



FATHER of FAITH

In the footsteps of Abraham

Joanna Barratt

FATHER OF FAITH

In The Footsteps Of
Abraham

Father of Faith - In the Footsteps of Abraham

by **Joanna Barratt**

First Published & Printed; Oct. 2011

by **Barratt Ministries Publications**

114 Daisy Bank Road, Victoria Park, Manchester M14 5QH, UK.

E-mail: info@barrattministries.org.uk

Web: www.barrattministries.org.uk

FATHER OF FAITH

In The Footsteps Of Abraham

By Joanna Barratt

BARRATT MINISTRIES PUBLICATIONS
Manchester M14 5QH, England



Contents

Introduction

Anybody out there?.

Taken from idolatry

The Footsteps of Abraham

Step 1. Leaving all

Step 2. Times of testing

Step 3. Spiritual eye opening

Step 4. Child of the flesh

Step 5. Circumcision

Step 6. First bombshell

Step 7. Second bombshell

Step 8. Enemy attack

Step 9. Isaac is born

Step 10. Hagar

Step 11. For such a time a this

Conclusion. Jesus is searching for faith

Introduction

... Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?

Luke 18:8

Without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that comes to him must believe that he is, and that he rewards them that diligently seek him.

Hebrew 11:6

What is faith?

Faith, in general, is the persuasion of the mind that a certain statement is true. Its primary idea is trust. A thing is true, and therefore worthy of trust. But we cannot possibly get to know God unless we have first had a revelation from him that he is indeed God. So it all hinges on whether Jesus the Christ reveals Jehovah God Almighty to us in the first place. If we are blessed with this revelation we must then continue the process by learning to put our trust in him. Jesus said ...

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

Matthew 11:27

Trust is not automatic, it takes a long time to cultivate,

and each step we take is just another stepping stone across a huge expanse of water which we must all cross in order to reach our goal. Every step will take more faith than the last step, for we are going further out, and the water is getting deeper, and at times very stormy. All we see on the surface is a foothold which is very small and vulnerable, but if we could only get a clear, underwater picture of what is really there, the enormous solid rock that is just peeking above the surface, we would not worry about taking the steps.

Yet it is because we cannot see, that we require faith, and every time we make that step to move on, and find that we are standing on something absolutely solid, then we are exercising our faith and it is growing stronger.

The fearful, and unbelieving, inevitably dither so are unsure of their footing. They constantly fall off their stone, get doused in cold water, and continually have to surface and swim back to one of the previous stones in order to gain confidence again. Some people get so discouraged from their constant soakings that they decide to give up altogether and swim back to the safety of the shore where they succumb to live a life without pressure, but miss out on the excitement of getting to know God.

The life of Abraham must be the embodiment of what God wanted when he called us to a life of faith. Of course, Jesus must be the very best example to follow, but some could argue that he was 'God in flesh' and had more advantages than us mere mortals. Abraham's example must be one that each and every one of us

should follow if we are to live by faith, for he was classed as being the very 'Father of Faith'. It would seem important, therefore, that we study each step Abraham trod to give us an indication of what God requires from us all.

So, I think it is wise to trace events back to the beginning and see how he began on this journey, for we all have to start from somewhere ...

Anybody out there?

God has always been, and still is, searching for heart relationship. Anyone who has read Maurice Barratt's (my husband) books on 'Israel, the Church, & the Kingdom of God' will have learned that God's plan, throughout the whole of the Bible, is one of love, romance, and family life.

When God created man and woman in the Garden of Eden he walked and talked with them in the cool of the day. It was obviously something God looked forward to as he made time for it. When he came to the garden one day and found Adam and Eve were hiding from him it must have come as a sickening blow, as the only reason for such behaviour was that they had disobeyed him and eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was the only thing he had withheld from them, and had forbidden them to even touch. Because of this terrible transgression he dealt out curses to the serpent, who had beguiled Eve; to Eve, because she had rebelled and done what she was forbidden to do; and the ground, because Adam had listened to his wife instead of God alone. They were thrust from the garden where they were provided with everything their hearts could desire, and Adam was forced to live by the sweat of his brow.

Rot sets in

From perfect beginnings, I find it quite incredible how

quickly man fell to a depraved condition. The very first child born to the brand new sinners, Adam and Eve, killed his own brother over something we could view as quite trivial. Cain, the older twin, brought an offering to God of the fruit of the ground which he had sweat and toiled over, whereas Abel, his younger brother, brought a lamb and sacrificed it. God much preferred, and had respect for, the offering that Abel brought, but unto Cain's offering he didn't have respect. Cain became uncontrollably angry. His extreme passions were unrestrained and for this minor offence he actually murdered his brother.

Obviously, God could not let this crime go unpunished. He cursed Cain, making him a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth (Genesis 4:11-12), so Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, took wives, built a city to create his own environment, and went his own way.

