

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

GENESIS 15-18

There was a city a few miles from Abram's camp that offered all this world's glamour and pleasure... The Las Vegas of its day, Sodom was the hot spot.

But the only thing in Sodom Abraham cared for was his nephew Lot, and when a confederation of Babylonian kings ransack Sodom, and take Lot captive – Abram marches off with a militia and launches a military raid which retrieves Lot.

When He returns he meets two other kings... the king of Sodom and king of Salem. The king of Sodom tries to reward him with spoils, but Abram refuses, lest anyone think that wicked Sodom made him rich. He preserves his *integrity*.

Then he offers tithes to Melchizedek, king of Salem - and respects his *authority*.

But when Abram gets home, it hits him. He's now made some enemies in Babylon, and it creates some *anxiety*... And that's when God speaks to him...

“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram..." He's concerned about King Chedorlaomer and his three eastern allies regrouping and refortifying their army for another attack.

But God assures him, “I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

Hey, it's our immaturity that looks for something from God... whether a reward, or protection, or blessing. In reality, God Himself is all we need. He is our most *valuable reward*. He is our *dependable protection*. He is our *richest blessing*.

“But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

In chapter 12 God laid the cornerstone in His plan of salvation. He initiated the foundational agreement on which the remainder of the Bible is constructed. We call it the Abrahamic covenant. It's a three-fold promise God made to Abram - *a chunk of land, descendents, and through his family the world would be blessed.*

God promised to Abram *a land, a nation, and a blessing... property, posterity, and priority.* Here's the best way to remember it – 3 Ss – **sod, seed, salvation.**

Now Abram is thinking of this covenant, and he sees a problem... It all hinges on him having an heir – a son. Yet he lacks a child. His wife, Sarai, is barren.

Following cultural custom, he's named his servant, Eliezer, to be his heir.

Verse 4, “**And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir."** Keep in mind Abram was 85 years old. He's been on social security for 20 years. He's no spring chicken, yet God promises him that his body will sire a child.

“**Then He brought him outside...**” Abram is in the country. There's no smog – no ambient light from the shopping centers. Abram didn't even have a Wal-Mart...

When Abram looked up into the sky he could see over a

thousand stars...

And God “said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Abram will not only have a son, but thousands and thousands of great-great-grandkids - an innumerable multitude. One day Abram will have an *all star* family.

Verse 6 is a key passage, “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Genesis 15:6 is an oft-quoted verse. It appears 4 times in the New Testament. In Romans 4:3, Romans 4:22, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23.

This is the verse Paul uses to prove we *obtain and maintain* a right standing with God - not because of what we do or don't do - but because of our faith in God's promise! All God's blessings are received by faith and faith alone.

As Mark Twain once quipped, “Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out, and your dog would go in.” God pours out His blessing – not on people who think they deserve it – but on folks who trust in His grace.

Verse 7, “Then He said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.” And he said, “Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?” Abram is looking for proof – for confirmation.

He wants God to ratify the covenant. Literally, sign a contract with him.

“So (God) said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a

three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two." This was the customary means by which the people in that day signed their contracts.

Here's how the ancients *cut a deal*... They would slaughter a series of animals. Cut them in cross-sections from head to toe, and then arranged the animal halves into a corridor. The two parties entering the agreement would then walk side-by-side between the animal halves as a commitment to their part of the covenant.

And you think a house-closing is a hassle. Imagine signing this type of contract!

Verse 11, "And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away." After slicing the beef Abram sat down to wait on God. He expected God to literally walk with him through the animal halves. He waited all day, and into the evening... shooing away the vultures... waiting on God to appear.

"Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him." In other words, Abram had a nightmare.

"Then (God) said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years." God is predicting the Hebrews bondage in Egypt.

"And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward

they shall come out with great possessions.” When Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt at the exodus they brought with them the spoils and treasures of the Egyptians.

God continues, “Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” Abram’s neighbors will grow more and more corrupt. The Amorites will plunge into sexual perversion and the occult.

God will use the Hebrews return to the land to punish the wicked Amorites.

While Abram is dreaming, verse 17 tells us what happens next. “And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.”

