

Today the title of the message is “The Obedience of Faith” and we are looking at Genesis 17:1-27. This is our progressive study through Genesis. In this portion if you are familiar with the Word of God beginning at chapter 12 of Genesis and going on down to I think its chapter [25] it all concentrates on the life of Abraham. Abraham is extremely significant in the Bible and extremely significant for Christians for he is truly the first man of faith. That is what this whole series of messages is about, watching [Abraham] learn how to walk by faith in God. That becomes the model for us. Often, it has been observed, that the book of Genesis is closer in its general depiction of spiritual life to the New Testament than it is to the Old for it concentrates very much on personal faith in the Living God rather than looking at the larger structures [of faith]: the temple and the nation and all of the attendant history of the nation of Israel.

As we come to the word today I impressed... I track current events and at this point in our lives I hope that we are conscious that we have entered a different age than the one into which I was born. There are two things which have emerged now with increasing clarity which demand our attention as Christians. We are now confronted with two aggressively hostile movements. On the one hand all of us are aware of the Islamic radicals the Islamic fundamentalist movement. Their stated objective is to destroy all of western civilization, primarily because they see it as the fruit of Christianity. That is their stated objective. But at the same time we face the increasingly hostile attack from the secularists in our own nation. [These are] people who are persuaded that the only way to solve the problems that beset western civilization is to get rid of Christianity. So in one sense from the right and from the left we are under attack.

Personally I say that is good news because the church has been too sleepy for too long. We have conducted our lives as if getting up in the morning, going to church on Sunday, having Bible Studies in the week, being able to witness here and there: that this was our birthright. It is not our birthright. It is a right claimed through the sacrificial love of the Body of Christ for its hostile neighbors. There is only way we can anticipate the gospel of Jesus Christ penetrating the hardened hearts of the secularists or the Muslim, and that is if we learn how to love them. But if we are going to obey Jesus and love and our enemies who are numbered amongst our neighbors, we are going to have to learn how to draw an immense amount of energy and wisdom from God through the Holy Spirit as He illuminates the Word. We cannot afford to just drift with occasional spiritual disciplines, occasional prayer life: I made the observation last week, why is it that so often we only turn to prayer when everything falls apart and we are suddenly in great pain? Why haven't we learned the lesson of turning to God in prayer when we are full of joy and thanksgiving, and saying, God of heaven with the fullness of Your blessing, with the strength that we have experienced through Your presence we are ready now to step forward and proclaim the grace and the goodness and the abundant forgiveness of our God. I am afraid that we have not learned that part of the lesson very well.

When we come and look at the life of Abraham that is given to us in Genesis 17, we observe a man who has not yet learned to do that himself. The thing that is shocking about this is that we know that Abraham has heard the Word from God. He knows that the Lord has blessed him. [But] he is struggling to remain faithful to God. Turn with me to the beginning and follow with me in reading [Genesis] 17. *“When Abraham was 99 years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless...’* I wonder how those words sank into Abram's ears. If you drop back to chapter 16, we have the sad story of Abram, Sarai deeply compromising their standing before God. Struggling, waiting hoping that God would fulfill His promise that Abram and Sarai would have a son, finally despairing that God was going to do anything, Hagar [Sarai's maid] is finally asked to become the “wife” of Abram in order to supply a son. It works! A son is born. Then as we looked last week, everything goes wrong. Having engineered their own answer to the promise of God, what should have been a moment of celebration and gladness – and no doubt was a celebration of gladness for a brief moment of time – quickly turns into a house filled with turmoil. So the answer that “came from God” that began with hallelujah and praise the Lord, becomes “What is happening?” as Sarai and Hagar begin to battle and Abram falls back in complete irresponsibility and offers no guidance to preserve the peace of his household. It has been 13 years

since that episode. After 13 years of silence, as far as we can tell from the text, God breaks into Abram’s life and He says, “*I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless.*” Why [would God say or want this?] Listen:

*“...that I make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly’ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ‘Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.’ And God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among your shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.’ And God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai you wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.’ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is 90 years old bear a child?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before you!’ God said, ‘No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly, He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bar to you at this time next year.’ When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. The Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very 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 thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.*

We cannot read that chapter without beginning to catch something of the tremendous emphasis upon the prompt obedience of Abraham to the exact specifications from God. You will do this; I will do it. You will do this; I will do this. You will do this; I will do it. Oh, beloved, what has happened to the church of Jesus Christ? We assume obedience is somehow in at best in a questionable relationship with the gospel instead of understanding that obedience is at the heart of the walk of faith with God?