It took until the 7th generation before God could actually walk with man again. The Bible records that Enoch walked with God (after he begat Methuselah) for 300 years, and 'he was not'; for God took him. I heard a story once that God and Enoch used to go out for walks together and at the end of the walk Enoch would go home to his house, and God would return to the heavens. But one day they were having such a great conversation, that when they got to the end of their walk they were so engrossed in each other that they didn't want to part and God invited Enoch to go home with him.

I find this little snippet of information in the genealogies (Genesis 5:24) absolutely wonderful, and so encouraging,

for it reveals that God had at last found someone who truly loved being with him, and that it is possible to walk with God so closely that we could be transported into his presence without ever tasting death. Paul had a similar experience, albeit for a very short period of time, for he also was transported to the 3rd heaven where he heard things that weren't lawful to speak about (2 Corinthians 12:4).

Giants in the land

How sad that these incidents are so isolated, for before we get to the 10th generation, Noah, we see that angels had actually come to earth to mate with women and ended up siring children who were giants, mighty men, people who were making a great name for themselves. Society became so wicked and depraved that God was forced to unleash his anger. It could appear from scripture that he hadn't anticipated these events. God was so sick of what he saw going on in the earth that he actually repented he'd ever created man. How awful is that?

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**

And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

Genesis 6:5-6

Anyone reading the accounts written in the Bible with any sense of emotion, could feel really sorry for this God

who was a very sad being. He just couldn't seem to make headway. He was surrounded with angels and beings he had created who served him out of obedience, but all he was looking for from the humans he had created was love, and companionship, but it took him years to find Enoch, just one man, who would love him so much that he was prepared to leave all this world had to offer just to be with him.

There is none that understands, **there is none that seeks after God.**

Romans 3:11

God starts again

Thank God, that is not the end of the story, for God finds himself someone else who truly loves him and wants to live a life that will please him.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD ...
Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations,
and Noah walked with God.

Genesis 6:8-9

It must have been really gratifying for God to search the earth and find a man who was perfect in his generation. After all the filth and wickedness he'd had to watch, this was something which blessed him. He decided to cleanse the earth of all defilement, for not only did men think evil thoughts continually and do unrighteous deeds, but the ground was defiled, and sodden with the blood that had been shed through violence.

So God sent the flood and preserved Noah and his

immediate family, the only humans, in the hope that they would repopulate the world with children who would call on his name. He even relaxed somewhat the curse he had placed on man and subsidised their diet in that he now instructed them to eat meat. Before the flood they had existed on what the ground brought forth, and God had made sure that they ate by the sweat of their brow. But now, he tried to encourage their love by lessening their punishment. God is always making moves towards us. I don't think we will ever appreciate just how considerate and humble this Almighty God of ours is.

But yet again God found those who wanted to oppose his authority. Noah lived for 350 years after the flood so had the misfortune to witness the swiftness in which his descendants rebelled against God. Ham, Noah's son, was in the ark and experienced the terrible judgement of God, but the fear of the Lord didn't seem to last long in his own life. There was an incident concerning Noah and Ham which brought upon Canaan, Ham's 4th son, a terrible curse. Not only was his 4th son cursed, but Ham's 1st son, Cush, was the father of Nimrod. There were only 3 generations from Ham to Nimrod: Ham begat Cush, and Cush begat Nimrod.

Genesis 11 tells the story of how the whole earth was of one language, and one speech, and how Nimrod the mighty hunter, began to build his kingdom which was called Babel. His intention was to build a city, and a tower whose top would reach unto heaven, to make a name, lest they be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth. God knew where all this would lead, but couldn't send another flood because of the covenant he had made

with Noah. So he decided to confuse the languages so that nobody could communicate, thus everyone had to start from scratch with no accumulated knowledge.

The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, they have all one language; and this they begin to do: now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore the name of it is called Babel; because the LORD confounded the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Genesis 11:5-9

The very thing that Nimrod feared came upon him. God scattered them upon the face of the whole earth.

Taken from Idolatry

People had lost touch with this God. After careful reading, the story of Abraham seems to start with his father, Terah, who was the 10th generation from Noah, and moved somewhat in faith, but then stopped ...

And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

Genesis 11:31

Abram was born only 292 years after the flood (whilst Noah was still alive), but in actual fact it didn't take long before Jehovah was abandoned and every man chose his own god. Speaking to the children of Israel when they were just about to enter the promised land, Joshua makes it very clear that Terah (Joshua also seems to think it all started with Terah rather than Abraham) came from a background of idol worship.

And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and **they served other gods.**

Joshua 24:2

... Now therefore fear the LORD, serve him in sincerity and in truth: **put away the gods which your fathers served** on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve the LORD. If it seem evil to you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom you will serve; whether **the gods which your fathers served** that were on the other side of the flood ...

Joshua 24::14-15

Embarking on a long journey

It seems that Terah, for some reason, felt a compulsion to leave the land of his nativity to go to the land of Canaan. Could it be that he had experienced an encounter with Jehovah? That he was the one who had been given the instruction first, and gone as far as he could with the limited faith that he had? Why else would he leave behind him everything that was familiar and comfortable, even his son Nahor and his wife, to go to the land of Canaan taking only part of his family with him? Could it be possible that God had tried to communicate with him and had spoken to him of a promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and that Terah had spoken to his family about this God he had come into contact with, the vision he had seen, and of a plan for the future in another land?

