credited this to him a righteousness
- "*It was reckoned to him as righteousness.*"
- Abraham is suddenly designated as one well pleasing in God's sight
- What does "righteous" mean?
- It doesn't mean good, moral, pious. It's not about being a goody-goody.
- It means in a right relationship with God.
- Not dogmatism, pietism, moralism, existentialism, positivism, Marxism, capitalism humanism.
- this righteousness means that one believes God. God's promises will control the future.

VI. Paul's of Gen 15:6

- Rom 4:1-11
- Abraham believed God. Abraham didn't uphold the law to gain righteousness.
- Paul is making the argument that the Gentiles don't need circumcision to be declared righteous. They only need to believe God.
- Abraham is not only father of the Jews
- He is father of the Gentiles who believe in God through Jesus Christ.

- Gal 3:6-9 all who believe in Jesus Christ are children of Abraham
 - we are not children b/c we lived by the law
 - we are not children b/c we are circumcised
 - we are children, b/c we believe

VII. Gospel Use of Gen 15:6

- disciples are shown as those who have great difficulty in receiving, trusting Jesus
- yet others gladly receive Christ
 - the centurion believes (Mt 8:10)
 - friends of the paralytic believe (Mt 9:2)
 - woman with the issue of bleeding (Mt 9:22)
 - woman whose daughter had a demon (Mt 15:28)
 - blind man (Luke 18:42)
 - lepers (Lk 17:19)
- disciples are men of “little faith” b/c they are anxious about eating and drinking (Mt 6:30)
 - “caught in the storm”, they believe the storm is stronger than Jesus (Mt 8:26)
 - Peter is a “man of little faith” b/c he doubts the power of Jesus (Mt 14:31)
 - disciples are “men of little faith” they only believe in the present bread (Mt 16:8)
 - disciples again, can’t cast out demons b/c they are “men of little faith” (Mt 17:20)

VIII. Binding of this crazy covenant (v 7-21)

a. A Curious Ritual (v 7-11,17)

- faith given and expressed needs to be ritualized
- we need rituals to affirm our beliefs and commitments
- rituals give us a memory.
- before there were pictures we took with our smart phone there were stones
- baptism is a ritual. We want to remember our profession of faith.
- weddings are filled with rituals (rings, dresses, walking the aisle)
- I am about to spend thousands of dollars for a ritual affirming the exclusive love two people have for one another
- God promises land (v 7)
- Abraham asks how can I know I will have the land?
- God proposes a ritual
- heifer, goat, ram, dove, pigeon
- they are killed and divided. Blazing torch passed b/w them (v 17)

- the ritual sears the promise and commitment into the memory of the people

b. Historical reflection (v 12-16)

- future prophecy
- a reference to the 400 years of slavery in Egypt
- more importantly, a warning not to allow the delay of the promise to lead Abraham to believe in the death of the promise
- the promise will not die though it be delayed
- Abraham can age, grow old, and die believing the promise
- all who follow him can do the same

- this is a problem for faith.
 - faith is not without its problems.
- Promises are sometimes delayed.

- Appl: we are so impatient.

We have come to believe if we don't receive it now, we will not receive it. People don't want to hear, well the promises God has made to you may not be fulfilled in your lifetime.

- the problem of faith is wating.

c. Promise of Land (v 18-21, v 7)

- commitment of God to give Abraham, not just a son, but land
- what good is an heir if there is nothing to pass on
- the description of boundaries reflects the kingdom at its height under David
- Egypt in the south, Euphrates to the East, Assyria in the North
- the substance of the promise is land and son

- there are rewards for faith
- Abraham's reward is land and heirs.

App: there are rewards to our faith, and not just heaven

- we don't need to allow the religious hucksters to make us afraid of this
- see Mark 10:29-30, rewards in this present age
- but these are not rewards for faith, they are free gifts that are received by faith
- faith isn't a work that leads to award
- faith is a response to God's grace that opens up the door to the abundant life.

How Do We Believe the Scandal? What Did Abraham Do?

1) Stepped out in faith.

He has already done this (Genesis 12:1-4). But faith is not a one time decision. It's an ongoing journey. Notice the protest of Abraham in 15:2-3.

App: To believe in God when it seems crazy requires that we step toward Christ in faith. This is not a step without question or even protest, but it is a step toward the promises of God.

Ill: My ongoing journey. God calls to give up roots, stability, security to risk for His Kingdom.

2) He remembered his history.

v. 7 "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur."

The same idea is presented before God gave the 10 Commandments to Moses, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt."

App: It can be helpful when faith seems crazy to remember what God has done for you in the past. Financially? Physically? Provided brothers and sisters in Christ? A mentor or role model in the faith?

3) He survived the dark night of the soul.

v. 12

God revealed future to him which was both good and bad. His descendants would be slaves for 400 years. (If he had stayed in Ur, maybe none of his descendants would become slaves.)

There is a dark side to faith. Suffering. Pain. Confusion. Loneliness. Jesus prayed "take this cup from me."

St. John of the Cross (1542-1581) wrote a treatise entitled, "The Dark Night of the Soul."

App: All of us, if we struggle to have and hold on to faith, have a dark night or nights. When God is silent. The abyss is wide. The other side is lost.

Death?

Not hearing God's answer to a prayer?

Result

Believing in God When It Seems Crazy

Justification by Faith: v. 6

Romans 4:3, 9, 22

Righteousness doesn't mean perfect or being "right" about everything.

It means we are "made right" in the sight of God.

We are justified.

It is a miracle. Matthew 16:15-17 "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you."

2 Corinthians 5:17—18,21

No other OT text has exercised such a compelling influence on the NT.

Conclusion

It's a miracle for us to believe in God when it seems crazy. God reveals Himself to us and makes us righteous.

Can God Be Trusted? Gen. 16-17

Intro: The promise has been made

- Abraham has now been promised a son and land
- that's all he needs. Who needs anything more?
- If you have a son and land, you are on your way to become a great nation
- All I need is: a bed, a chair, TV and remote control. What else could I want?

- Abraham believed the promised, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness
- the entire NT is based on this promise
- we believe in God, and this is what makes us right with God

I. Houston, we have a problem (16:1)

- remember Apollo 13, 5th lunar mission and 3rd to land on the moon
- launched April 11, 1970
- 2 days later oxygen tanks ruptured
- the astronauts spoke to the control center with the understatement of the century: "Houston, we have a problem."

- indeed, they did have a problem. Their lives were in jeopardy
- the mission had to be aborted.
- they had to scramble and muster all their knowledge combined with creativity to bring the capsule home.
- they would not make it to the moon. The promise was unfulfilled

- Abraham and Sarah have a problem
- they have a promise of an heir but no heir
- they are confronted with the audacity of the problem in the face of their barrenness
- they both are in anguish, struggling with the promise of new life, but no visible evidence of it

Application:

- the issue we all face
- there is the promise of resurrection, but we've never seen one
- there is the promise of God's presence, but we can't see God
- there is the promise of the Holy Spirit,
- Rom 8:22-24 we wait for the redemption of our bodies

II. Sarah takes matters into her own hands (v 2)

- Sarah has an Egyptian maid, Hagar
- she suggests Abram sleep with the housemaid
- Now anytime, your wife tells you to sleep with the maid, you might want to pause
- the wife who says, "Go, see your old girlfriend. You should catch up and get reacquainted."
- the wife says, "Go play golf. I'll take care of the kids."

- seriously, there were no moral qualms with this arrangement in those days
- it was legal for a husband to use his maidservant as a surrogate mother to his children
- remember this is before the Law of Moses. We have no code of moral ethics at this point, other than the code of the ancient world
- Sarah offers a legal solution
- she will solve this problem
- she will solve the problem through a clever use of the law

- as in Gen 12:10-20, when Abraham used his cleverness to protect himself by telling Sarah she should pretend to be his sister, rather than his wife
- Sarah is now the clever one
- Sarah and Abraham are willing to help God keep the promise

- they are unwilling to wait
- Calvin called this “defective faith”
- faith is not easy. It calls for persistence in the face of unfathomable odds
- “Faith calls for believing in a gift from God which none of the present data can substantiate.”
- Have you ever done something that had no evidence of success?
- Have you ever exercised faith in a way that some questioned or even ridiculed you?

