

The Life of Abraham - Part 4

by W.F. Anderson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God's word and having faith in His promises, as seen in the story of Abraham in Genesis 15.

Scripture: Genesis 15:1, Genesis 15:4

Topics: "Biblical Patriarchs", "Faith And Obedience"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the 15th chapter of Genesis and the life of Abraham. The sermon begins by discussing the importance of studying the Bible and recommends a book called 'The Annotated Bible' by Arno C. Gablein as a helpful resource for Bible study. The preacher then delves into the 15th chapter of Genesis, where God speaks to Abraham in a vision and promises him a great reward. Abraham expresses his concern about not having any children, but God reassures him that he will have a biological heir. The sermon concludes by encouraging the audience to read the Bible for themselves and discover the true meaning of God's words.

Transcript

I don't get a commission off these books, by the way. That isn't why I'm pushing them. I'm pushing them because they're good, and I hope you can find them very, very helpful.

In all the current drive of women's liberation that has spilled over into Christianity, all kinds of books have been written, from one extreme to the other. Some books I will not let my wife read, especially those that talk about the biblical responsibilities of husbands. My feeling in reading a number of the books that Christians have written is that there is, in my judgment, almost a real difficulty in dealing squarely with biblical texts.

Now, I know the authors don't feel that way. It's simply my response to a number of books that have been written. But here's one by Elizabeth Elliott, Let Me Be a Woman.

I like Elizabeth Elliott. I like her writings. I like her straightforwardness.

I like her honesty. I like her fairness in trying to handle the biblical material. And I like her writing style.

It's a beautiful writing style. Flows very easily. It's clearly written.

And I think this is an excellent book. I think you men ought to read it. I think the ladies ought to read it.

I think it ought to be sent to young men and women who are thinking about marriage, for instance. But her writing, whether you agree with everything she says or not is not the point. She forces you to think.

And it's a beautifully written book, *Let Me Be a Woman*. So if you're caught up in the... It's really a series of letters that she wrote to her daughter when her daughter was getting married. If you're into this sort of thing and you want a much more conservative point of view, let me recommend you get that book.

Then there's a set of biblical expositions called *The Annotated Bible* by the late Arno C. Gaebelin that I found to be a great deal of help a number of years ago when I was just starting to do some serious Bible study. What I discovered is, much to my relief, Arno Gaebelin had simplified Darby's synopsis of the books of the Bible. I say to my relief because I was given advice of a young man to do what Harry Ironside did.

And I think Harry Ironside went through Darby's synopsis in two or three weeks. I can't get through it in two or three decades. I admit that I'm not that sharp, I'm not that intelligent.

Darby just leaves me cold in his writings because he's such a difficult writer. I don't think Darby could write a simple sentence if his life depended on it, but be that as it may, you've got all that truth enshrined in very, very difficult language, very difficult sentence structures. But this I discovered is really Darby simplified.

And Gaebelin has simply taken Darby and expanded on it and simplified it, and gone through the whole Bible just like Darby did in the synopsis. And I found this to be a very, very helpful analysis of each book in the Bible. And I don't know how many sets are back there, but here is Arno Gaebelin's *The Annotated Bible*.

If you're past the Bible study age, it would be a good thing to put into the hands of a young person who has a serious interest in the Word of God. Let's go back to the book of Genesis again tonight. We're looking at some lessons from the life of Abraham, beginning in chapter 15.

Now, I'm going to find this rather difficult, because chapter 15 is such a theologically important chapter, and we should have to turn to two books in the New Testament to pick up the thread of it. And I don't like to do that, because it may end up getting so involved, and we cover so much ground that by the time you're through, you don't know what I said. And that may be a blessing in the long run.

You may go home and read the Bible for yourself and discover what God really meant, and that'll be a help. But let's read this 15th chapter of Genesis to begin with. After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.

Fear not, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. But Abram said, O Lord God, what wilt thou give me? For I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.

And Abram said, Behold, thou hast given me no offspring, and the slave born in my house will be my heir. Behold, the word of the Lord came to him, This man shall not be your heir. Your own son shall be your heir.

And he brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your descendants be. And he believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.

And he said to him, I am the Lord who brought you from Her that called these to give you this land to possess. But he said, O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it? He said to him, Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle dove and a young pigeon. And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other.

But he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram, and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him.