According to custom a covenant was sealed when both partners joined arms and walked together through the animal carcasses. They were saying to each other that if they didn’t fulfill their end of the deal they would be dead meat.

Abram was expecting God to join arms with him - and the two of them would walk together - but God walked down the corridor by Himself. Abram was asleep.

In other words, this was a unilateral – a totally one-sided - covenant. This was not man’s part and God’s part... It was all God. He would complete His promises all by Himself. Man’s obligation was to simply rest and put his faith in God.

While Abram was in a deep sleep, God appeared in the form of a burning torch and smoking censor. Later God will appear

to Abram's descendents as a cloud by day and a fire by night. Perhaps Abram woke up just in time to see God walk down the carcass corridor all by Himself... *Abram woke up, looked on, and believed.*

And here's the lesson for us. Salvation is not a tag-team effort. It's not up to us to meet God half-way. The blessing of God is not received, by God doing half the work, and the recipient doing the other half. *God does all the work!* He takes sole responsibility for earning the blessing. All we have to do is wake up and believe.

In verse 18 God clarifies the boundaries of the land given to Abram.

“On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt (the Nile) to the great river, the River Euphrates - the Kenites, the Kenezites, and the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." The debate today is whether Israel owns the West Bank of the Jordan. God says Israel owns land to the West Bank of the Euphrates.

God has given to the Hebrews not only today's disputed territories - the West Bank, and Gaza, and the Golan Heights, but He's also given Israel a lion's share of Egypt, the Sinai, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait.

Today, the area of Israel is about 8000 square miles - the size of the state of New Jersey. One day Israel will possess 300,000 square miles of territory.

“Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.” Remember when famine struck in Canaan, rather than trust God and stay put – Abram ventured off to Egypt. There he picked up two items that caused him problems – *herds and Hagar*. The herds caused a conflict between he and Lot. *Hagar will cause a conflict that still brews today...*

By this time Sarai is at least 75 years old – and even a mega-dose of fertility drugs will do no good, so Sarai comes up with a plan...she will bear a child via a surrogate. “So Sarai said to Abram, “See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.”

This was a customary remedy for a barren woman... to have a child through her maidservant. This was the first example of surrogate motherhood.

But though this was an *accepted method*, it was not *God's method*. Hey, not every *great idea* is *God's idea*. What's customary, may not be godly.

Every time God told Abram to be patient, his wife brought up Hagar. She *haggard* him with *Hagar*. Finally, he gave in – Abram took matters into his own hands. Rather than wait on God, and trust in God, he stepped out on his own.

The New Testament calls this “*walking in the flesh*” – relying on your own ingenuity and power – trusting in human means – rather than relying on God.

“And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her

husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived.” On that fateful day, Hagar went into Abram’s tent *a maid* and came out *a mom* – and it ignited *a bomb* that’s still going off in the Middle East today.

“And when (Sarai) saw that (Hagar) had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.” Hagar copped an attitude. She felt superior to the barren wife, Sarai. She began to demand more of Abram’s attention and support.

“Then Sarai said to Abram, “My wrong be upon you!” It was her idea, but now she blames it on him. “I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me.” The baby isn’t even born when a battle erupts... Hagar gets haughty. Sarai gets jealous. And Abram gets caught between two *feuding females*.

“So Abram said to Sarai, “Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please.” And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.”

Sarai was so mean, Hagar ran away from home. Remember, the word “Sarai” means *contentious*. Sarai hated Hagar, and apparently tried to run her off...

But, verse 7, “Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur.” This was the road back to Egypt. Apparently, Hagar was heading back home... That’s where the Lord intercepts her. We’re told the “Angel of the LORD” appeared to her by the desert spring...

“And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."

Understand who this angel might be... Often in the Old Testament the “Angel of the LORD”, or “Angel of Jehovah”, is actually a pre-Bethlehem, pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. The word “angel” simply means “messenger” – and it can refer to an angelic messenger, or a human messenger, or a divine messenger...

If this is Jesus, He’s communicating a powerful message. This is the first appearance in the Bible of the “Angel of the Lord.” There’s no record of this Angel appearing first to Noah, or Enoch, or Abram – or any of the heroes of the faith. No, his first appearance is to a Gentile woman who’s been used, abused, discarded.