III. It didn’t turn out as she hoped (v 4-6)

- it seldom does.
- when we take matters into our own hands and are unwilling to wait for the promise things rarely turn out as we intended.
- when Hagar becomes pregnant she “despised” Sarah
- probably was jealous. Sarah had the love and honor. Hagar had the child.
- Sarah tells Abram, “*May the Lord judge between me and you.*”
expression of hostility
- Abraham does what any husband would do, “Honey, whatever you want to do will be fine with me.”
- Sarah makes life miserable for Hagar. Hagar runs away.

IV. God intervenes (v 7)

- everybody seemed satisfied – Abraham, Sarah, Hagar (single mom)
- a solution had been achieved. Separation and alienation.
“We can move on with our lives.”
- God is not satisfied
- God is going to redeem Sarah and Abraham’s mess
- God is going to make a promise to Hagar
- God is going to make Hagar’s descendants too numerous to count
- Ishmael is going to be a good and bad sign
- Good sign: functions as a sign of God going outside Israel
 - God is not bound by Abraham and Sarah
 - God will give promises and presence to those outside Israel
 - Ishmael means “God hears.”
 - God doesn’t just hear Abraham and Sarah. God hears Hagar
 - God is going to bless Hagar
 - the people of promise are not the only ones whom God hears
 - the people of promise are not the only ones whom God blesses

- Bad sign: functions as a temptation to Abram to seek assurance in his own activity
Ishmael is a temptation for Abram to trust in the fruit of his own creativity
Ishmael will be wild
- things get wild, out of hand, when we take things into our own hands

- In the short run, our creativity can make something happen, but it's not what God ultimately wants to happen. When we take things into our own hands, we can solve the problem in the short-term. But short-term solutions are just that – short term.

Example: Girls finding Xtn husbands

- UNC
- 60 percent female
- half of the male population are jerks, drunks
- half of the remaining population of males are gay. Off limits
- result: 10 percent of the population are worth dating. They have 60 % choice.
- temptation: To give in, to do what you have to do to have a boyfriend.
Or you can hold out, and wait.

So, at the end of chp 16 we are left with a temptation, a temptation for Sarah and Abraham not to trust the promise and to trust in their manufactured solution. Sarah is still barren

Chapter 17

13 years pass between chp 16 and 17

- Abraham and Sarah have been barren. Ishmael is a teenager. He is the hope

I. The full covenant is declared

- not the first iteration of this covenant (also Gen 12 and Gen 15), but the fullest
- the covenant that will be remembered and uttered again and again
- an audacious **self-naming** of God ---- I am God Almighty
- an audacious **confirmation** -- I will confirm my covenant b/w me and you!!
- Abram falls facedown. What else can he do?
- his name is changed from “exalted father” to “father of many”
- it's going to be an **everlasting** covenant. It will never end.
- he gives him **land**. Canaan. He specifies what the boundaries are.

II. The covenant ritualized

- circumcision
- sign and seal of the covenant
- entrance into the covenant must go through the ritual
- don't need to get sidetracked into the origin of circumcision. We know other tribes did this. Health concerns? Quasi-magical origins?

1. Covenant is about doing, not just saying

- Abraham can't just say "I believe God"
- something must be done. Something that communicates the radical nature of believing in this God
- circumcision is the dramatic, painful, irreversible act to convey belief
- biblical faith is always lived, never just spoke
- biblical faith always requires concrete commitment

- what is done is serious.
- later it would be enjoined as a circumcision of the heart

2. Covenant rituals are filled with power and peril

a. Peril

- peril is that circumcision may lose its theological intent and vitality
- it then takes on a life of its own
- it becomes an empty form
- it nurtures self-deception. Deceives you into thinking the act is done and its over. You are a son of Abraham. That's all that matters

- or, it becomes an instrument of oppression and conformity
- there is pressure to be circumcised w/o understanding and power

- apparently the early church came to see circumcision in this way
- see Rom 2:25
- see Rom 4:12
- see Gal 6:15

b. Power

- provides a ritual, an act, the gives concreteness to serious faith

- You don't say, "Did or didn't I believe in the God of Abraham?"
- it has the power of identification
- I belong. I know I belong. I have this is common.
- It's not genetic. It's not racial. It's theological combined w/ physical
- flesh and faith come together in power.
- one without the other is powerless.
- If you have the flesh, but no faith, there is no power to serve God
- If you have faith, but no flesh, what is it that will serve God.

c. Power and Peril of Baptism

- the Xtns adopted baptism as the new circumcision
- it will be the physical ritual of identification
- Paul connects circumcision and baptism
- see Col 2:11-13

- the intent of circumcision is the intent of baptism
- baptism becomes an initiating ritual signifying identity
- you are now a child of God. You have been baptized

- it also holds power and peril
- it can energize faith or it can numb faith

- baptism can become an empty ritual
- baptism can deceive someone into believing the Xtn faith is all about being dunked. Faithfulness doesn't matter. It just matters that you've been baptized.
- that's the danger of baptizing too young.
- it can happen without being fully embraced
- baptism can take on a life of its own, w/ little connected to vital faith

God Makes Me Laugh

Genesis 17: 15 – 18:15

Introduction

- Abraham has entered into covenant with God
- the covenant is sealed with the ritual of circumcision
- God has promised land, son, and a multitude of descendants for Abraham
- he seeks, in return, a physical symbol of commitment - circumcision
- then God tells Abraham the covenant will be carried out through Sarah becoming pregnant

I. Abraham Laughs (18:15-27)

- after this text on circumcision, God tells Abraham that Sarah will bear a son
- this is the first time he names Sarah
- prior to this he has son Abraham will have a son

- now God says Abraham, at the age of 99, will have a son with Sarah, at the age of 89
- Abraham can't help but laugh
- perhaps it's a mocking laugh
- he appeals to the Son he already has. The temptation of Ishmael
- Abraham is exhibiting defective faith, weak faith
- he is willing to rely on his alternative, rather than God's promise
- Abraham doesn't need this promise. He has Ishmael.

- Abraham has defective faith

- the Father of the faith has defective faith
- he is not unlike the first disciples of Jesus
- disciples saw the miracles of bread and fish
- yet they still questioned him
- they did not understand, but it wasn't just a matter of the mind
- it was also a matter of the will. Their hearts were hard.
- when Jesus spoke of crucifixion, they didn't believe
or didn't want to believe
- when Jesus spoke of resurrection, they didn't understand
- they couldn't accept God creating life from death
- Abraham couldn't accept God creating life from barrenness

- we have a hard time believing God can alter our futures,
can create reconciliation where there is bitterness
can create a debt-free church, when we are 1.75 million in debt
can create joy, expectancy, vibrancy when we are older and getting older
Don't laugh.
God is the one who laughs when we tell him what can't be done.
We should fall on our face, and believe God, and then submit ourselves to God.

II. Isaac vs. Ishmael

- first time we're given the name of Isaac
- "he laughs"
- Ishmael means "God hears"
- it will be through Isaac the covenant is established

- Ishmael:
 - blessed
 - make him fruitful
 - father of 12 rulers (princes)
 - make him a great nation
 - he is also circumcised like everyone else

- difference b/w Ishmael and Isaac
 - * no reference to land
(but there's got to be land. How can you be a great nation w/o land)
 - * princes/rulers instead of kings (contrast 17:6)
 - * everlasting covenant will be through Isaac

- Paul exploits this text to differentiate b/w children of the law and children of the promise. See Gal 4:21-31
- Paul compares Hagar and Ishmael to the law.
- Paul compares Sarah and Isaac to the promise
- He is connecting the Xtn community to the promises of God to Abraham

III. Sarah Laughs (18:1-15)

- Sarah laughs when she hears she's going to have a baby
- she has the same defective faith as Abraham

Critical Excursus: Identity of the Visitor (Lord or angels)

- 18:1 The Lord appeared to Abraham

- 18:9-15 The Lord is the one speaking

- 18:2-8 3 men are standing nearby

- 18:16 3 men get up to leave and looked toward Sodom

- if you are confused, you understand. You are reading it correctly. It is confusing.
- Possible solutions:
 - * two stories have been blended together
 - * the Lord was speaking through these men or angels

- Meaning: This is about Revelation
 - the vacillation of the identity heightens the hidden source of the revelation

- revelation is a disclosing of God's purpose
- we have a mysterious encounter with bold news from God
- Sarah is going to have a baby
- Is this news directly from the Lord? From Angels? From Men?
- Ultimately, the news comes from God.
- God is making a promise to Sarah, about Sarah
- God is changing her name

A. Part One of the Story: Abraham (vv 1-8)

- Abraham is in a hurry
- He is deferential. He bows down to them.
- something unexpected and peculiarly important is about to happen
- Abraham wants to provide them with water, rest, and food
- he goes to Sarah and says we've got friends coming over for supper
- he then finds a tender calf, and provides milk, cheese
- he sets the meal before them and stood near them

B. Part Two of the Story: Strangers (vv 9-15)

- now the focus is on the strangers and what they say
- they want to know about Sarah, where is she
- he says she's in the tent
- the Lord says, "I will return to you about this time next year and Sarah will have a son."