It is clear from scripture that Abram was taken from idol worship to serve a new God whom he didn't know. Maybe Terah's reasons for moving on had somehow stirred something in the hearts of Abram and Lot causing them both to uproot also and follow him. Some soul searching discussions must surely have taken

place for Terah's family certainly weren't all of the same persuasion, as Nahor stayed behind in Haran with his wife.

Terah was 70 years of age when he begat his sons Abram, Nahor and, Haran, so he could have been around 110 years old when he began his journey. He got as far as Haran after having travelled around 700-800 miles following the Euphrates river, but decided to settle in Haran as there were yet another 500 miles to go before reaching Canaan. Maybe his limited faith just couldn't take him any further, but one thing is certain – he never got there!

Knowledge is an essential element in all faith, and is sometimes spoken of as an equivalent to faith. Yet the two are distinguished in this respect, that faith includes in it assent, which is an act of the will in addition to the act of the understanding. James says scathingly ...

You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

James 2:19

It's no big deal to believe in Jehovah, the big deal is concerning what you do about it. How far your belief will take you?

I remember hearing some time ago that somebody asked the well known evangelist, Reinhard Bonnke, what it felt like to be a chosen vessel of God. He said it was quite humbling. When asked why, he replied, "I was God's 3rd choice, the first two wouldn't go!"

Football game

Some years ago God gave me a vision of a football game. One team were wearing black strip and the other team were wearing white.

The game was in progress. The black team would have the ball, then be tackled only to have it taken from them by the white team. The boots made contact and the ball was struck ferociously. On occasion the ball was hit hard by two opposing players and would burst, it would be thrown out and a substitute ball thrown in. It didn't matter which ball was used just so long as the game could continue. Goals were kicked on both sides and the spectator's cheers were deafening.

As I was seeing the vision I automatically assumed which team I was on ... the white team, obviously! But then the Lord showed me what it was all about, saying that I was not on either team. This was not my battle, it was the Lord's, and the players were angels and demons. In actual fact, I was ... the FOOTBALL!

It was the game which was important. The job of the football was to take the pressure meted out by either team, but if the football couldn't do that and was burst, then it would be thrown out, off the field, and another ball would be thrown in. One thing was sure – the game would continue until the time was fulfilled and the game was over. We will get kicked from both sides, maybe sometimes even be used to score goals, but our job is to take the pressure and allow God's will to be done.

General before specific

My Pastor often stressed to his congregation that if we can't obey the general will of God, as written in the Bible, we will never even get to hear about his specific will – what he intends for us personally. God just won't reveal it. We all prove our faith by our obedience. He who obeys believes, he who believes obeys! We will never fulfil God's plans and purposes in our lives unless we begin to put our faith into practice and start to be obedient. We are human and cannot possibly understand the ways of God.

Understanding and obedience are two distinctly different things. They can both operate in complete independence of each other. We don't need to understand before we are obedient, neither do we need to be obedient before we can understand. When God gave the children of Israel the commandments he didn't always give a reason for his demands '...thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour; thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's'... these are statements which God does not qualify in any way. He simply expects obedience. Just because he said so!

The
Footsteps
of Abraham

Step 1
Leaving All

Personal word

Terah had already left Ur with the intention of going to Canaan, but settled once he got to Haran. Nevertheless when the Lord Jehovah gave instruction directly to Abram he graciously dangled a carrot before his eyes to give him the incentive to progress further.

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee ...and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed

Genesis 12:1-3

The bible does not record what God said to Terah – if indeed God did instigate his journey, but a personal word is of vital importance if we are to walk by faith. This personal word gave Abram the confidence to continue the journey, even though it meant abandoning his father, apparently with no male relatives to care for him.

So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed out of Haran. Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had begotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

Genesis 12:4-5

Lot went too

I have heard many preachers criticise Abram for the fact that even though he was instructed to get out of his country, leave his kindred, and his father's house, he disobeyed by taking Lot, his nephew, with him. Indeed they are very quick to criticise many honoured men of the scriptures, such as Elijah and Jonah. But I, personally, would be very careful about doing something so rash as to criticise someone whom the scripture honours with the titles 'Friend of God' and 'Father of Faith'.

...that he might be **the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised**; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: and the **father of circumcision** to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of **our father Abraham**, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

Romans 4:11-12

...Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which

is of the faith of Abraham; who is the **father of us all**.

Romans 4:16

Abram was not obliged to look after Lot for he was not a child, and if he had been then Terah was well capable of taking care of him. Lot was the son of Haran who had died in Ur of the Chaldees and was a business man in his own right, having inherited his father's wealth. Lot's sister, Milcah, was grown up enough to become the wife of her uncle, Nahor, whilst they were still dwelling in Ur so there is no chance that Lot was still a child when living in Haran from where Abram set out for Canaan.