This chapter can be broken into four parts. The first, verses 1-8 deals with the implementation of the covenant. Here God is establishing a covenant with Abraham. The second portion speaks about the sign of the covenant as well as its inclusivity. The sign of the covenant is of course circumcision and to whom it applies. We will have a chance to look at that. The third [part] deals with the exclusive nature of the covenant. There is a very narrow channel that has to be followed or taken or you do not stand in the graces of God. Lastly verses 22-27 give the record of Abraham’s obedience in applying the sign of the covenant.

In examining or reflecting upon the life of Abraham we can easily confuse call or promise to Abraham with God's covenant with Abraham, for they include much of the same thing. Genesis 12:1-3 give to us God's call to Abram. What he says is that Abram will gain lands, will become a great nation, he will have a great name, he will be blessed and all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abram. That is the call. That is the promise. The call, understand, was to have faith that God would fulfill His promise. That is the heart of the relationship that we have with God. God makes promises and we believe that He will in fact fulfill His promises. God reiterated this promise to Abram in chapter 13 after [Abram] travelled down to Egypt and came back up to the land and then Lot had separated from Abram and Lot went down eventually to Sodom and Gomorrah and Abram is left alone in the heights of Judea. Then we come to Genesis chapter 15. In Genesis 15, one of the most dramatic moments in scripture, we see that God creates a covenant. A covenant creates a relationship with mutual obligations. But the heart of the covenant, you will recall, is when God had Abram take animals, sever them and lay them in two separate lines. This was copying an ancient form of treaty amongst the peoples of the Near East. The objective or the point was that each of them would walk through the split animals and say, “If I do not uphold the terms of the covenant may it be done to me as has been done to these animals.” So the king would walk through and so would the vassal, the common responsibility. But when you read Genesis 15 what you find out is only one person passes between the split animals, and that is God. This is the unique character of the covenant that we have with our God. He says to us, “You are Mine and I take complete responsibility to ensure the fulfillment of the covenant, your part as well as Mine.” That is incomprehensible to most people. It is also incomprehensible to us. Unless the grace of God penetrates our hearts and alters our minds all of us are committed to working out our own salvation. But the message of God's word is that none of us is capable of doing it. No man can in fact remain faithful to God. No man can in fact walk and live a holy life without flaw or failure. But all men who encounter God know that they are called to be holy, and therefore God says, “You are Mine, and I will take care of you.” On that day, Genesis 15:18, we read, *“The Lord made a covenant with Abram.”*

Now we come to chapter 17. God appears to Abram. Curiously at this point we are told nothing of an altar or praying. Apparently God just simply breaks into [Abram's] life. As I mentioned before, it has been 13 years since the debacle with Hagar and the birth of Ishmael. As far as we can tell, this has been the longest period of silence that Abram has experienced with God since he was called. 13 years: how many of us have gone 13 years with no communication with God? How many of us have prayed for something for 13 years and wondered why it hasn't been answered? Oh I think many of us have prayed for 13 years. What strikes me is that God has given Abram a lot of time to think about what happened with Sarah and Hagar. I surely think that the lesson to be learned from the episode with Sarah and Hagar is; “Do not answer God's promises for Him. Wait, learn to wait.”

Now we come to what God has to say. When we first read God's statement to Abram I think it sounds as if He is making a new covenant. *“I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you and may multiply you greatly.”* Is this a covenant of works? Is this a contradiction to what was laid out for us in Genesis 15? Here now suddenly He is saying that in order to walk before Me you must be blameless, yet we know we cannot be blameless. It might help if we realize the word translated as “make” can equally well be translated as “give”. For God is telling Abram something critical. That is the necessary conditions for the fulfillment of the covenant promise. If we are going to enjoy – if I were taking notes I would write this down. Enjoy: do I enjoy my relationship with God? Do I enjoy the walk of faith? Do I enjoy opportunities to be with Him? Do I enjoy when I read His word? Is joy the hallmark of my walk of faith with God? Joy! What are the necessary conditions for the fulfillment of the covenanted promise? That may sound strange, but it is not strange though often times we struggle with it. This is exactly the distinction between Paul's description of Abram's faith alone for salvation in Romans 4:1-12, which has in view Genesis 15:6. Let me ask you to turn to Romans 4:1-12 and listen to what Paul says about this covenant with God. He is speaking of Abram and this is what he says:

*“What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture*

*say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’ Now to the one who works his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are these whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised so that righteousness would be counted to them as well...”*

This is the free gift of God’s righteousness, not earned, given, a gift. Ah, but this is not the only time in the New Testament that these episodes are discussed. If you turn to James 2:21-23 here we have a discussion once again of Abraham, this time by James. James has Genesis 22 in mind. What happened in Genesis 22? We haven’t got there yet. Oh, Genesis 22 is when Abraham is asked by God to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise. In Genesis 15 He says here is My free gift. In Genesis 22 God says, give Me the gift back again. In both cases He is saying, do you trust Me, do you trust Me, do you trust me? This is what we read in James 2:21-23, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’* (It was fulfilled, it was completed. As the Reformers often said, we are saved by faith alone, amen, but such faith is never alone, it always accompanied by works, always.) A faith that does nothing simply isn’t faith. You might think of it as presumption. You might even think about it as self-deception. I cannot tell you often I have had people speak to me about so and so, perhaps themselves, [saying], “You know I went forward when I was ten. I must be saved.” Really? You live like hell, but you think you are going to heaven. What do you call that? [You call it] self-deception or presumption. “What does the law of God say?” “Oh, I don’t really know; I’m saved by Jesus.” I hope it goes well for you. It does not look good from where I stand.

If Abraham is going to raise a son who will receive the promise from his father and carry it forward to the next generation and not fall away into idolatry, Abraham is going to have the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. And if we are going to pass on the faith from our generation to the next generation and have any hope of reversing the tide that is gradually erasing the presence of the church of Jesus Christ from our land then we are going to have to learn to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and not occasionally. That is where these chapters connect with our own lives. I believe that when Abraham falls on his face before God it indicates something of his level of devotion.

God then proceeds to confirm the covenant and alters Abram’s name from Abram, Great Father, to Abraham, father of a multitude, connecting Abraham’s identity with the fulfillment of the promise. Someday nations will come from you, some day kings will come from you, some day every family upon the face of the earth will be blessed through you. How is that going to happen? Not by having kids by Hagar.

We come now to the next section, vv. 9-14. Circumcision, God says, will be the sign of the covenant. You need to know and understand that circumcision was not and has never been unique to the Jews. In fact it was widely practiced amongst the peoples of the Near East. One of the commentators, Kidner, says that “Circumcision itself was widespread in the Near East; the Philistines from the west were thought outlandish for not practicing it.” The significance therefore was not the mere fact of its being done, but why it was done. The new feature was its new meaning to mark the threshold not of manhood but of the covenant. This is seen by looking more specifically at what was said. The [circumcision] for the Jews comes to symbolize the discarding of heathen ways. Heathen nations performed circumcision when a boy was about eleven, twelve or thirteen; it was part of his entrance into

manhood, to sexual activity. For the Jews, however, when was circumcision to be performed? [It was to be performed at] eight days. The sign has nothing to do with sexual behavior: nothing. Rather it is a sign of belonging to the community of faith. We hear that emphasis in the Lord’s instructions. Notice again verses 10 to 14 of Genesis 17. Listen carefully to what is actually said.

*“Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with money, shall surely be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout our generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh and everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”*

Do you catch the emphasis, the insistence the demand? There is something very significant in what he has said. Who qualifies to be part [of the community of faith or covenant people]? Anybody! The covenant is open. It is open to people outside of Abram’s family or bloodline. That is the point of the stress that is made. You were not disqualified if you were a slave. In fact, notice; the master was obligated to bring you into the covenant. Already, therefore, with Abram at the very beginning of the covenant people of God we see that the covenant of grace was open, it is inclusive. How often have we been told otherwise? How often did the Jews themselves become convinced that if you weren’t born a Jew you could never become one? How readily do we take up the opportunity of grace to see that every single person at least has opportunity? The grace of God is open, not closed. It is inviting, not shunning. He wants people to come.