- Sarah is listening. Sarah laughs
- she says to herself, "After I'm worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

- The Lord asks Abraham why she laughed.
- "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?"

- Sarah was afraid. She denied laughing.
- The Lord says, "Yes, you did."

- **Defective Faith**
- Sarah joins Abraham in disbelief
- The powerful promises of God outdistances their ability to receive it
- Sarah reveals the scandal of faith
- It is not reasonable
- It does not fit into the normal scheme of life

- The promise of the Gospel is not a conventional piece of wisdom easily accommodated

- Sarah and Abraham have grown accustomed to barrenness.
- They are resigned to a closed future. Ishmael will carry on for them
- Ironic isn't it: Abraham is about call and faith.

But here they can't believe the promise or take it seriously

- Neither can we. We would be like Abraham and Sarah wouldn't we?
- We couldn't believe God would give us a child at 90?
- We couldn't believe God would create a great nation from us?

Misuse of text:

- God doing the impossible means God will do what you desire
- Joel Osteen talks about finding a better parking space at the mall
- Prosperity preachers use this story to promote faith, belief in God
- But not everything is promised
- God didn't promise Sarah twins. God didn't promise Sarah a new kitchen
- What is possible is what is promised?
- Only what corresponds to God's good purposes is possible.
- God doesn't promise to provide everything we ask. Only what he promises
- Jesus : "Remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt."
- Evidently, what God will not do is circumvent waiting, pain, and suffering.
- God did not circumvent the cross for Christ, nor has he promised to circumvent suffering for us.

- The universal question: Is anything too hard for God?

- Is anything too hard for the Lord?
- It is the great question of that time and our time.
- It's the great question of the Bible
 - Can God make Sarah pregnant?
 - Can God make Hannah pregnant?
 - Can God save the Israelites from bondage?
 - Can God open the Red Sea and allow an escape in the presence of the Egyptian army?
 - Can God use little David to defeat Goliath?
 - Can God rebuild the people of God who are in exile?
 - Can God put a baby in Mary w/o the help of a man
 - Can God become incarnate in a man?
 - Can the death of one man on a cross atone for the sins of the world?

- Can God bring the dead back to life?
- It is the fundamental question of faith all humanity must answer.
- How this is answered determines everything else.
- If we answer “Yes, some things are too hard for God,” then God is not confessed as God.
- We have determined to live in a closed universe where things are stable, reliable, and hopeless.
- But if we answer “No, nothing is impossible for God?”
- We accept the freedom of God
- We can fully entrust our lives, our future, our world to God
- This answer calls us to break out of the parameters of reason, wisdom, morality, and common sense. It usurps our view of reality.
- The story is left unresolved:
 - Sarah denies laughing (i.e. she denies unbelief)
 - The strangers say “Yes, you did laugh.” (i.e. you don’t believe)
- The strangers leave, and we can assume Abraham and Sarah still don’t believe

But

Not everything depends on their answer.
 Not everything depends on their faith.
 Not everything depends on their defective faith

The resolve of God will not be quenched by defective faith
 God keeps his own counsel and works his own will
 It will happen not in the context of ready faith, but defective faith

- Everything doesn’t depend on me.
- Everything doesn’t depend on you.
- God is going to act, through you (at times), but at times (in spite of you).
- Prosperity Gospel teaches. Believe and it will happen.
- This story teaches, even when your belief is defective, God will be God and carry out his will.
- It takes away a great burden.

Sodom and Gomorrah

Gen 18:16-19:29

Reminder: God has now told Abraham and Sarah the promise will be fulfilled through his body and hers. At the ripe old age of 90 and 100, they will have a son of promise. This will be the work of the Lord, and not their alternative plans they made on their own.

The Sodom Narrative:

- 3 distinct movements

1. Remarkable theological reflection (18:16-32)
2. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1-29)
3. The children of Lot (19:30-38)

- the stories are varied in their composition and presupposition

I. Remarkable theological reflection (18:16-33)

- the “strange men” had promised Sarah and Abraham a *beginning*
- they will now promise Sarah and Abraham an *ending*
- the ending will be Sodom and Gomorrah
- we see here the theological principle that God is the source of all beginnings and endings
- God is the alpha and omega (Rev 21:6)
- this is why we read Rev. 21:6 at funerals. God is author of the ending and we acknowledge that.
- Ps 75:7 God is the one who exalts and brings down
- the beginning is the coming of a son to Abraham and Sarah
- the ending is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
- one is as inscrutable as the other
- we have as hard a time believing one as believing the other

A. God considers counsel with Abraham

- a remarkable statement
- a statement of legitimation
- God is legitimating Abraham, not only as a promise-bearer, but as a worthy counsel
- “*Shall I hide from Abraham, what I am about to do?*”
- God is considering taking Abraham into his intimate counsel
- Abraham will not only be the father of a great nation. He will be a trusted counsel to God

- God is going to trust Abraham
- God is going to give Abraham a “heads up” about his doings.
- “For I have chosen him” (v 19)
- the Hebrew word is *yada*, which means “to know”
- it will be helpful remember that *yada* is used in a positive way here, and the same word *yada* is used in a negative way in 19:5 describing what the men of Sodom want to do with the strange men visiting Lot

B. God’s Holiness is at stake

- Abraham asks if God *will sweep away the righteous with the wicked?* (v 23)
- Abraham is, in essence, asking “Can God, if he is really God and not a capricious tyrant destroy an entire city?”
- v 25 “Far be it from you...”
- this is not an innocuous statement.
- this is an existential statement
- It means “Far be it from who you are.”
- Abraham is challenging the idea of total destruction if there are innocent people there, b/c it would undermine the essence of who God is, God’s holiness

C. Careful interpretation

- grace is not mathematical
- this isn’t a formula speech
- 10 is not the magic number
- there is no magic number
- the numbers are really irrelevant
- this isn’t about numbers, it’s about the intrusion of grace

D. A God who negotiates

- this story is about grace, not numbers
- it’s about a God who negotiates with his people
- we affect God.
- our personal relationship with God is not all one-sided
- God listens. God responds. God is nimble
- This is a huge theological innovation that Israel brings the world
- God is not a distant deity who sets the rules and leaves us to fend for ourselves
- God is intimately and personally involved with his creation
- remember God was talking with Adam and Eve in the Garden

Application: Our prayer life

- God really does listen
- God really does respond to our prayers
- Sure there are limits. Notice Abraham didn't go down to 1 good guy.
- God responds freely, as God chooses. But God chooses to respond to us.
- We have an opportunity affect God !!!!!
- We have an opportunity to pray for healing, world peace, justice for innocents

E. Great Theological Principle

- S & G is often thought of as pure judgment
- here we see the intrusion of grace
- there is an escape
- the entire city will be spared if only a few good men are found
- the entire city will not receive what it deserves if a few will be found
- God is convinced by Abraham that the guilty will be spared if a few innocent people are found. There will be grace for the guilty as a result of the goodness of the few.
- Do we have here, a precursor to the Gospel?
- the capacity of good people outweighs the destructiveness of evil people
- God will give more heed to the good than the evil
- this undermines the idea of God as score-keeper, offering judgment quid pro quo
- theological point : The power of righteousness overrides evil !!
- NT counterpart: Rom 5:15-17
- the goodness of Jesus Christ is greater than the sin of Adam

Sodom and Gomorrah

Gen 18:16-19:29

Reminder: **The Sodom Narrative:**
 - 3 distinct movements

1. Remarkable theological reflection (18:16-32)
2. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1-29)
3. The children of Lot (19:30-38)

I. The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1-28)

- an odd story
- seems more akin to Noah's story, than Abraham's story
- that is the point
- we've had this wonderful interplay b/w God and Abraham that has revealed a dramatic new understanding of God.
 - * God negotiates with his people
 - * Good overcomes evil (a few good men would've saved Sodom)

- yet, here we are. Humanity at its worst
- we have here a juxtaposition of the faith of Abraham vs. the waywardness of humanity
- Abraham has been unfaithful at times, but we are talking about pure evil in Sodom

A. The sin of Sodom

- popular name of "sodomy" for homosexual act
- the term *yada* is used to describe their particular act.
- they wanted "to know" the strange men
- cf Judges 19:22-25 a similar account later in the history of Israelite judges
- conclusion: the particular sin of these Sodomites was the desire to gang rape God's messengers.