Then the Lord said to Abram, Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there. And they will be oppressed for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

As for yourself, you shall go to your father in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between those pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates. Now, there's no use reading those last few verses, because either I cannot pronounce all those names, or I can.

But we won't know any more by the time I'm through. In a recent copy of Moody Monthly, Dr. Ben Haden of Chattanooga had an article on Christians' need to forgive God. I know it's a shocking title, but I had been thinking the same thing in my own experience.

I remember saying about a particular tragedy, I'm not sure I can forgive God for that. What Ben Haden was getting at in that article was our need as Christians to come to terms with what God is doing without getting any explanation from Him at all. And I felt that sometimes Abram is in that very position, and he goes a step beyond it.

Abram goes beyond that, and in his progress of faith, he almost demands an accounting from God, and is willing to argue with God. It doesn't sound like a step of faith. Well, it is.

It's because we are such timid souls that we are shocked by some of the things Job says to God. Of course he said a lot of wrong things, driven to that by his so-called friends. But Job had enough confidence in God to believe that God would hear him out.

And what good does it do to have something in your heart that you cope with fair word when you're in the presence of God? God knows what's in your heart, and He sees the disparity between the words that we use and what we really think in our hearts. Far better, like Job, to be honest in both heart and word than to have one thing in our hearts and another thing on our lips. And what Job really felt about his whole situation, he told God.

And some of it was quite uncomplimentary, and some of it he repented of, but nevertheless he was honest before God. We do not fool God by our fair word that we think we should say when we are in the presence of God, when those words really do not express what is in our heart. That is what the Bible calls hypocrisy.

The conflict in Scripture, and I'm throwing in a free sermon here, this is not part of the study in Genesis 15, and I won't charge you extra for it. The conflict in Scripture, and I probably said this last year, is not

between believing with the head and believing with the heart. That is never a contrast in Scripture.

We make that contrast, but it's not a biblical one. The biblical contrast is between what we say with our mouths and what we believe in our hearts. That's the biblical contrast.

There is no way that you can divorce what you believe in your head from what you believe in your heart. There's no way you can do that. But there is a divorce very often between what we say and what we really believe in our hearts.

And you have that in Romans chapter 10, If thou should confess with thine mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in thine heart that God is raised from the dead, thou shalt be saved. When my verbal confession is the genuine expression of what is in my heart, then I am in touch with God. But when what I say contradicts what I really believe, I'm like the Pharisees who drew near to God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him.

By the way, to throw in something else, when Paul, in writing to the Romans, talks about confessing Jesus as Lord, there was a whole needless controversy among evangelicals a number of years ago on whether or not a person could be saved if he did not accept Jesus as Lord. Or if this sinner, coming to Jesus Christ, had to take Jesus as Lord as well as Savior to be saved. And it all revolved around those verses in Romans.

But what Paul is saying is not whether or not Jesus Christ is my Lord, it's my confession as to who He is. Do I confess that Jesus is the Lord? That is, the Christ who has been raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. It's not His relationship to me.

It's who He is and the position that God has given Him. That's what Paul is getting at. Who do I say Jesus is? That's the question.

Do I say He is the Lord? And by that confession I mean He is the Christ who has been raised from the dead and exalted to glory. Whether or not He is my personal Lord is not the issue. The issue is who is He? That's the issue.

And none of us really knows a great deal about the Lordship of Jesus Christ in His own life anyhow. It's something we are learning all life long. And the older we get, and the more we get into the Word, the more we discover of our lives that has been outside the scope of His direct control.

It's a growth process. And that chorus, Lord of all or not Lord at all is simply not true, thank God. If He refused to have anything to do with me unless He were totally in control of all of my life, never in this world would He have anything to do with me.

No, He is not that way. It's one of the indications of the humility of God He'll take whatever we give Him. We don't exactly flatter Him, you know, when we turn to Him as an alternative to hell.

And many of us went to Jesus Christ for that very reason. We didn't want to go to hell, and so we came to Christ. That's not exactly flattering to Him.

But He took us anyhow. It's the humility of God. On the human level we'd be insulted by someone coming to us for that reason.

But God loves us so much He'll take anything He can get. And He'll accept us on those terms. But Abram is a man who in faith would argue with God.

And it's one of the growth processes of his faith. Because he's arguing with God on the basis of what God has said. And when you come to chapter 15, and God's assurance to Abram may come out of the experience of chapter 14 that we were looking at this morning.