Abram and Nahor took wives: Abram's wife was Sarai; and **the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran**, the father of Milcah, and Iscah.

Genesis 11:29

And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.

Genesis 13:5

Make no mistake, Lot continued the journey with Abram because it was his chosen path – it was his choice, and I'm sure it was with gladness of heart that Abram allowed him to accompany him.

Unknown God – Unknown destination

It's not easy doing things on your own. When Abram set out to follow the leading of this unknown God to an unknown destination, he had nobody to share his faith with. Nobody around him had heard God speak to them,

they wouldn't be able to identify with him. Besides, they had many gods whom they were following, and idols they were worshipping, why would they want to hear about a god with no name, and no visual image, for since the Garden of Eden God had withdrawn and hidden his form from man.

There was no Bible to read from which he could derive inspiration and encouragement, and there were no meetings to attend where he could have fellowship or share testimonies with others who had experienced similar things. No, he was completely alone in his new found faith. He was leading his family and servants, like a shepherd leads his sheep. They didn't know where he was going, but they knew him, and believed that Abram had such a relationship with his God that they were prepared to place their trust in him to do what was right for them.

Quite apart from this fact, he was only just entering into this relationship with God and had nothing to fall back on other than the clear words which he had heard, and the firm conviction that God had spoken into his heart and made a promise to him. His action of walking out from his father's house, leaving him without any male relatives, proved that he believed that God had spoken to him ... He who believes obeys!

Obedience school

Abram did not disobey God by taking Lot with him, he was just on the first of many stepping stones, walking in obedience with the limited revelation he had received,

believing that this would lead him to his destiny. Abram was in obedience school, and he was to study in that school for 24 long years, being tested and tried by fire, before he received tangible proof that God would indeed fulfil the promises made to him.

Thank God he had a good wife! I don't think it would have been possible to serve this unknown God and live a life of faith if he had been shackled to a complaining, negative female. He had been blessed by being married to a woman who loved him with all her heart, she was a **help meet** (suitable) **for him**, for God knew that in the first part of this walk of faith they had to carry the candle together until Abram was strong enough in God to carry it alone.

There is no record of God ever rebuking Abram for any of the actions he took – and the bible is very explicit concerning the sins of those we are expected to look to as examples of how to walk. Moses, Samuel, David, Peter, to name but a few, were all reprimanded for their particular mistakes, but no rebukes were ever spoken concerning Abram. This, in itself, should be a lesson to us!

If God thought so highly of him that he would consider him to be his friend, and the scripture states that he is the 'Father of Faith' for all believers, then we should not touch – or judge – God's anointed, nor do his prophets any harm. It is not within our jurisdiction **to judge another man's servant.**

Abram views the land

Abram was 75 years of age, and Sarai 65, when they left Terah, aged 145 years, behind. It's quite amazing that within a short space of time Abram actually sets foot in Canaan, the land his father had first set out for but didn't actually reach.

Those extra 500 miles seemed to pass without too much trouble or incident and it would almost appear that this part of his faith journey apparently came to pass very quickly and without hitch. Although it had been a traumatic experience for him to leave behind a beloved father, and all that was familiar to him, seeing before him the land that God had promised to him must have been a tremendous encouragement.

He had actually arrived! He was standing on the soil he was to inherit! God must have been very pleased with his act of faith because he personally appeared to Abram, and confirmed his word.

And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there built he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he built an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

Genesis 12:7-9

It didn't unduly perturb Abram that the Canaanites still lived in the land. He believed even then that if God promised this land to him, then God would work something out sooner or later. So he was happy to pitch his tent there, dwell amongst them, and wait.

There was absolutely no reason for Abram to leave the place God had said he would inherit. He would just wait, and hold his ground, until the Lord gave it to him on a plate – just like he had promised. But that wasn't what God had in mind. Before Abram could get what was promised there were a series of tests he had to go through first to prove his worthiness. He was allowed to view it for himself, even walk through it, but it would not be his – lock, stock, and barrel – until he had overcome the hurdles God was now going to place before him.

When Jesus Christ gives us a revelation of who God is, and tells us to leave all and follow him, it is because he has already been preparing us over a period of time. We will have been spoken to in many ways, on many different occasions during our lives, but there comes a time when our feet have to start walking down the path God has brought us led us onto. It can no longer be simply a mental acceptance, it will have to be something we walk in – physically.

Abram's life prophetic

Abram's life was prophetic and each and every one of us will have to go through a similar process if we are to live a life of faith.

The walking away from all we have ever known to serve this new God we have just met can be both a frightening and exhilarating experience. God speaks to us, we can hear him in our hearts, and are sure that this is the right path. We encounter many encouragements and it isn't long before we know we are where we are meant to be.

Abram actually walked, slept, ate, and drank, in the very place God had promised to give to him, yet it didn't belong to him. He could see and feel what had been promised to him, but it wasn't actually his. That was for the future ... but only if his faith in God would permit him to pay the price God was asking in exchange for the promise to become a reality. First of all he had to face the wilderness.