- but other texts in the Bible suggest a larger sin pattern of Sodom
- Is 1:10 sin of injustice
- Jer 23:14 a variety of irresponsible acts
- Ezek 16:49 sin of pride, excessive food, indifference to the needy
- Zeph 2:9 weeds and salt pits (i.e. nothing productive at all)

- NT references
- Jude 7 sexual immorality and perversion
- Mt 10:14-15 not listening to prophets who bring the word of God
(also Mt 11:23-24, Lk 10:12, 17:29, 2 Ptr 2:6)

- Conclusion: the sin of Sodom has to do with a general depravity among the men of the city against one another and nature itself, sexual immorality being a derivative of that sin.

B. The power of natural law

- there is no indication the people of Sodom are the chosen people
- they are not people of promise
- yet they are held accountable for their sins
- God's laws are clear, even to those who have not received a written law
- cf Rom 1:18-20, 28-32
-
- in this case, the judgment is death
- no goodness was found in the city.
- where's the forgiveness?
- where's the grace?

- in this case, the grace has been evident in the preceding story. If a few good men could be found, God would spare all the evil city
- in this case, no good men are found outside of Lot
- Lot is aided in his escape.

- we must be careful in our understanding of grace
- grace is amazing, but it's not cheap
- grace is unearned, not deserved
- we can't presume upon God's forgiveness indefinitely
- there comes a point (who knows what that is), when God intervenes on behalf of the victims, the oppressed, and punishes those who have victimized and oppressed them.

- if you jump off a building, you can expect gravity to take you down
- if you break God's natural laws, you can expect to be hurt eventually
- what we consider misdemeanors, God may consider felonies
- God sees the affect of all behavior on his created order. We do not.

- Therefore, we should give God space to judge in ways that fulfill his justice in the world and the world to come.
- God is Lord and Judge overall. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

II. Excursis: The Problem of Holy War in the Bible

Did God kill every man, woman, and child in the city of Sodom and Gomorrah?

What does this say about God? What does this say about the Bible? Even if we accept the idea that all the adults of Sodom and Gomorrah were evil, should all their children have been wiped out by fire and brimstone? This same question appears in the period of Joshua when the Israelites infiltrated the land of Canaan and believed God told them to kill every man, woman, and child -- without any mercy.

How have Christians dealt with this question throughout the history of the church?

1. Different gods

- Marcion's position
- this is clearly another God than the one revealed by Jesus
- Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek
- Jesus taught us to love our enemies, give them our cloak, go a second mile
- Jesus allowed others to kill them to overcome their evil
- clearly the God of the OT is not the God of the NT

2. Progressive Revelation

- The Bible is the written revelation of God.
- The Bible is a divine-human book, "the Word of God through the words of men"
- All the Bible reveals something about God, but the ultimate revelation of God is in Jesus Christ
- Heb 11:1 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets...."
...."the son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."
- Therefore Jesus is the climax of God's revelation
- Therefore we should read and interpret the Bible through the teachings and life and works of Christ
- So to answer the question, "Did God kill every man, woman, and child in S&G?" we should think of the question "Would Jesus tell Abraham or anyone else to kill every man woman, and child?"
- The answer most reasonable is "No."
- So how do we explain it. We explain it through progressive revelation
- God has progressively revealed himself to mankind from the time of Adam to Abraham to Joshua to Jesus.
- Just as we don't reveal or explain the depths of God to an infant or a child, so God has done with humankind. We gradually teach our children in greater depth about God, because to do otherwise would be overwhelming. Later we teach a fuller understanding. So God has act in

world history. We already know Abraham is a fallible human being. He lies when he believes it necessary to save his own skin.

- Abraham lived in a culture of *realpolitick*, a culture of holy war. Jihad. His tribes of Israel were fighting like others tribes of Canaan, Assyria, Babylonia.

- The Land was God's promise to Israel. Abraham was promised the land. Later, Joshua would be sent to conquer the land, settle there, and inhabit the land. From there Israel would be a light to the Gentiles. They would have a base from which to operate.

- Joshua may have heard enter, conquer, and do not compromise, do not assimilate in any way with the evil, pagan people. And Joshua, who was very inculturated in holy war of his time, understood God to say "annihilate." God may have said "infiltrate and settle", but Joshua who did not have the vantage of the perfect revelation of Jesus Christ there, interpreted this to be "annihilate and settle."

Likewise, Abraham understand natural law, the moral laws of God. His cousin Lot personally witnessed the immorality and injustice of S&G. Lot then witnessed the destruction of S&G which is known to be in a lively volcanic region. So when Lot witnessed the volcano destroying S&G, he naturally understood that as the active hand of God. God controlled volcanos, earthquakes, hurricanes, every natural element. Therefore, God completely destroyed S&G as understood by Lot, who then told the story to Abraham, who continued to tell the story to his offspring through the lens of the promises God made to him. Lot and Abraham made this interpretation and recorded without the benefit of Jesus Christ, who was yet to come.

3. Face Value

- The Bible says it and we accept the words of Scripture at face value.
 - If the Bible says "God killed every man, woman, and child in S&G who are we to argue with that.
 - Our claim that this seems immoral puts us in judgment over God. We are allowing our modern sensibilities override the express teachings of Scripture.
 - Everything God does it moral, good, righteous, and loving
 - Therefore this was a good act although we may not understand it. We simply accept it as true because the Bible is our authority and while the NT interprets the OT it doesn't contradict it.
 - We accept these statements about God's wrath against Canaan at face value.
 - This doesn't mean that "holy war" is a legitimate action for the people of God today. This was done in a particular time under a particular call of God that has not been repeated. Today "holy war" is a spiritual struggle against the forces of evil
- Eph 6:12-13

III. The Children of Lot (19:30-38)

- a strange story of incest b/w Lot and his two daughters
- the resultant family populates the tribes of the Moabites and the Ammonites
- both these tribes will become bitter enemies of the Israelites
- what are we to do with this strange, dysfunctional story?

1. What goes around comes around?

- Lot what appeared to be the best land and left Abraham the leftovers (Gen 13:10)
- Lot chose the land east of Canaan. East is usually a bad omen in Genesis
- (Adam and Eve were banished from the garden and sent east of Eden)

- then when the men of Sodom came to his home he offered his daughters to satisfy their sexual, perverted appetites
- what kind of father would offer his daughters to a group of rapists ??
- clearly this is a man who has been on a downward moral spirit

- Irony: Lot had offered his daughters to be sexually abused.
Now his daughters use him in a sexually abusive way.
They get him drunk, then become pregnant by him

- his fate corresponds to his earlier deed
- what goes around comes around.
- you reap what you sew

- parents who are abusive, negligent, etc. are usually harmed by this abuse
- a parent that doesn't love his child, will not likely be honored and loved later on.

- I have known parents that haven't even attended their own sons/daughters wedding
- The son/daughter didn't want them to come.
- What goes around, comes around. A general truth.

2. God works in the worst of situations

- we know what Lot and his daughters did was wrong
- Lev 18:6 "No one is to have sexual relations with a close relative."
- this was a practice among other tribes
- the people of promise were to be different

- Lot and his daughter produce a child, whose name is Moab
- Ruth was a Moabite during the time of the judges
- she married Boaz, an Israelite

- they had a son, Obed
- Obed would have a son, Jesse
- Jesse would have a son, David

- Mt 1:5 the genealogy of Jesus
 “Boaz, the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth

- from this comes Jesus

- today we are living in times when children will be born out of wedlock
- children will be born or raised in homes that do not honor biblical norms for fidelity
- children are going to have single parents, gay parents. It's a fact of our times.

- We do not have to lay aside biblical norms for marriage and sexuality just b/c the larger culture is doing that.
- But let's remember that God can and does use people for his divine purposes who live outside that norm.
- This isn't a modern accommodationist view. It's a biblical view.

- Even out of the worst of family situations, God can bring goodness, life, and blessing to the world !!

- Praise be to God!

Is God Too Demanding?

Gen. 22:1-14

Skipping

- chp 20, Abraham and Abimelech, another story of Abraham presenting Sarah as his sister rather than his wife. Ditto
- Chp 21, Birth of Isaac and the jealous tension b/w Sarah and Hagar. Ditto

Context: Story of Ab's sacrifice of Isaac. One of the most troubling texts in all the Bible.