That shouldn’t surprise us. Jesus was called a friend of sinners. He came to heal the brokenhearted, and free the oppressed. *He’s a friend to the friendless.*

In John 4 Jesus will show compassion and forgive a woman at the well in Samaria - but Genesis 16 records the first woman at the well. It was Hagar.

“The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." In other words, “go and sin no more.”

The Angel tells Hagar to stop the haughtiness. Her place is in Abram’s tent. She’s still Sarai’s maid. She’ll have to trust God to work out the conflict with Ole Contentious, but it’s better to be a little uncomfortable in the will of God, than to

seek comfort outside His will. God will bless her if she remains humble...

“Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, “I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.”

“And the Angel of the LORD said to her: “Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has heard your affliction.” The name “Ishmael” means “*God hears*”.

“He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” And the Angel’s description perfectly describes the descendents of Ishmael, the Arabs.

Throughout the centuries God has multiplied the Arab nations. But the Arabs have proved to be “**a wild man.**” They’ve rebelled against the one, true God.

They’ve concocted a false religion, Islam - which encourages a violent and hostile struggle – or *Jihad* - by Arabs on non-Arabs. As the Angel predicted, “**His hand shall be against every man.**” Arab history is one bloody conflict after another.

And true to the Angel’s word, even today the Arabs live among the Jews in Israel – they “**dwell in the presence of his brothers**” - but as a thorn in his side.

Verse 13, “**Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?”**”

Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered.” The name “Beer Lahai Roi” means “*Well of the Living One who sees*”.

I hope you realize that tonight you have a God who sees... He sees your hurts and pain. He sees your struggle at work - your illness - your crumbling marriage. Your situation isn't being overlooked. You're at the center of God's radar screen.

Verse 15, “So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.” It's sad, but when Hagar returns to Abram's tent the hostility between her and Sarai doesn't end. The conflict spills over to their sons – Ishmael and Isaac.

In fact, even today Ishmael and Isaac are still at each other's throats. Middle East hostilities between Jews and Arabs, are the direct result of Abram's mistake.

Guys, when you try to do *God's will your own way* you'll ultimately make a mess of the situation. Faith trusts God to do *His work, His way, in His time*.

Chapter 17, “When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”

Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many

nations.” In the Hebrew “Abram”, and its related word, “Abba” means “Daddy”. “Ram” means “exalted”. Thus, “Abraham” means “exalted daddy”, or “big daddy”. Abram goes from *daddy* to *Big Daddy*.

And the *mechanics* are even more interesting than the *linguistics*.

You say the word “Abra-am”, by adding a consonant “am”. You take a breath at the end of Abram... “Abra...am”. This is what turns a *fruitless Abram* into a *fruitful Abraham* – a breath... the breath of the Holy Spirit. This is also what makes the difference between barrenness and fruitfulness in our lives – not more effort, but more of the Holy Spirit. Don’t walk in the flesh - trust in the power of the Spirit.

Verse 6, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.”

If God had not gone through the animal parts by Himself – if He had left just the smallest obligation up to Abraham and his heirs – we would’ve eventually blown it.

Our relationship with God would’ve been temporal – not eternal. God offers us *forever forgiveness* only because He earned that forgiveness all by Himself.

“Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” Israel’s lease

on the land of Canaan was never revoked. When God gave it to Big Daddy, Abraham, it belonged to his family forever. God is no Indian giver.

Despite Palestinian claims the land is Israel's "everlasting possession."

Verse 9, "And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations."

I'm sure Abram never forgot his experience among the animal parts, but God wanted all Abram's descendants to remember the terms of their covenant – and that's why in chapter 17 God prescribes *a surgical symbol* for all Jewish males.

Circumcision will become the family crest for the family of Abram. In fact, in Israel today there are two trees named after Jewish circumcision. There's the eucalyptus (*you-clips-us*), and the other is the Juniper tree. *Jew-nipper*

God tells them in verse 10, "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you."