When we first come into a relationship with God we also experience our promised land, but we only experience it in our spirits. The Kingdom of Heaven is within us, it is not something physical, and cannot be seen externally. One day it truly will be a reality, but until that day comes we also have to face the wilderness, for only those who *endure to the end shall be saved*. God cannot fulfil his promises to us unless he knows what is in the depth of our hearts, and only the heat and dryness of the wilderness can bring this out. Only the loneliness and solitude of the wilderness allows the conditions for our motives to be scrutinised. God knows exactly what he is doing. The wilderness is not a mistake, it is paramount to our eventually inheriting.

Our lives as believers mean nothing until we have been tried and tested. Until proven, our faith is just a mere

belief that Jehovah is the one and only true and living God, and is no better than the faith that the devil has, for he also believes in God and trembles. We need much more than belief. We need to suffer for what we believe in before we know for a certainty that we really do have faith in God.

Step 2

Times of Testing

No pain, no gain!

If it's worth having, it's worth fighting for!

First test — Famine

And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

Genesis 12:10

The first test Abram had to face was famine. There is nothing so severe as hunger. Food is a basic need, for without food we will inevitably die as life cannot be sustained without it. This famine was not a mistake, it was God's doing. Creation will always carry on doing what God ordered it to do for God set times and seasons in motion. He is the Master of the weather and earthly cycles.

Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: you have established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.

Psalms 119:90-91

God knows how to direct our paths, and in this instance he used an 'act of nature' to force Abram to uproot, and take his whole entourage with him in search of the food that would keep them alive. It took a near death experience to make Abram move because the faith that God's initial words had built up in his heart were so strong.

God also used this method of famine to force Joseph's brothers to come to him in Egypt. They had no other choice but to go where the food was, and God had ensured that Egypt – the world! – would have all the food they needed to survive through the famine.

Abram had to learn many lessons about faith. One of them was that it is impossible to inherit what God had promised immediately. The very word 'inherit' means that you have to wait for something, or someone, to pass on before you can obtain it. Situations have to dramatically change, and in my experience I have noticed that God has to 'make the person' first, before he will alter any of the situations.

My husband and I have been redirected many times by God allowing adverse circumstances in our lives. Indeed, Maurice would not be a preacher now if God hadn't allowed the thieves into our home to steal all our musical equipment 20 years ago. He would never have taught in house groups for 3 years at a time if God hadn't allowed our 5-berth touring caravan to be stolen out of our back garden, 17 years ago. We would have carried on touring the U.K. for weeks at a time locked into our time warp.

God spoke to us beforehand about giving up what he eventually took, but we listened, and were influenced by natural reasoning, such as ... 'If you don't use the talent God gave you, you'll lose it!' And 'God would never tell you to do a thing like that!' The problem with humanity is that we get locked into a way of thinking, and don't take easily to change, so unwittingly we force God to resort to drastic measures in order to steer us.

Second test – his Marriage

It came to pass, when he had come near to enter Egypt, he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.

Genesis 12:11-13

From the very moment Abram left his father's house he knew that his marriage would be a problem. He had been blessed with a very beautiful wife who was still stunning even though she was probably nearly 70 years old at the time this event took place. Indeed it was when Abram realised what the implications of having a gorgeous wife could mean to him – it could cost him his very life – that he made a plan to avert trouble. He was living in a godless world where men were living by their consciences. There was no law saying, '**Thou shalt not commit adultery**', it was up to every man how he should behave, and there were some very selfish, covetous men out there whose

consciences were hardened and unconcerned for the feelings of others.

She is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said unto her, This is thy kindness which you shall show me; every place where we come, say of me, He is my brother.

Genesis 20:12-13

There was no lie in the story they both hatched up together, it was completely true. Neither were Abram, nor Sarai, reprimanded for allowing others to believe that this was their relationship. I find that people are very judgmental and won't allow compassion to be a part of their appraisals of the way others react. This was something Jesus criticised the Pharisees for – forgetting 'the weightier matters of the law – judgement, mercy and faith!' God allowed them to pursue this course because Abram had to experience everything God experiences, and losing his wife was one of those experiences. Abram was a prophet, and the love he had for his wife must have been something very close to the love God had for Israel.

Abram loses Sarai

And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he entreated Abram

well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.

Genesis 12:14-16

Just think of it, the most powerful man on earth – the Pharaoh (King) of Egypt – wanted the woman he thought to be Abram's sister, which in actual fact meant that Abram would become a brother-in-law to Pharaoh. He would have been well looked after, being in the 'family', for Pharaoh had already paid him handsomely, and I'm sure he would have continued to do so while ever Sarai kept him sweet.

This was a test to see whether Abram was covetous or not. Jesus said, 'you can't serve God and mammon' – meaning God and riches, so God had to see what was in Abram's heart. He needed to know why Abram was following him. Was it for love of God, or the benefits he was being promised? Which god did Abram really want to serve – Jehovah or wealth? I don't, for one minute, think that Abram was at the point yet of really loving God with all his heart, he was just starting out on this walk of faith and getting to know him. But I do think Abram knew this relationship was blossoming, and beginning to get more and more personal.