- best known, most troubling story in the OT
- one of the most demanding theological narratives in the OT
- it is the climax of the Abraham narrative
- everything leads to this extraordinarily tense moment
- everything becomes denouement afterward

- if all we had was the promise of Isaac, then the birth of Isaac we would have a sweet story, a story of origins
- instead we are faced with an intense challenge to our understanding of God and faith
- this is a story of anguished faith

Interpretation:

- need to interpret like a story
- not a set of propositions
- must take seriously the story as it unfolds
- Abraham = Israel
- the journey of Abraham is the journey of Israel
- Example: We can't approach the story propositionally, what truths does it hold?
 - : Since God knew Abraham would be faithful, there is really no risk here.
 - : Perhaps God did know what Abraham was going to do, but Abraham didn't know what God was going to do.
 - : We don't know what God is going to do in our lives either.
- this is the anguish of faith. It's why faith is so difficult. Not for wimps.

I. A Test (22:1-2)

- the story begins with a test
- the test is to take Isaac, Abraham's son, his only son, the son he loves
- notice this description. Son. Only Son. Beloved Son.
- sacrifice this son as a burnt offering

- Does God really test this way?
- The story tells us he does. He does for Abraham. He does for Israel.
- Actually, testing is a common thing God does in the OT.
- Ex 20:20 after the giving of the 10 Commandments
- Deut 8:16 tested the Israelites in the desert
- Deut 13:3 when a prophet of another god gives you dreams, wonders don't listen to him. God is testing you.
- what we learn from all this testing, is that God is testing for loyalty
- when there is a context of syncretism, God is testing for complete devotion

- some have argued the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, is the story of his moving from the polytheism of the region of Mesopotamia, where he was from, to the monotheism of Canaan. In other words, this is depicting a major religious revolution taking place. Polytheism to monotheism. There are no revolutions w/o the shedding of blood. God is calling Abraham to trust him and not the other gods.

- We are learning something about God.
- God is a jealous God. God wants undivided loyalty.
- God is not a God of tolerance.
- The faith of Israel is not to be syncretistic, not to be pluralistic
- the testing of Israel in a syncretistic culture is to determine if Israel would trust only Yahweh or if it would also trust other gods.

- testing is no marginal notion in the faith of Israel
- it occurs when a singular God demands singular devotion.
- testing is unnecessary in religions of tolerance.
- testing for all of us comes when it is more attractive or easier to serve another God.
- Do we mean what we say when we call Jesus "Lord" or do we not !!!

II. New Testament testing

- not just an OT notion
- the early church knew there would be times of testing
- Mark 13:9-13 testing during crisis
- 1 Ptr 1:7 trials come so faith may be proved genuine

- God tests, and sometimes ultimately in order to bring us to maturity
- illustration: Officers and Gentlemen
 - boot camp. Mayo is one that gets under the sergeant's skin
 - he challenges the sergeant, fights him, goes to bat for his buddy even when it puts him in danger
 - when the sergeant finds that Mayo has been cleaning belt buckles for money he assigns him to a weekend of running, pushups, and hell.
 - in the middle of doing pushups in the mud, the serg. is yelling at him, asking for him to quit. Notice what Mayo says.
 - [Show film clip]
 - he breaks down "I can't . I don't have nothing else."
 - this is the test of Abraham
 - he must follow through the hell of this sacrifice, b/c he has nothing else
 - God was the giver of the promise
 - God was the one who gave Isaac to Abraham in his old age
 - Abraham has nothing without this God. There is no other way to fulfill the promise. Even if it seems contradictory.

 - in our pluralistic, syncretistic world where the temptation is to blend all the worldviews into one, God demands absolute loyalty. God is intolerant.
 - God wants us to come to the point where we say "I don't have nothing else. I have no where to go but to You O God."
 - Faith in this God is not easy.
 - It will be the hardest way to live. But it's the only way of promise.

III. The move toward faith (3-5)

- Abraham sets out to carry out the test
- he takes two servants and his son, Isaac
- he cuts the wood and sets out
- on the 3rd day he sees the place. He leaves the servants and takes the boy
- "We will worship and then we will come back."
- Did you notice that: "We will come back."

- Is he deluded? Is he that confident Isaac will be spared?
- Is he trying to stay positive to convince himself?
- I don't know. What do any of us know about the purity of our faith?
- How much is real? How much is cultural? How much is family tradition?
- Perhaps, Abraham doesn't know. But he continues to move toward the mtn.

IV. God provides (6-8)

- Isaac is old enough to know something is missing
 - he notices the wood and fire, but doesn't see a lamb for sacrifice
 - Did Abraham swallow hard? How long did it take for Abraham to give an answer?
 - finally he says, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering
-
- this man of faith, this man of impure, imperfect faith exercises faith
 - he affirms that God will provide
 - he affirms that God is the source of life
 - God is the God of promise.
 - God will provide the answers to his promises
-
- Abraham's answer means the alternative ram was not luck, but providence
 - the ram in the thicket is not coincidence. It is orchestrated by God
 - God's provision in our lives isn't luck,
 - It's not that we are Americans or prosperous or smart
 - God's provision are a demonstration of his grace. He makes and keeps promises.
 - In a world of naturalism, secularism, pluralism, scientism this is a scandalous idea
 - God alone provides
-
- the word "provide" comes from the Hebrew word ra'ah, "see"
 - God will see to it, God will see before
 - Latin : pro – video
 - so we get the term "providence"
 - God's provision throughout future
 - I don't believe in luck. I believe in providence.
 - God is active in the world in ways we can't see. God sees what we can't see.
 - God cares and sustains.
 - Mt 6:25-33 look at the birds of the air

V. The Challenge of Faith: God Tests and Provides

- Abraham is walking a path of juxtaposition
- Abraham is walking a path of faith in a God who both tests and provides
- There is no way around this.
- This is the God who reveals himself to Abraham
- God tests and God provides

- Our deal: We only want the provision. Right?

We want to take classes Pass/Fail

We want to audit classes and not write papers and take test

We want to work, but not be evaluated

We want God to provide our daily bread, and keep us from tests

- Or if we must have tests, let them be easy tests.

- Abraham is learning God is both

God is free to test us. God is sovereign.

God is competent to provide for us. God is Creator.

God is free and competent.

A silly notion to the modern world.

God comes as he will. As high and holy, God identifies his people, testing to see if they are serious about their faith. He wants to know in whose lives he will be Lord.

- as loving and compassionate and generous, God provides. He gives in ways that can't be explained, and are not deserved.

- We are not permitted to make God one or the other. God is both.

- In NT we find the conflation of these two: Testing and Providing

- We face this every day

- 1 Cor 10:13 *"God is faithful, and he will not let you be **tempted** beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also **provide** the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."*

- this is the strain and strength of each day.

VI. The Leap of Faith (v 9-11)

- Abraham takes his son, binds his son on the wood
 - He took his knife to slay his son.
 - It was the moment where test and provide were at their intense peak.
 - What kind of emotion was Abraham feeling?
 - What kind of God would ask this of anyone?
 - What disposition did Isaac have as he lay on that altar?
-
- every person comes to this moment
 - we are going to put our faith in something
 - atheists put faith in themselves
 - some people put their faith in govt
 - some put their faith in their intelligence or goodness
 - some people put their faith in science, logic, reason
-
- Abraham decides to put his faith in the God who tests and provides

V. Rembrandt



- painted in 1635
 - hangs in The Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia
 - Rembrandt painted it when he was 29 and his first son was born and died
-
- Isaac. We do not see his face
He is helpless
-
- Abraham.
 - his left hand covers the face of Isaac
 - he can't bear to look at the son he is about to kill

- his right hand is lifted up
- if we could see clearly we could see tears running down Abraham's face

- Knife
 - the knife has dropped from his hand
 - he has been seized by the angel

- Angel
 - some have suggested the angel has the face of Isaac
 - it's the face of a young boy
 - the nose is like the father
 - Could God be speaking through the son, to fulfill all his promises
 - Could the son of promise, being the voice of God?

VI. God had a Son

- God too had son, an only son, a son he loved
- he took him to a mountain
- Son said, we have the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb
- Father said, "God will provide the lamb."

- The Son was put on a cross.
- There was no intervention. There was no rescue. There was no interrupting angel
- The blood of the son was spilled.
- God provided the lamb that took away the sins of the world

- God provided a son, so we could be the people of promise

Will God ask me to kill my child? Is God too demanding?