It's possible that Abraham knew he was getting some sort of covenantal sign – that in some way, God was going to distinguish him from other men so everyone would know that they had a special relationship. And I'm sure on the day of the big announcement Abraham got excited about what form that sign might take...

I can imagine Big Daddy and Sarai discussing it at breakfast. *“Maybe God will give me a crown to wear, or a ring (like a Super Bowl ring), or perhaps a medal I can pin to my lapel.”* What a surprise later in the day when Abraham puffs out his chest to receive his medal, and God says “nope”. He sticks out his hand for his ring, and God says “nope”. He bows his head to be fitted for that crown, and God says “nope.” Then God says, *“Abe, you’re going to have to pull down your pants.”*

Imagine, Abe coming home that night, and Sarai asking him, *“Honey, what sign did God give you today of the covenant?”*
“Sarai, are you in for a surprise!”

Remember Abraham is 99 years old, yet God schedules him for surgery.

God continues his instructions, *“He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”* All God’s kids have to go under the knife – even Abraham. Remember, he’s a whopping 99 years old...

It’s one thing for an 8 day old baby to be circumcised, but a 99 year old man?

This Wednesday I’ve got surgery scheduled to repair a hernia, and I’ve been told it’ll take a week before I get back on

my feet. If hernia surgery on a man in his physical prime requires a week's recovery - can you imagine what circumcision would do to a 99 year old man? It would wipe him out – totally incapacitate him...

Yet what better sign for the terms of the covenant the Jews had with God?

No one earns God's favor through what they do. You can't add to what God has already done. You're incapable of contributing anything to your righteousness.

All we can do is to admit our weakness and barrenness - and trust in God.

Circumcision is the cutting away of the flesh – which is the key to spiritual victory for you and me – don't walk in the flesh, but rely on the Holy Spirit.

“Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.” As with Abraham, God also gives his wife a new name. She goes from “Sarai” or “contentious” to “Sarah” or “princess”.

Verse 16, “And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.”

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old? And shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child?” And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!”

“Abraham fell on his face and laughed.” And I wonder how

many of us would have done the same? For Abraham, this is long before the days of Viagra. Sarah would be the only woman in history to pay for a labor and deliver with Medicare!

Abraham knows his wife is on the other side of menopause. There's no way she can have a child. There's got to be a misunderstanding. He reminds God, "**Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!**" God, I've got a son. He lives in Hagar's tent...

"Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac;" The name "**Isaac**" means, "*he laughed.*" Thus, every time he mentioned his son's name, Abraham was reminded of his lack of faith.

God continues in verse 19, "**I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.**" Here's the key to Middle East politics today. The Abrahamic Covenant – **the sod, seed, and salvation** was passed on to Isaac and the Jews, not Ishmael and the Arabs.

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year." God is saying, "*Let's get it straight. I'll bless Ishmael, but Abraham's covenant belongs to Isaac.*"

This is what the Arabs refuse to concede. It's the source of the ongoing strife in Israel. The Bible refers to "**the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**" – who was the son of Isaac - while the Koran refers to "**the God of Abraham, Ishmael, and**

Isaac.”

Islam teaches the covenant passed to Ishmael. The Bible says it passed on to Isaac... There in a nutshell is the cause of the Middle East conflict today...

And if you believe in the Bible you can't be neutral. You'll side with Israel.

“Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him.

Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was 13 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.” Abraham was obedient and circumcised his family.

Chapter 18, “Then the LORD appeared to (Abraham) by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground...”

Remember Abraham was a powerful man. He didn't bow to just anyone.

Notice verse 1 says “the LORD appeared to Abraham”.

Verse 2 says “**three men were standing by him.**” I believe one of the visitors was God – or probably, another pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. The other two men were angels.

This may be the incident Jesus references in John 8:56-57, when He told the Pharisees, “**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.**” Then the Jews said to Him, “**You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?**” *When did Jesus see Abraham?* Perhaps it was right here...

In verse 3 Abraham “**said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant."** They said, “**Do as you have said.**”

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, “**Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.**” This was just the first example of a husband calling at 5:00 and telling his wife he’s bringing home guests for dinner. This scene will be repeated countless times down through history.