After all, he with only 318 men has conducted this night raid on a much larger force. And now he has come back and the people are all back in Sodom. How does he know that those kings humiliated by this defeat are not going to reassemble their armies and make a fresh march? And this time they're not after Sodom and Gomorrah.

They're after Abram. And at that juncture, God comes in and says, Don't be afraid, Abram. I'm your shield.

And I'm your exceeding great reward. I think if God had come to me like that, if I were in Abraham's shoes, I would very humbly have said, Thank you, Lord. That's enough.

Not Abraham. He almost brushes that aside. Wait a minute, God.

I'm not interested in that. Ten years ago, you promised me a child. Where is that child? And that's what Abraham is saying in chapter 15.

Don't talk to me about being a shield and a great reward. Don't give me any more promises until you've fulfilled the promises you've already made. And it may very well be because of Abram's response that God was simply testing Abram by the opening statements of chapter 15.

And Abram, now growing bolder in his confidence in God, is determined to hold God to his word. And I like the boldness of the man. And it's because he is doing this in this process here, and we'll see it again in chapter 17 and 18 and 19, that finally God is able to put him to the supreme test and he can offer up his son Isaac because he knows God will keep his word.

That's what he's holding God to now. Where is that son you promised me? And all your promises are going to come to nothing if you don't give me that son. Because by the culture of the day, if a man died childless, the oldest servant in his household was his heir.

And this is what Abraham is arguing. If you don't give me that child, this foreigner, this Eleazar of Damascus is going to be the heir to all that you've given me. And that isn't what you promised.

What you promised was a son. Now where's the promise? I like the boldness of this man. I wish we had half his boldness.

Really to get hold of what God has promised us and hold God to it. Not in the sense that we have any idea that God won't keep his word. But to argue God's promises in his presence.

You find some of the prophets doing that. Coming before God with what God has said about himself and what he has said about his people. Habakkuk argues with God.

He must just tell God, you can't do that. Why not? Because of your character, God. You've got pure eyes and to behold evil.

You can't look on iniquity. How can you take up that wicked people Babylon and use them to chastise your people Israel? You can't do that. He was arguing with God on the basis of God's character.

No, this is nothing childish. This isn't anything petty. This isn't a kid throwing a temper tantrum.

This is a man who is beginning to get hold of the reality of God and God's promises and he goes back to God with what God has said. And he has enough confidence in the integrity of God that God will not go back on his word. And I like the growing boldness of this man.

He'll step out beyond that in chapter 18 and intercede with God in an area where he has no promises and he'll argue with God simply on the basis of the character of God. I like the growing boldness of this man. God's response is twofold.

With the promise and then with the covenant. And as you know, both the promise and the covenant form a great deal of Paul's teachings in his letters to the Romans and to the Galatians. But first comes the promise.

And God says you're going to have your own son and from that son there is going to come a multitude of people and he takes them out under the starry skies and now can you count the stars? No. Your seed's going to be like that. And by the way, to say that the dust of the earth represents the earthly seed of Abram and the stars of the heaven represent the heavenly seed is not true because God uses in another passage the stars of heaven to represent the earthly, physical seed of Abram.

God mixes all these things. He simply tried to say of the multitude that's going to come out of Abram. And here is Abram, about 85 years old, 10 years after the promise had been given, without a child, past the normal age when he would get a son or Sarah could bear a son.

And God takes this man out and says your descendants are going to be as numerous as the stars of heaven. And if Abram hadn't been bold enough to argue with God about God's own promises, he never could have responded to that statement. Would you have believed such a statement? At 85 years of age, would you have believed that statement? Abram did.

And God counted it to him for righteousness. Now Paul builds on that in Romans 4 and I can't stay out of Romans 4, so let's go there. And then we'll look at the covenant that God makes with this man.

You know, the idea of what Abram did sometimes shocks me, just the way I put it tonight, but it didn't shock God. God responded delightfully. No, Abram, don't worry about that.

You're going to have a son. And gave him the sign of the stars of heaven. And then went further when challenged about the land that God had promised.

To enter into that very meaningful covenant with Abram is described in that 15th chapter. God was delighted! He wasn't insulted by Abram's boldness. God was delighted by it.

The man was beginning to take God at his word. And that pleased God a great deal. But you remember in Romans chapter 4, Paul picks this up and he talks about salvation by faith alone in chapter 4. And this is his theme in this fourth chapter.