Troubling Text: Why?

1. Seems to reveal a contradiction in God himself.

He promises and gives Isaac. Now he asks for him back. God is portrayed as psychopathic, giving then asking back.

2. God too demanding?

Would God really do this? A number of scholars say no. They say Ab dreamed this and the story of sacrifice is a story of how Ab overcame the pagan culture around him to obey the God of his fathers, who valued life more than these pagan deities. Presupposition behind all this is that God is not really that demanding. The text that is normative for all interpretation is "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

(READ TEXT)

I. Is God too demanding?

- it's easy to see where this question comes in

- Ab is already a man of faith

12: 1-4 he departs to follow God into the unknown¹

5:6 positively responds to God's promise

17:22-27 embraces circumcision

21 Isaac is born and Ab rejoices

- WE too are people of faith: Why us? Why pain? Why loss? Why do the wicked seem to prosper? Or Why do the people who are shallow in faith and only play church seem to be so successful and here I am trying to be faithful and I've got heartache, loneliness, and more bills than I can pay.

- When those feelings arise we can remember we are in good company.

Ab: asked to kill his son

Moses: sent into the desert with a whining bunch of ignorant slaves for 40 years

David: Ps 3:1 "O Lord, how many are my foes, How many rise up against me."

- Paul: bore on this body the stigmata, the marks of J

- Jesus: despised and rejected by men, led like a lamb to slaughter

II. God's demand: Radical Obedience

- Gen 22:2, "take your son,sacrifice"

- Ab's response is immediate

- This is a serious God. God of Ab, Is, and Jac, and Jesus This is not the god of civil religion. the god on our coins "in god we trust", the god of our graduations and civic organizations.

-our problem with this text is cultural. our culture which has been called the "Sensate Culture" is dominated by the idea that pleasure is king. God is love, not judgment. God is redeeming, not demanding. God would not dare violate our cultural sensitivities.

- John Leo's column "A Kinder Gentler Army"

- drill sergeants are now like supportive counselors, eager to avoid tension, please recruits, and build self-esteem....Under the relaxed new standards trainees wear gym shorts, T-shirts, and sneakers. Instead of running formation, they run on their own. Sometimes,....Navy recruits are given 'blue cards' to hand to a trainer when they are feeling blue. They are also told it's OK to cry, and that 'physically, anybody can get through boot camp. At army bases, bayonet practice may be called off if the weather is too hot. On obstacle courses (many of them sensitively renamed 'confidence courses') recruits may run around some walls if climbing them is just too hard. In Marine training at Quantico, a visitor noticed a footstool placed in front of an 8 foot wall so that no trainee would fail to get over it.

- reason for this is to accommodate the 'couch potato' generation.- we are lowering standards and dropping demands because we are creating a society where demands are inconvenient and we have convinced ourselves they are harsh and repressive.

III. God is a Tester

- throughout the Bible God reveals himself as a tester

- Ex 20:20 James 1:2-4 Heb 2:18

- God tests, and sometimes ultimately in order to bring us to maturity

- illustration: Officers and Gentlemen

-boot camp. Mayo is one that gets under the sergeant's skin

- he challenges the sergeant, fights him, goes to bat for his buddy even when it puts him in danger

- when the sergeant finds that Mayo has been cleaning belt buckles for money he assigns him to a weekend of running, pushups, and hell.

- in the middle of doing pushups in the mud, the serg. is yelling at him, asking for him to quit,

- he breaks down "I can't . I don't have nothing else."

- God wants us to come to the point where we say "I don't have nothing else. I have no where to go but to You O God."

IV. God is a Provider

v 8

v14

Mk 8:35

- There is a radical obedience toward God, because there is an unreserved trust in God.

- Ab. believes that God will provide.

- And God does provide.

- In the end, God does provide "yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art w/ me (you will provide)

personal reflection: whenever I have stepped out in faith toward God, he has provided. It hasn't always been easy, but any steps that have resulted in pain or loss have always been followed by strength and more confidence in God. He continues to beckon us to deeper sacrifice, more radical obedience, and more fragile vulnerability. He is always there in the end as provider: grace, presence, and resurrection, eternal life

Planning for Your Death

Gen 23

Transition:

- we come to a more relaxed part of the Abraham narrative
- the narrative has run its course and reached its climax
- its sweep from the initial promise in 12:1-3 to the radical risk of the son in 22:1-14
- all good stories have points of climatic intensity and more relaxing elements
- this is a relaxing element
- fits well w/ my more relaxed mood this week. The wedding is over.

Intro to this part:

Title sounds morbid. Yet, necessary.

Another way of saying it: "Putting your house in order."

- Practically- it takes an emotional burden off your family
- theologically — it recognizes our mortality and puts us in the frame of mind to prayerfully consider our years
- . Psalm 90:10, 12

Context:

straightforward story. Not overtly theological.

No mention of God. Sarah dies.

Abraham is prompted to take care of the practical matter of her burial.

- Seeks one from the Hittites b/c he doesn't yet own any land.
- Negotiates. Resolves the sale.

READ TEXT

I. What causes us to desire to plan for death? (w 1-2)

- death of spouse
- death of close friend.

Illustration: my mother- when my father died she very soon made arrangements for her own funeral. Casket, services, etc. Though she is not a woman of means, she has arranged for every aspect of her funeral. It's an act of selflessness

- Elizabeth's mother has done the same thing.

- Sarah lived 127 years. She had no burial site so Abraham had to address the situation
- notice that she died in the land of promise, but it's not their land yet

II. What do we do to plan for our death?

- Abraham bought property
- it's the longest legal negotiation for property we have in the Bible
- notice the self-effacing manner of Abraham: "I am a stranger and alien...."
- he is not demanding.
- he doesn't take the land that has been promised to him.
- he characterizes his alien status and ask to purchase land.

- in response he is called a "mighty prince."
- literally he is called a "prince of God" or prince of Elohim
- Abraham has a reputation among the Canaanites
- yet he approaches them in a humble manner

Application: We're living in the day of bluster and ego. We like to announce our rights and our entitlement to this and that.

- Yet, we are more often effective if we begin from a position of humility
- cf Luke 14:8-11 take the low seat first

Back to the story

Abraham takes care of Sarah's burial

- He bought property.
- Remember the promise? Descendants, Great nation, land!
- But notice that he initiates this. He buys land. God hadn't give it to him yet.
- He could've waited for God to give him something, but he didn't.
- He bought land from the Hittites

- Application: Sometime we have to take a word from God and flesh that out in our lives. Act. Not just wait and say, "Well, God promised. Now he ought to deliver and use that as an excuse to do nothing.
- this is different than depending on Ishmael, who was not the son of promise
- Abraham took matters into his own hands, not believing the promise
- here we have a more practical matter.
- Abraham is not going to mistake a burial tomb as the land of promise.
- Sarah dies and needs to be buried. Something has to be done.
- He takes the promise God had given him and he cooperats w/ God in making that promise become reality for his ancestors.
- The first land given in the promise is purchased.
- But the act is connected to the promise. It perpetuates the promise
- It would be a physical sight the family could go and remember their mother,(of promise

Perpetuating the Promise

- That's the most important thing we should do to plan for our death ——

---- perpetuate the promise-

For us that means the promise of the Kingdom of God.

Both near and far. Both here and hereafter.

We are to find ways to make our faith affect future generations.

How can we perpetuate our faith?

1. Perpetual Giving (state, global missions, church)

- support foundations and faith based institutions
- Gertrude Alley
- Virginia Miller, house
- Bill Marcuson, endowment for benevolence fund
- Katherine Green, fund for transportation for missionaries in m.h.
- some people have ABC as the beneficiary of the insurance policy

2. Perpetual Testament

- we know about last will and testament

- we do pretty well with the wills, but what about the testament.

That last statement of faith.

Some last testaments:

* Famous French author Francois Rabelais died in 1553. His last will and testament consisted in these 3 sentences:

“I have nothing.

I owe much.

I leave the rest to the poor.”

* German poet Heinrich Heine left his wife his entire estate, provided she marry again. That way, he said, at least one man would regret this death.”

What if you had your testimony read by your children and grandchildren on your birthday every year.

- I encourage you to write a “last testament”

3. Personal Conversations

- family and friends
- illustration: Margaret Martin , matriarch of FBC Mt Olive
- business woman
- church treasurer for 30 years
- knew she was dying
- had her two sisters, all the nephews and nieces come in
- had a talk
- called me in.
- talked about what the church meant to her. What her faith meant
- she sat up in the bed in her pajamas, and talked with clarity and grace
- then died the next day.