“**And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it.**” Have you ever been to a restaurant where you waited so long you said, “*What did they have to do, go and out a kill a cow?*” Well, that’s exactly what Abraham does here. He kills a calf to feed his guests.

Husbands, notice something important here. Abraham leaves the pre-incarnate Christ and two angels to go into the kitchen and help his wife prepare the meal...

Apparently, there are two ways to get to know Jesus... In Luke 10 Mary leaves Martha in the kitchen and worships at Jesus' feet. Here, Abraham leaves Jesus to help Sarah in the kitchen. Mary got to know Jesus by spending time with Him. Abraham got to know Jesus by being like Him, and serving His wife. Both work.

Verse 8, **“So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.”**

“Then they said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “Here, in the tent.” And He said, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.” Abe was 100. Sarah was 90.

Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, **“After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”** And the LORD said to Abraham, **“Why did Sarah laugh...”** Notice verse 12, she **“laughed within herself”**. It wasn't an out loud, audible laugh. She just chuckled to herself. But apparently, the Lord read her mind.

So He asked, **“Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’** I'm sure He *revealed her mind to stir up her faith*. He wanted her to think, *“If God has power to read minds – He's got the power to help a woman conceive.”*

That's when the Angel asked Sarah, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

Guys, most us have little problem with the doctrine of God's omnipotence on a theoretically, theologically level. God can do anything. We believe in the existence of miracles *until...* God personalizes a promise - and monograms a miracle - and puts our initials on it - and says, "*This is the miracle I want to perform in your life.*"

That's when we're tempted to laugh it off, or shrug it off! God can work miracles, but in somebody else's life. There's no way a miracle can happen for me...

Hey, I can sing the right songs, and quote the right creeds, and memorize the right verses, and make the right statements of faith - but do I *really* believe?

The Lord is challenging Sarah, and He's challenging us, are we really *believing* or are we just *bluffing*? *Believing or bluffing*? How real is your faith?

Back in America's pioneer days a weary traveler came to the banks of the mighty Mississippi. It was early winter and the river was frozen. The traveler had to cross the ice on foot, and he was scared that the frozen waters wouldn't be able to hold his weight. He dropped to his hands and knees - and inched his way across.

Halfway across the sheet of ice the timid trailblazer heard singing and laughter. He turned to see a man driving a wagon full of coal. The wagon just rumbled across the ice. The traveler had been afraid the ice would crush under his weight - when in reality, it was able to support a wagon loaded to the

brim with heavy coal.

Guys, too often we creep through life on our hands and knees. Each move is filled with worry and fret. We live in a sweat - wondering if the ice is about to crack. We could be singing and laughing and enjoying the ride if we just had a little faith.

Let me ask you, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

The Lord continues in verse 14, "At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"

Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." The Lord doesn't share His secrets with strangers, but with friends – with people He can trust to follow Him.

And since Abraham is a friend of God, "The LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know."

Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD.”

Apparently the angels continued to Sodom, while Jesus stayed with Abraham.

“And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." Abraham was God’s friend. He knew God’s heart, and it was not God’s nature to judge the righteous with the wicked. The righteous always come out before the judgment comes down.

This is one reason why I believe in a pre-trib rapture. In the last days God will judge this wicked world with seven years of cataclysmic, earth-rattling judgments – but before the judgments come down the church goes up. And the reason? As Abraham points out, God doesn’t like to judge the righteous with the wicked.

Verse 27, “Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?"

So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it."

And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there

should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty."

Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place." If makes you wonder how far God would've gone if Abraham kept pushing the issue.

One of the fun days we have in Israel is a shopping day in the Old City of Jerusalem. The merchants in the bazaar love to haggle. It's a Jewish trait.

Jews love to haggle, and apparently, they get it from their father, Abraham.

It's amazing though, that Abraham haggles with God over big stakes – the survival of the city of Sodom hangs in the balance. Apparently, there are some similarities between haggling and interceding. In essence, Abraham prays and intercedes for Sodom, but he does so, in typical Middle Eastern haggle mode.

My point is, prayer may be a whole lot less sophisticated that we make it. When you pray just get to down business - speak your heart – do some holy haggling...

We'll see what happens to the city of Sodom next week...