Although Abram was a rich man already, he didn't want another woman, even though the one he had was barren. If it was a wife he wanted for physical satisfaction he could take his pick from either his own clan, or from Egypt. He was rich, and free to have as many wives as he chose to have. Whatever the Pharaoh was tempting

him with, this very passage of scripture proves to me that Sarai meant everything to Abram. I think any other husband would have been sorely tempted with this situation but the love he had for Sarai far outweighed any love he had for riches. He would much rather have her than all the wealth of Egypt. He must have really loved her with a very strong passion – how else could he have prophesied the feelings of God?

Love, the essential ingredient

This theme of love and romance seems to flow throughout the whole Bible. I am constantly enthralled by passages talking of the love of God for Israel, the love of Christ for his church, the love of a husband for his wife, the way of a man with a maid. It thrills me to know that God upholds the idea of men passionately loving and cherishing their wives, even to the point where they will give their lives to protect them.

If, as Jesus said, love fulfils the law, then how important is love for the fulfilment of God's plans and purposes. Love is spiritual whether it's between a man and woman, or a man and God; and this is the essential ingredient that God is looking for. The child who was going to ultimately be given as a fulfilment of promise had to be a 'love child' not a child of mere duty or destiny.

Abram had never faced this situation of losing Sarai before so he had no idea of how it would affect him. He must have been beside himself thinking that his wife was in the arms of another man. Yes, Abram was a blessed man in many ways, but the fact that he had a beautiful wife could almost seem like a curse, for there was always someone who wanted to steal her, and that was why they made the brother/sister agreement between themselves.

She was indeed a wonderful prize; a glorious, flattering boost to his ego; just to gaze on her must have brought him immense pleasure and gratification. But her beauty was a fearful, and constant, threat to his personal welfare.

I always dreaded the idea of being married to a really handsome guy. It's hard enough trying to live a clean, pure life in this polluted world without having to worry about all the sex-mad, liberated, and conscience-free, females out there who would be flinging themselves at him. I could never live as I do now, supporting my husband to go out preaching every night, it would drive me crazy with jealousy in case he had a roving eye, or was enticed.

The world Abram was living in back then was probably no different to how it is now, perhaps it was even worse, everyone did what they thought right in their own eyes. There were no restrictions, other than the laws and customs that certain civilisations enforced. God knew what he was leading Abram into. He allowed this trial because both Abram and Sarai were being trained for a higher objective. Each test would be a stepping stone towards the goal God had in mind for them.

Sarai loses Abram

Sarai was not exempt from God's scrutiny and his spotlight was searching her innermost desires also. This was a test for her, and we must remember, she had just been forced to flee from a fierce famine. She was every inch a woman, and a very beautiful woman at that, so

she must have been well aware of the effect she had on men. Now she found she was attracting this mighty, powerful, influential, charismatic man, the ruler of the whole magnificent empire of Egypt, who wanted to lavish gifts and attention ...on her!

It was very likely that he had other wives and she would have to share his affection, but it is possible that this may not have posed any problem for her. I know many women who can 'live without a man', as they put it. They are very happy to look after the house and children so long as they are provided for, have a wifely status, but are not necessarily required to be subjected much to the marriage bed. If this had been her persuasion it could well have suited her lifestyle very nicely. What an intoxicating experience for any woman to have to face. The Pharaoh had already paid her 'brother' handsomely for the privilege of taking her to himself, so what worldly thing could he possibly withhold from her? Nothing! She could have whatever she wanted. She didn't need to wander the desert any longer. She could live in a king's palace, wear the finest of clothes, bathe in rare spices and perfumes, eat exotic delicacies, sleep on fine beds, be waited on hand and foot. All this for the rest of her life! All she needed to do was submit to what was being offered now and she had her future made. Neither did she need to worry about Abram for the Pharaoh had not only financially blessed him, but had given succour to all her people who were even now being fed from the fat of the land. What a temptation! What woman could resist?

I'm sure that if Sarai had secretly desired what was being offered to her, then the Lord would have allowed her to

have her heart's desire. You must remember that this trial was of the Lord because he was sifting them. He's not interested in what we profess, he's interested in what's in the depths of our hearts; and he has to dangle the carrots before our eyes in order to see how we react. Temptations are a vital part of our walk with God for they reveal to him – and to us – what we truly want and have placed our faith in.

So why did she resist? The bible tells us some wonderful things about this woman. Although she had been married for many years she was still deeply in love with her beloved husband and wasn't on the look out for anyone else, which was another reason for her saying she was his sister. She was chaste, and could be trusted completely. She had such a tremendous respect and admiration for Abram that she considered him to be her 'lord' and was in absolute subjection to him. She didn't need the ornaments and decorations that were being offered, even by a Pharaoh, for she was a beautiful person inside, having a meek and quiet spirit, which even God considered to be valuable and 'of great price'. She was a rare woman, fearing her husband and not wanting to cause him offence; trusting in God, so that they were both pulling the same plough, in the same direction, in complete harmony and unity.