III. What can't be done in preparing for our death?

- You can't or shouldn't finish all you start.

Our dreams and visions ought to be so great, they would take more than a lifetime to accomplish.

Heb 11:13-14. Ab never got finished.

- he only saw the promises from a distance
- the great things in our lives will probably not be completed

- MLK "I have a dream"
- Billy Graham "I have never read about retirement in the Bible"
- Jesus, when he left his disciples were naive, poorly organized, scared.

- Ab's promise still moves nations
- MLK's dream brings hope
- Billy's evangelical zeal still enlist soldiers to share the Gospel w/ the world
- Jesus is still alive, making disciples

- I hope your dreams and visions are so large and vast that you'll never accomplish it in this time.

- Perpetuate the faith of Jesus Christ
- inspire someone younger to carry on the dream,
- Hold on to the promise, even when it's in a distant land.

Conclusion

For years William Wilberforce had pushed in Britain's Parliament for the abolition of slavery. Discouraged, he was about to give up. His elderly friend, John Wesley, heard of it and from his deathbed called for pen and paper.

With trembling hand Wesley wrote: " Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? Oh be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery shall vanish away before it."

Wesley died six days later. But Wilberforce fought for 45 more years and in 1833, 3 days after his own death, slavery was abolished forever in Britain.

Plan for your death, but dream big and perpetuate your dream while God gives you breath.

How Do you Find a Spouse that Pleases God? Gen 24

Introduction: Does the Bible give us any help in finding a spouse?

this story of Abraham finding a wife for Isaac

- a simple, elegant, understated story about finding a wife
- Isaac is the son of promise.
- For the promise to be fulfilled he needs a wife, and they need children
- long, leisurely story told at a slow pace

Summary of Story: Sarah has died and Ab wants a son for Isaac.

- But he doesn't want any of the Canaanite women nearby.
he wants a home grown woman from Mesopotamia.
So he sends his servant to fetch one.
- this servant is in charge of all Abraham's affairs. Complete trust.
- he makes his servant take an oath. "hand under the thigh" (v 2)
- later in Genesis, when Jacob was dying, he asked Joseph to place his hand under his thigh, and promise to bury him in his homeland, not Egypt
- the servant makes the promises

- the servant goes to Mesopotamia, and prays for success along the way
- he takes 10 camels and all kinds of gifts. Show of prosperity
- he arrives outside the city of Nahor, by a well
- he prays that God will grant hesed, steadfast love to Abraham
- he seeks a sign
- the wife will not only offer the servant water, but the camels as well

- young Rebekah approaches, beautiful, virgin (How did he know?)
- he asks for water. She gives him water, and then gives his camels water
- He's excited !!!

- he breaks out the gold. Gold nose-ring (1/2 shekel) and two bracelets (10 shekels)
- he brings out the bling !!!
- he thanks God
- he confesses the Lord has "led" him to this place.
- a theme here. God's leadership in the ordinary events of life

- they go to her father's home. Laban, her brother sees her wearing the gold
- Laban invites the servant to spend the night.
- Was it the kinship with Abraham that is bringing Isaac and Rebekah together, or the gold, or the providence of God?

- The servant tells the whole story to Laban and the family
- They have won the lottery! Hit the jackpot

- They offer Rebekah.
- the servant brings out gifts for everybody, Rebekah and her family
- they wine, dine, and sleep
- the next day the servant asks for Rebekah to return with him to meet Isaac
- they ask for 10 days
- the servant again ask for immediate return to Abraham
- they ask Rebekah what she wants.
- She says let's do this thing now. No need to wait.
- they offer her a blessing reminiscent of the blessing to Abraham

- she leaves.
- Isaac is in the Negev. he sees the camels coming
- she sees Isaac and ask who he is.
- “He's your husband to be.”
- she covers herself with her veil.
- they meet. Directly go to the mother's tent and are married.
- No ceremony. The pledges and promises have already been made.
- the Honeymoon begins

How Do you find a spouse that pleases God?

- especially since 1.2 million couples divorce each year
- avg duration of the marriages is 7 years, w/ half of these disintegrating after only 3 years
- many couples have no role model in choosing a partner or seeing a good marriage in action. We have grown pessimistic about marriages. Remember Carly Simon's song from another generation, *That's the Way I've Always Heard it Should Be*:

My father sits at night with no lights on
 His cigarette glows in the dark.
 The living room is still;
 I walk by, no remark.
 I tiptoe past the master bedroom where
 My mother reads her magazines.
 I hear her call sweet dreams,
 But I forgot how to dream.

But you say it's time we moved in together
And raised a family of our own, you and me -
Well, that's the way I've always heard it should be:
You want to marry me, we'll marry.

My friends from college they're all married now;
They have their houses and their lawns.
They have their silent noons,
Tearful nights, angry dawns.
Their children hate them for the things they're not;
They hate themselves for what they are-
And yet they drink, they laugh,
Close the wound, hide the scar.

Chorus

You say we can keep our love alive
Babe - all I know is what I see -
The couples cling and claw
And drown in love's debris.
You say we'll soar like two birds through the clouds,
But soon you'll cage me on your shelf -
I'll never learn to be just me first
By myself.

Chorus

1. You're partner should be a Christian.

- .- Ab went back to his kindred to find a wife. The Canaanites were too pagan
- cf Gen 28:1 for aversion to Canaanites
- Why? Ex 34:12-16 the husbands will follow the wives in idolatry
- 2 Cor 6:14ff don't be unequally yoked
- Paul is calling for believers to be separate from unbelievers in intimate living

2. Pray.

- 24:12., this is admittedly a magical kind of prayer.
- but it doesn't dismiss our need to pray about important things .
- key element of prayer however isn't magic, it's trust, Ab and the servant completely trust Yahweh's *hesed*, his steadfast love.
- *hesed* is a theme of this prayer and the entire wife search

- it's trust in the steadfast love of God to fulfill his promises
- *hesed* begins the prayer and ends the scene in doxology (v 26-27)
- Abraham and the servant now trust in the steadfast love of God.
- Phil 4:6 -don't worry about anything
- I'm not going to worry about Sarah and Bryan, although there are many landmines in front of them, that they don't know about.

"Make the choice of a marital partner carefully and prayerfully... you're playing for keeps." James Dobson

3. Look for someone who cares about something besides themselves.

- 24:18-20 Rebekah cared for his camels as well
- Ann Landers column

Dear Ann: With all the columns you've written about finding "Mr. Right," many women still don't understand the basics. I've compiled a list of guidelines that will be extremely helpful if followed correctly. I hope you will print it. It could change a lot of lives. – Merrillville, Ind.

Dear Merrillville: You have made some valid points. A reader from Quebec sent a similar list two years ago. Both lists provide excellent suggestions for husband hunting. Here is an edited version of A Perfect Guide for Husband Hunting:

1. You probably won't find Mr. Right in a bar. Try grocery stores, church, where you work or through a friend.
2. If he tells you he is married, he's separated or his wife doesn't understand him — he has trouble stamped on his forehead.
3. If he tries to move in with you or wants to borrow money, be careful. He may be a con artist.
4. If his family doesn't like him and avoids him, maybe you should, too. They know him better than you do.
5. Check out his car. It should be clean, serviceable and insured.
6. If he has children, decide if you want to marry them, too, because that is the way it will be. And be aware that they are a direct link to his former wife.
7. You don't need a man to be a complete woman. Choose the man – don't let him choose you. Be selective. No one has the power to make you happier than the right man or more miserable than the wrong one.

8. Find someone who laughs at the same things you laugh at. A shared sense of humor will make the good times better and the bad times less difficult.
9. If you want several children and plan to stay home and raise them, choose a man whose skills and education will put him in a high salary category.
10. If you want a career, don't marry a man who hates his job. He will resent the time and attention you give to yours.
11. Two red flags: Does he have a short fuse and a hot temper? Is he hung up on his mother? These are two negatives that inevitably get worse after marriage. Both can be disastrous.
12. Don't get married because you are afraid to be alone. No wife is more alone than one whose husband pays no attention to her.
13. No matter how wonderful his other qualities may be, do not marry a man who has threatened, hit or humiliated you. In fact, don't go out with him a second time. Such a man is hazardous to your emotional and physical health and should be avoided like the plague.
14. Pay attention to how he treats his mother. Chances are good that he will treat you the same way.