But of course this is not the entirety of the story. The next paragraph will feature a very different aspect of the covenant. This aspect is exclusivity. I read an article this morning on the internet – it is probably dangerous to look at the internet Sunday morning. Here was the article. As you know I am fairly passionate about what I believe. The article said, is it ok to teach your children religion with God? Let me run that by again: is it ok to teach your children religion without God. The article was absolutely dead serious. We have an opportunity. This is our opportunity. As our culture continues to unravel, as people have a deepening of dis-ease that the moral structure of our society is fracturing and there is no shared consensus about good and evil, right and wrong, and as we begin to increasingly hear voices with insistent hostility directed against some of those beliefs and practices which to us are most precious and which have in fact governed the social order for all of recorded history, people are beginning to become unsettled and they are asking the question, “How do I raise my child so that my child has an opportunity to reflect upon the deep things of constant truth, to entertain the ultimate questions, to reflect upon what is real as opposed to the constant chatter, the trivial conversation of our social media.” Well, let’s take them to church. And I say, “Amen!” Let’s throw our doors open wide. Let’s let them see and understand that you and I who know the living God understand the deepest needs and desires of their hearts.

Because you see as we look at what God says to Abraham about the exclusivity of His grace, the answer is made clear. The promise of a child for Abram had been stated from when God first called him. The lack of a child and his desire for one has been at the forefront of Abraham’s dealings with God. The sad episode with Hagar was not a case of emotional abandonment or even betrayal of Sarai by Abram. It was about having an heir born into the family. He was desperate to have that kid! However, though not explicitly stated we understand that God intended that Abraham’s heir would not only be fathered by Abraham, but would be born of his lawful wedded wife. Somebody made this observation; I have mentioned it before. Today we are struggling with same-sex marriage. Where did our culture go wrong? Well I can tell you where it went wrong. [It was] when the church decided it didn’t make any difference if you got divorced or not. I know that that is painful for some people in this room and that is not my intention. But my intention is this: when we lose the concept and the understanding of the sacred

commitment that is made between a man and woman and God in marriage, we have lost already most of the ground upon which the truth must stand. If the world around us cannot see convincing evidence of the sacrificial readiness to remain faithful to the covenant [of marriage] then we have no witness. That was the beginning of the transformation of sexual relations from sacred between husband and wife to a form of amusement and entertainment. You and I both know we have fallen far and return will not be easy.

But notice what God does at this point, and it is so critical for us to understand, and oh how I wish our forefathers had understood it. Believe me folks, I am an historian and I know a lot of the story as to why the church became so rigid before losing her bearings. Notice what God does. Sarai also receives a new name. Did you notice that? She receives a new name! The significance at this point is not found in the altering of the name: they both mean virtually the same thing. Sarah and Sarai both refer to “princess.” However, by changing her name and directly addressing her, the place of Sarah is directly addressed by God and she is specifically included in the covenant and its promise on virtually equal footing with Abraham. Husband and wife on common ground before God, one, joined, equal in standing and status before the God of heaven. Of course! How long and bitter and sad has been the tale of men repressing their wives in the name of religion? I know the story. When God says, “I will bless her” and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her – and listen to this – and she shall become nations; king of peoples shall come from her. Oh my goodness!

Listening to Abram’s response, he really doesn’t believe Sarah can have a child, which means he doesn’t believe God, and that in practical terms Ishmael is the son and heir, but such a conclusion goes against everything God has just said, [and that was] one of the lessons to be drawn from the sad episode of Hagar. We need to understand, fallen souls do not readily grasp the ways of God’s power or of God’s grace. So when God says, “*I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of people shall come from her,*” Abraham immediately responds by falling on his face again and laughing, talking to himself. He says, “Shall a child be born from a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah who is ninety years old bear a child?” You have to understand that his laughter is not just skepticism directed against God, but he is simply revealing the natural mind at work. How many of you have a ninety year old lady in your family? How would you respond if you found out she was pregnant? You are a bunch of “Abrahamites”, you are laughing it up! It is absurd. Of course it is absurd. Hallelujah that it is absurd. It makes me really nervous. I don’t want to have that happen. It is hard enough raising grandma as she is; if she had a kid we’d be done! So what you find in Abraham is the limitations of what to him is just common sense. All you have to is transfer this from the obvious absurdity of when at ninety having babies to what? Where in our lives on a daily basis do we let common sense rule out the promises of faith? “Oh for heaven’s sake; they both go to the bars all the time. There is no way under heaven they will ever come to know Jesus Christ!” That is right, but for grace. “My aunt Susie is so bitter. . .grace.” “That boy is lost. . .grace.” “We can’t do that. . .grace” So Abraham says, “Oh that Ishmael may live before you.” But God doesn’t change His mind. Notice how He responds, “No, no, Sarah your wife will bear you a son and you shall call his name – you all know what that name means, don’t you? Isaac means laughter. Are you laughing, I’m laughing. I get the last laugh, God says. You are having a baby. Get ready for it.