That we are justified before God not by our works, not by our religious observances, but simply by faith in God. And what he does is go back to the Old Testament and take Abram and David as two outstanding

examples of that truth. And what Paul is at great pains to show in these chapters in Romans is, look, what I am preaching is not one bit different from what's in the Old Testament.

No! The Old Testament never taught salvation by work. No, it didn't. Nowhere did the Old Testament teach that.

The Old Testament always taught salvation by faith. And all through the book of Acts, the apostles are at great pains to go back to the Old Testament that was their Bible, and preach salvation through a crucified Messiah by faith in that Messiah. And when Paul describes the gospel that he preached when he's writing to the Corinthians, how does he put it? How that Christ died for our sins.

You remember the next expression? According to the Scriptures. What Scriptures? The Old Testament. And that he was buried, and that he was raised again the third day.

According to the Scriptures. And that's what he's doing in Romans 4, showing that salvation has always been by faith, never by obedience to the law, always by faith in the revelation that God has made at that particular time. And he takes Abram, he takes this very instance in chapter 15, that God justified Abram when Abram believed God.

And then he begins to build on that, and show the implications of that very incident and the implications of Abram's faith. So let's come down further toward the end of chapter 4. Verse 17, and this is a quote maybe from the 17th chapter of Genesis. He is already quoted from the 15th chapter.

Abram, he says at the close of verse 16, is the father of us all. As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead. Now that's an important statement in this chapter.

And calls into existence things that do not exist. Calls as being things not being. It's not only God's creative power.

Before Isaac was ever born, God talked in concrete terms about Isaac and about the descendants of Isaac. God talked as though they already were, because in God's plan they would be. And Abram, who is not God, had to take God's word for it that it would be.

Abram could not call things not being being, but he had to trust that God could, and he believed God for that. Listen to what Paul goes on to say. In hope he believed against hope.

Against what kind of hope? Was there any natural hope for the fulfillment of that promise? Not a bit of it. His hope lay not in nature, but in God. Not in his reproductive power, but in the creative power of God.

Against hope. In hope he believed that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, so shall your descendants be. He did not weaken in faith, and the Greek text on which this translation is based leaves out the negative.

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about 100 years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. And what this text tells me is that Abraham looked all the impossibilities squarely in the face. He looked at himself.

Impossible. He looked at Sarah. Impossible.

He considered all the natural impossibilities, that they should have a child. On the one hand he had that, and on the other hand he had God's promise. Now what are you going to believe? I have no problems believing God when I see how he's going to bring it about.

When I can see naturally how this thing can be, I can trust God. But when, as far as nature or human resources are concerned, I haven't got a prayer, then I worry. But that's exactly where Abraham was.

Humanly speaking, he didn't have a prayer. And over against that situation he had God's promise. You're going to have a child, and your descendants are going to be as numerous as the stars of heaven.

And he looked fully at his own dead body, Sarah's dead womb, and he believed God. And God had been leading him up to that point, but there it is, he believed God. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

That is why his faith was reckoned to him as righteous. Now Paul brings it all down to us. The words that were reckoned to him were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also.

It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Abram believed God. Paul said, so do we.

About what did Abram believe God? That God could bring life out of death. His dead body, Sarah's dead womb, a living child to come? Yes, God can bring life out of death. We believe God.

About what do we believe God? That he has brought life out of death. And out of Joseph's tomb, Jesus Christ came the third day alive. We believe God.

That he has brought life out of death when he raised Jesus our Lord the third day. That's the God we believe, the same God Abram believed. Our revelation now is about his son who died for our sins upon the cross and was raised again the third day.

And we can look at all the problems and all the arguments against it. How many resurrections have you seen lately? You mean to tell me you think that that man who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, buried beyond question dead, you really think the third day he came out of the tomb? That's the confession Paul is getting at in Romans 10. Thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead.

Thou shalt be saved. That's what he's saying here. For us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.

But now note what he says about that death and resurrection. Who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Why did he die? We once took our stand, if we had done any thinking at all, with the people described in Isaiah 53.

We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. That's the way we thought, or we would have thought, if we had been there in the first century when he was put to death. Why is he dying on that cross? He must be a wicked criminal whom God has brought to be.

We esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, false messiah, blasphemous. Aren't those the charges that were hurled against him? He deserved to die. That's the ground we took.