4. Check out the family.

- 24:23 "tell me whose daughter you are"
- we marry more than one person. We marry into a family
- Ruth 1:16-17 "your people will be my people"

- from Sarah and Bryan's wedding (May 18, 2013)

A third promise you're making today,

III. Your people shall be my people

Who are "your people?" Ruth was speaking primarily about Naomi's extended family. She was saying I will embrace your family and recognize them as my own. Here is where young couples often are naïve. They believe they are marrying one person, but in psychological fact, they are marrying into a family. Sorry, Bryan, but I'm part of the deal here today. Not to say I intend to intrude in your marriage intentionally, but you and Sarah know each other well enough now that you can see traits in one another that come from parents. There are brothers and sisters that are part of the deal, that impact you. For better or worse, what your families do affect you. All of us have selfish tendencies, and live under the delusion that what we do affects no one else. But our decisions do affect the larger family, and even the human family in some ways. The promise of marriage is the promise to extend your sense of family, and to try to love them as your own family, even if at times it takes some effort, some forgiveness, and some patience. Your people shall be my people.

- Elizabeth's parents were good Xtns, solid emotionally, and the kind of people I was proud of.

- they were part of the deal 28 years ago. Now I'm living, not with Elizabeth, but with her mother.

- Pay attention to the family.

Summary:

1. Look for a Christian

2. Pray about your mate

3. Look for someone who thinks of someone other than themselves

4. Pay attention to the family

Life Goes On and On and On

Gen 25:1-18

Intro: Sarah has died. The wife of promise
Isaac has been married off.

If the order has been chronological, Abraham is 140 years old

- he does what any 140 year old man living alone would do. He marries again !!
- He marries Keturah.
- Who in the world remembers Keturah. I had forgotten all about her.
- I remember Sarah.
- I remember Hagar.
- But who remembers Keturah
- 1 Chron. 1:32 describes her as Abraham's concubine

Polygamy

- What is the biblical view of polygamy
- Clearly it is not condemned at this point

1. Dispensational Polygamy

- The Mormons argued that God provided a special dispensation during the period of the patriarchs to allow for polygamy. Likewise, God allowed a period of polygamy during early Mormon history. God has since offered a new revelation of monogamy and curtailed the dispensation of polygamy.
- when Moses and the 10 Commandments came along, polygamy was ended.
- I think that's a convenient way to look at it.
- It absolves the Mormons of immorality
- It absolves the patriarchs of immorality

2. Historical reality

- this is evidence that Israelite history is credible.
 - it hasn't been cleaned up by later editors.
 - early polygamy stands exposed
 - I remember when I wrote my history of NC Baptists and submitted it to the convention for publication, I met with the top brass.
 - I sat at a table with the 3 top VPs and their secretaries
 - they challenged any statement that made the convention look bad
 - it was my role to resist their edits. I was fighting for historical accuracy.
 - They wanted a piece of propaganda to make them look good.
-
- Calvin, the great Swiss theologian of the Reformation, criticized Abraham for this part of his history

- God revealed in the 10 Commandments, and later through ethical decrees, as well as the teachings of Christ that polygamy was immoral.

- Just because the patriarch had multiple wives, didn't mean it was approved by God

- Solomon was the most notorious (1 Kg 11:1-8), 700 wives, 300 concubines

- How Solomon ever came to be considered wise, conveniently dismisses that fact

- What we have here, I believe, is cultural accommodation

- Polygamy was common in the ancient Near East cultures

- It was as common cellphones in our pockets.

- It was a derivative of a patriarchal culture

- Men were in charge. Their needs and desires were the priority

- Abraham adapted to his culture, like we all do to some degree

- Remember he asked Sarah to pretend she was his sister at one point to save his hide

- The Bible is one long story of God overcoming the brokenness and fallenness of the world, establishing his intentions for humanity

- It took time.

- the early patriarchs were living in the midst of male-selfish-domination

- the needs of the woman were secondary

- Moses and the Law would improve this

- later Jesus would improve the law. He stated marriage was b/w one man and one

woman

- Paul would say leaders of the church should be the husbands of one wife.

- Paul would later call for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

Love from man to woman could never surpass that kind of love

- Yet, another example of the elevation of the Christian faith on fractured human cultures

- there is a trajectory in the Bible toward goodness

Sons of concubines

receive gifts

sent "east"

Son of Promise

receive all

remain in the land

"East" is usually a bad omen in Genesis

Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden and sent east of Eden

After Cain killed his brother, he was banished to the East

Lot chose the land "East" which eventually would lead to the destruction of his wife

East is a term designation separation from God more than a geographical location

- so we have this dichotomy

- the sons of concubines are given "gifts", but not all

- they are sent to the East.

Application: God does elect some, but blesses all

- there is no denying God plays favorites
 - God elected Jacob and hated Esau
 - there is a qualitative difference b/w the sons of concubines and the son of promise
 - there is a qualitative difference b/w the people of Israel and the Gentiles
 - yet, the Gentiles are blessed also. They are grafted into the blessing
 - God's generosity extends to those not considered his people.
 - non-believers, atheists, Muslims are recipients of God's generosity and blessing
 - Some people will say, "The non-Christians act nicer than the Christians."
 - Sometimes that's very true.
 - This is because God's goodness extends to all kinds of people.
 - Plus, there are all sorts of factors that play into how "nice" someone is.
 - I'm nice b/c I've been loved, supported, cared for, nurtured
- There are Xtns who are still overcoming neglect, abuse, unloving homes. They have huge set of obstacles to overcome. Christ makes all things new, but not perfect all of sudden.
- Here we have an example of God's generosity to the "sons of concubines."
- Prevenient Grace

Abraham's death

- a good death
- he lived to be 175 years old
- "he breathed his last"
- "died at a good old age"
- "an old man"
- "full of years"
- "gathered to his people"
- What made it good?

1. He lived long.

- 175 years
- In Nigeria they have a saying, "You dance at your parents funeral, not your child's."
- the natural order is for the parents to die first
- that's what every parent wants
- Abraham died before Isaac

2. He died among his people.

- both sons buried him – Isaac and Ishmael
- there is no family drama going on.
- there is no animosity displayed b/w the brothers
- cf Psalm 133:1
- we want our children to be in harmony at the funeral don't we

- he is buried in the plot he purchased for Sarah

- that's what we want
- a terrible thought to die in a rice paddy in Vietnam
- that's why we go to such lengths to bring the bodies home to be buried on American soil
- we want to die around our family
- I want my funeral in a church, not a funeral home
- I want my ashes to be spread in a place only known to my biological family, since it's illegal
- I want the congregation to stand and hear the Hallelujah Chorus and then sing "The Solid Rock"
- I don't want my life celebrated, I want people to worship the God who became incarnate through Jesus Christ. I don't need a eulogy. I would like the proclamation of the Gospel and the resurrection of Christ proclaimed.
-

The Conclusion of the Abraham Narrative

- followed immediately with the account of Ishmael
- 12 sons come from Ishmael
- he lived 137 years old
- he also died among his people
- he has also been blessed (16:11-12 and 21:17-21)
- there is a qualitative difference.
- the story bends toward Isaac
- but it doesn't exclude Ishmael
- the tension w/in the family is not resolved,
- the hope continues
- hope that the son of promise and the sons of birthright can live in peace
- (Is 19:23-25)

- Egypt (South) and Assyria (North) will be blessed along with Israel

Life Goes On and On and One

- the promises are fulfilled in his sons and families
- today Abraham is father to 53% of the world's population

- Who is Abraham? What is his significance? Why does his life go on?

- *He is the man God used to fashion an alternative community*

- this community embodies the hope and promises of God
- God's purposes were to be carried out through this community

- they would be carried out through the faith of an old man and old woman. The nation wasn't dependent on power, wealth, guns, and ingenuity. It was totally dependent on the creative power of God.

- Abraham left his home, family, and country to follow the promises of God
- he didn't do it perfectly or flawlessly
- but he continually took risks. Stepped out in faith
- he became the father of a great nation
- his life goes on today

- You and I are sons and daughters of Abraham
- We are people of promise
- Not through the genetic makeup of Abraham and Sarah, but through the gracious promises of God

- We have the capacity to live on, not just in heaven
- Our faithfulness can become a vehicle for the activity of God in the world
- Our faithfulness can lead to
 - a light for peace and harmony
 - a more loving community
 - a witness for future generations
 - the expansion of God's will into the world

- Is there anything better we could do with our lives than attempt faithfulness?
- That is the greatest avenue for life that goes on and on and on.