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing

of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the **holy women** also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: **even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord ...**

1 Peter 3:1-6

God had to put them both through these tests because his promise to them was going to be an everlasting covenant, and he needed to make sure they were the right people to entrust this to. Make no mistake, you cannot just walk into the plan of God without the necessary training. God is too just for that. It takes years for God to 'make the man'. **Many are called, but few chosen** – and I'm sure this is because many are given the opportunity, but only a very few will actually go the whole hog where personal sacrifice is concerned, and pay the high price God asks in payment for his promises. Yes, everything has a price ... God is no exception. If you can't pay the price, then he will move on to the next person who possibly can, because his plan **will** be fulfilled.

Abram & Sarai delivered

So then, because both Abram and Sarai showed God that they didn't want to serve mammon, they wanted to see his plan come to pass in their lives, God delivered them from the most powerful man on the face of the earth, and they were rewarded handsomely.

The LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why said you, She is my sister? I might have taken her as my wife: now therefore behold your wife, take her, and go your way. Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had. Abram went up out of Egypt, with his wife, all that he had, and Lot with him, to the south.

Genesis 12:17 - 13:2

It seems to me that God is always trying to pick a fight with Egypt – Poor Pharaoh! – On this occasion he was actually the innocent party, but became the subject of terrible plagues from the Lord. He gave Sarai back to her husband and Abram, who after spurning Pharaoh's brotherly ties, was blessed both financially and materially as he was forced from Egypt. He was indeed an extremely wealthy man.

This is not the only time that God plagued Egypt for in the days of Moses, when God was determined to show his might and strength, he performed many miraculous signs, wonders, and sent terrible plagues upon this powerful nation to free the Israelites from the bondage of Egyptian slavery.

The wonders he performed were so terrifying that the Egyptians couldn't get rid of the Israelites quickly enough, and gave them gold, silver, exotic and expensive materials, as gifts to hopefully buy their way back into

Israelite favour and make sure they left with kind thoughts towards them. One thing was for sure, they did not want them to remain amongst them for their presence in Egypt spelt nothing but trouble. God had proven himself to be so powerful, and had delivered Israel with such a mighty hand, that Israel were greatly revered, and Moses considered to be a very great man.

If Lot was going to continue with Abram as part of this family who were to inherit such unbelievable promises, then he also needed to be tested. Abram was the man with the 'call' of God on his life, Lot had just jumped on his bandwagon because he had been inspired. But what had inspired him? What had made him leave Ur in the first place? We must remember that Lot was not a child, he was a grown man who had inherited his father's property for he had his own herds and herdsmen.

And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

Genesis 13:7

Lot tested

One thing Abram didn't want was trouble in the family, but even he could see that a problem had arisen which needed a drastic solution to enable each party to live together in peace and harmony. Being such a godly man he humbled himself to his nephew and gave him the option of choosing where he preferred to live with the people in his employ.

And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as you come unto Zoar. Then Lot chose all the plain of Jordan; and journeyed east: and they separated themselves one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

Genesis 13:8-13

It didn't matter to Lot that God had promised this land to Abram. Lot was looking out for 'Number 1' – himself! That was the very reason why he'd come on this journey in the first place, he was a businessman, looking for material gain and benefit. It would be to his advantage to be able to trade with the 5 cities of the plain, and he could live a more comfortable lifestyle.

Family separated

He jumped at the offer Abram made and chose the most desirable part of the land, the place which was described as being like the Garden of Eden, and pitched his tent

towards the city, perhaps not realising that the men of that particular city were extremely wicked. Instead of honouring his uncle, who was heading up this whole expedition, he showed his greed and ambition; and Abram stood back and let him have what he wanted. How many men in his position would be able to do a thing like that?

If God had promised that the land they were living in was Abram's inheritance, then it didn't matter who lived where, it was all his anyway, and no person, or circumstance, could alter that fact. Already Abram had come too far, and seen too much, to think otherwise. I actually believe that God set Lot up for this separation because it wasn't Lot who had a problem with Abram, it was Abram's herdsmen who had a problem with Lot's herdsmen.

So far Abram had produced no children and Lot was the closest kinsmen he had. Lot would automatically consider himself to be the one to inherit in the event of Abram's death because Abram wasn't interested in any woman other than his barren wife. God could see the future and would not allow him to have part in the inheritance. Lot was a problem to God's plan and therefore needed to go.

Only a man of faith could have done what Abram did that day. One more of Abram's family members had to be removed from the scene as God was working towards the special, close relationship he was after – God and man – and just that! God doesn't call 'families', God calls 'a man', and God will do the same with each and every

one of us for with God, just as with those who are truly in love, 'two is company – three (or more) is a crowd'!