One day we were awakened to the fact that he was wounded not for his transgressions, but for ours. He died for our transgressions, not for his. And if we saw the drama of it at all, we were thunderstruck to think that God smote his son for our transgressions.

That's what happened. Now, the grammatical construction is identical in the second clause, raised for our justification. In that first expression, Paul is telling us why he died.

It was because of our trespasses. And in the second expression, he is telling us why he was raised from the dead. It was because of our justification.

Now, note the order. Our trespasses were the direct cause of his death, and our justification was the direct cause of his resurrection. Parallel construction.

I can't turn it around. What do you mean by that? Just exactly what Paul says in Romans chapter 5, we were justified by his blood. That's his death.

And his death totally satisfied God in regard to our sins. His resurrection was the inevitable consequence of that. And we are justified by his death, Paul says in Romans 5. And his resurrection was possible only because his death had totally answered to God for all of our sins.

He was raised not in order that we might be justified, but because our justification had been secured by his death. Now, that's the gospel. God says that's what happened.

And I either believe or disbelieve God. And if, like Abram, I believe God, who in this case has brought life out of death, has brought our Lord Jesus Christ triumphant out of the tomb. If I believe God, and remember Abram stood before God.

It's that personal relationship. I'm not believing just statements. I am believing God.

Paul said it was written for our sake. We too are declared righteous, as Abram was, when we believe God. What a tremendous statement comes out of Genesis 15.

He believed God, and he counted it to him for righteousness. How Paul loves to go back to that. But I've got to go back to the 15th of Genesis because we've got this covenant that God makes with Abram that Paul then builds on in his letter to the Galatians.

And we have to look at that rather quickly. God is going to make a covenant with this man about the possession of the land that these descendants of his, the first of whom has not yet been born, but these descendants of his, are going to come back into this land after 400 years in a foreign land oppressed by the people whom they serve. Now, by the way, God gives a reason for that.

The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And even God will not rush judgment. And the elect nation will simply have to wait and suffer, as they would in Egypt, until it was the right time for God to visit his judgment on the Amorites.

Not till then, not even for the sake of the elect, would God judge the Amorites before his time. The great mercy of God. But in regard to this covenant, I'm sure all of you are aware that it's a typical Near East blood covenant.

It's not unique to the Bible. It's found in the literature of many of the peoples of the Near East in the second millennium before Christ. It was the most solemn covenant that people could enter into.

And what they did, just as Abram did here, was take sacrificial animals and kill them, cut them in half, and lay a half of each carcass over against the half. The birds were not divided, just placed, the dead birds. So you had two lines of carcasses, an aisle in between.

And if you and I were going to enter into this covenant, which was the most solemn and binding kind of covenant that they knew in the Near East, you would begin at that end of the aisle between those carcasses and I would begin at the other. And we would meet in the center and solemnly swear to keep the covenant. And what we were saying by those divided carcasses was if either one of us breaks this covenant, may he be as one of these animals.

Now God, coming down to Abram's level and Abram's culture, as Abram set up this whole thing, to assure you, Abram, that what I have said will come to pass, to assure you of that, go ahead and set up a blood covenant. And Abram prepared a blood covenant. Now, if the normal procedure had been followed, God, in whatever manifestation He made to Abram at that time, would have started at one end and Abram would have started at the other and they would have met in the middle.

But when the time came to fulfill that covenant, Abram was put aside and had nothing to do with it. And the symbolic representation of God was all that passed between the pieces. There was too much involved in this covenant to have any of it depend on Abram.

There could be no possibility of failure here. And so God alone makes the covenant and accepts the full responsibility for its fulfillment. And Abram is only a witness, not a participant in the covenant.

And now it seems to me Paul builds on that in Galatians chapter 3. And let's begin at verse 15. And this begins, the third chapter, as you know, begins the doctrinal section of his letter to the Galatians where he's arguing, in defense of the gospel, that we are justified by God's grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, period. Without any works of our own, without the observance of the law, it's salvation by grace through faith plus nothing.

I think, wasn't that A.C. Gamelin's description of Galatians? Salvation by faith through grace plus nothing. And that's what Paul is now arguing doctrinally in chapters 3 and 4 of this letter to the Galatians. Now, he says in verse 15, to give a human example, brethren, and he's talking about the promises of God, and he's already gone back into the Old Testament again to show that salvation is by faith and not by law.