Then God goes on to say two critically important things in verses 20-21, “*As for Ishmael I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.*” Those are the Arabs. Already we have heard a description given to Hagar [in Genesis] chapter 16. Now we have the long history of those nations and people. We know the conflict, violence and suffering that has resulted. Beloved we must not forget that there are millions from those nations who now know Jesus Christ. God is gracious. It is common sense to us to avoid sorrows and problems, but God is gracious. When the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua after the death of Moses prepared to enter the Promised Land once more, now that the people living there have filled up the full measure of their iniquity – I am simply repeating what God said to Abram in the first place – the people of Canaan are rotten. They are hideous in their religious

practices, which we know from extra-biblical sources. They are a terrible people. But what is the first thing that happens when they enter the Promised Land? Do you know? Rahab is saved. “Jericho? There’s nobody in that city that isn’t rotten to the core! There’s no point trying to save anybody in that city. They are just a bunch of sinners stewed in their own wickedness.” God says, that’s mine. Not only is she saved along with her entire family, but she is one of the forbearers of Jesus the Messiah. We should not think for a single moment that the Lord loves Arab people any less than he does us or the Jews. Never let your understanding of prophecy blind you to present spiritual realities. Beloved, there are more non-believing or secular Jews in Israel than there are practicing. They are cruel often to the Christians. Israel is a deeply secular nation which has yet to meet with God’s judgment.

That brings us to the second statement by the Lord recorded in verse 21, *“I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”* God does not necessarily reject the soul of Ishmael or any of his descendants, but the promise and the covenant which will eventually bring to birth the son who will crush the serpent’s head can only come through the bloodline of Abraham and Sarah. This is the exclusivity of the faith. This is the exclusivity of God’s grace. Much later, when the New Covenant in Christ’s blood has been made by Him on the cross and the empty grave Peter will underscore this exclusivity by declaring in Acts 4:12, *“This is Jesus the stone that was rejected by you, the builders which has become the cornerstone, and there is salvation...”* Where? Nowhere else. Nowhere else at all. *“...no other name under heaven is given among men by which we must be saved.”* What confronts us here is the choosing of God. It is the doctrine of election, a doctrine which makes us uncomfortable perhaps but is powerfully stated by Paul in Romans 9 where he defends God’s electing grace in face of the staggering unfaithfulness, the faithlessness of Israel. This is Romans 9:6-13.

*“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel...”* Did you hear that? It is not the case that everybody living in Israel belongs to Israel. It is not the case that everybody who numbers their generations from Abraham belong to Israel. *“...and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: ‘About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.’ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”*

The doctrine of election does not say that only those of the bloodline of Abraham can be saved. That was never the case. What it does say is that only those who believe the promise given to Abraham can be saved. What was the promise given to Abraham? It was that God gave him a son through Sarah. That is the promise, that God gave him a son through his wife. That is the promise. That bloodline then is continuous right straight down to Jesus the Messiah. Therefore I believe Jesus the messiah is in direct [descent] from Abraham, because Abraham received a son by God through Sarah, not Hagar. To be saved by the promise of God we must believe that God keeps his promises. That means that we believe God kept His promise by means of the son born to Abraham and Sarah and nobody else.

Faith that does not act is either presumption or self-deception; it is not faith. Beloved, do you believe that Abraham had a son by Sarah, and that he is the forbearer of Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ is therefore exactly whom God said He is, the Son of God who died for the sins of men that they might be saved by believing in Him. That is the promise. We have to live by it.

Please stand together: The name of that last son is “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”. How appropriate. Please pray with me: Father in heaven, obedience. When Abraham heard the word that God said, “You must be circumcised” he went that day and circumcised every singly male, including himself. Forgive us, our Lord, we live easy. We take the instructions of Your word lightly. We attempt to weave our faith into all of the other activities of our lives

with as little disturbance as possible. But Father it is not possible. We are called by You to be a separated people, known for our love for You and our love for our neighbors. Father teach us how to love one another. We pray this, giving thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.