To give a human example, brethren, no one knows even a man's testament or will or covenant or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now, the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say, and to seeds, referring to many, but to seed, referring to one, which is Christ.

Now, at the moment, Abraham didn't know that, but God knew it. And when God promised Abraham a seed, he wasn't thinking primarily of Isaac, nor of the stars of heaven. He was thinking of Christ.

That, by the way, is a philosophy of history, biblical history. The nation of Israel was never an end in itself. And I'm afraid a great deal of prophetic preaching today sees Israel as an end in itself.

It was never an end in itself. Israel was simply the chosen channel through whom God's salvation could come to the whole world. And the primary thing in the promise of God in Genesis chapter 12 is, in thee

and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed.

And the restoration of Israel in a coming day, as Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, again its purpose is for greater blessing to all the Gentiles. They were the channel. They bore the terrible burden, as the Jewish rabbis used to talk about it, the terrible burden of being God's elect.

They were the chosen channel through whom God's salvation was to come to the world. And that's what God was thinking about when He made the promise to Abram. It's not just Abram.

It's not just the Jew. It's the world. The Savior of the world is God's Son of the seed of Abram.

That's the seed God was really thinking about when He made the promise to Abram. Now, when God makes that promise and then ratifies it by a covenant, what Paul is saying is, even God Himself will not come along later and add riders to it. There are no appendices to God's will or God's covenant.

No codicil. God doesn't add to it. Now, listen to how he will argue.

Verse 19. Why then the law? It was not added to God's covenant with Abram. No.

It was added because it came in alongside because of transgressions. Not because of the covenant. Till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.

And it was ordained by angels through an intermediary. Now that's important. Three times in the New Testament we learn that the law was given through the intermediatorship of angels.

You learn it in Acts and Galatians and Hebrews. Why do you need an intermediary? Because you have two parties entering into a contractual arrangement. The angels brought down to Moses what God said He would do and what He required of Israel.

Moses carried back up into the mountain, presumably into the hands of the angels who delivered it back to God. Israel's promised to obey. But what Paul is building on is where you have an intermediary, you have two contracting parties.

And the success of the covenant, the validity of the covenant depends upon the faithfulness of both contracting parties to the terms of the covenant. That was the law. Now Paul reverts to the covenant made with Abram.

Verse 20, an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. How many parties were in that contract, that covenant with Abram? Only God. There was no intermediary there because it didn't depend on Abram.

And bringing His Son into the world to be our Savior was too vital a thing to have hang on the faithfulness of so great a man as Abram. And as we shall see in these studies, with only a year to go to the specified time for the birth of Isaac, Abram, except for the grace of God, would have blown the whole thing. No, God is not going to put that in the hands of Abram.

God is going to keep it in His own hands. Now Paul will go on to argue that's our salvation. It is not a contractual agreement between God and us.

God will do His part if we do our part. Oh no, God is one. And both my Savior and my salvation, Paul is arguing, rests in God.

It's too important a thing to entrust to me. All I can do is accept, thankfully, the gift of God. But the fulfillment of His promise rests in God, not in me.

There is no more hope of my safely keeping my salvation than there was of Abraham safely keeping the promise of God till Isaac should be born. There are some things too important to entrust to our unfaithfulness. That's one of them.

And that's why we like to sing some of those great hymns of assurance. What more can He say than to you who yet said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have laid? The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I'll never, never forsake to His foes. That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake.

It rests in God. And that means I as a Christian can relax in Jesus Christ. Oh, for the faith in Abraham.

And it's not great faith. No, don't think in terms of great faith. I think our Lord should have cured that forever.

That idea should have been knocked out of our heads a long time ago when our Lord said, if you have faith, it is the grain of a mustard seed. It's not great faith. If you have faith, it is the grain of a mustard seed.

None of us has great faith. But we have a great God who has committed Himself to us and will never go back on His word. And that new covenant was established in the darkness and the blood of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

We stand aside. The whole thing was between God and His Son. We stand aside as observers and thank God as grateful participants.

But Jesus paid it all. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank You with great joy and gratitude tonight for Your unreserved commitment to us in Jesus Christ.

Thank You for His sacrifice upon the cross. Thank You for His resurrection. Thank You that He lives, assures us our sins have been forever dealt with.

Thank You we can rest in Him. The work is His. We are His workmanship.

For that we thank You. Help us by life to show it, by our confidence in You and by the fact that we have been created unto good works. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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