Separation from our nearest and dearest can be one of the most painful experiences we have to face in our relationship with God, and God never apologises for putting us through this for it seems to be what affects us all the most. The Bible warns us often enough about God's character, but for some reason we never seem to hear about it from the pulpits of our churches before we make our commitment to serve him. He is portrayed as a benign God who solves all our problems without asking for anything in return.

You shall worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

Exodus 34:14

The LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

Deuteronomy 4:24

Joshua said unto all the people, You cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God.

Joshua 24:19

Jesus said, Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of

me. And he that doesn't take his cross, and follow after me, is not worthy of me.

Matthew 10:34-38

I don't for one minute think that God was seeking an opportunity to get rid of Sarai from Abram's life, her tests were merely to sift and refine her. She was not seen as a near kinswoman in God's eyes – she **was** Abram. She was his wife, and God had joined them together with a love that was real.

For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be **one flesh**? Wherefore **they are no more twain, but one flesh**. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

Matthew 19:5-6

There can be no more perfect union on this earth than that of husband and wife who have been joined together by God, and for this very reason Abram was an exceptionally blessed man, for not only was she beautiful to look at, she was one with him in spirit. He didn't need anybody else if his wife was with him, he wasn't alone in his walk of faith.

Because his heart was so set on believing what God had already said, God spoke again after the separation of Lot for a sifting had taken place.

And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and

southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which you see, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

Genesis 13:14-17

Step 3

Spiritual Eye Opening

This journey of faith that Abram was taking necessitated many lessons. He needed to see that there was a vast difference between 'unclean' and 'abomination' – the 'world' and the 'devil'. But before he faced this next test he needed divine intervention to show him just what he was dealing with. The devil comes to each of us in such subtle, and plausible, disguises that it takes spiritual discernment to discover his ploys.

Abram meets Melchizedek

In Genesis 14 we are told of a battle which took place between 4 kings against 5 kings, during which Lot and his family were amongst those people who had been taken captive by the attackers. Word got out to Abram so he set about to rescue him. Together with 318 of his own trained servants, he went out in hot pursuit of the enemy to bring Lot back to safety. It didn't matter that there had been a family dispute – 'blood was thicker than water', and he risked his life, and the lives of many men who worked for him, to save his nephew.

When the King of Sodom was informed of Abram's great victory he set out to meet him and bring back to his

city all the stolen souls Abram had delivered. But before these two men could meet, an amazing incident took place. The following encounter is unique and seems really out of context with what has just happened, almost like a break in the story, for Melchizedek, the King of Salem and priest of the Most High God, appears to Abram.

And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which has delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

Genesis 14:16-21

Nothing surprises God

Note the verses before and after this strange encounter which is in bold print. Throughout my trials I have come to realise that **nothing that happens to us surprises God**. Situations happen in life which often throw us off balance for they seem to have come out of the blue, and were completely unexpected. But it isn't like that

with God. From his position in the heavenlies he has a magnificent bird's eye view of all that happens – and is about to happen – to each one of us.

He could see the messenger arrive at the king's palace with the news that Abram had rescued his subjects. He could hear the conversation between the king and his chancellors saying that he was going to bring the people back. He watched as the king mounted his horse and set forth on his journey, and knew exactly when he would arrive at Abram's door. So, because he was watching as all the events unfolded, he sent his most trusted, spiritual representative, to prepare Abram for the forthcoming meeting.

We never need to worry about any situation we are facing because God can see it all happening. Indeed, in many of the situations we find ourselves in, it is because God has instigated all the events in the first place. When you belong to God Almighty you can be certain of one thing ... nothing can happen to you that God does not allow. Whoever touches you, needs permission from God first, so if God allows it, it will be for your ultimate benefit.

Take the pressure and don't fight it

I don't know whether Abram was aware of the customs and practices that went on in Sodom, but obviously God considered it necessary to send this most important figure to commune with him before he encountered, and listened to, the persuasive talk of this Sodomite king. Abram didn't know what he was dealing with and

needed his eyes opened to spiritual truth. The disciples who spoke with Jesus on the Emmaus Road didn't realise the importance of what was being shared with them until they had their eyes opened when Jesus broke bread with them. Abram also needed spiritual discernment and Melchizedek opened his eyes, as he also brought and shared the bread and the wine.

And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

Luke 24:30-32

Sodom could not bless Abram

It seems from reading Abram's statement that Melchizedek had already warned him not to take anything from the king of Sodom. Why? Well, it would have made him a partaker of Sodom's sins. Jesus was emphatic when he told his disciples '!... the devil has no part in me'!

And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is

yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich: save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

Genesis 14:21-24

So, he had already lifted up his hand and made a vow to God that he would not to make any allegiance with this nation. God was happy for Egypt to shower gifts and wealth upon his people; we see the way Pharaoh blessed Abram with gold, silver, and livestock when he both took Sarai from, then delivered her back to, Abram. Then again later on when the Egyptians gave the Israelites jewels of gold, jewels of silver, and clothes as they left the slavery of Egypt in the days of Moses. But this was different. God will not, indeed cannot, permit us to receive blessings from anything demonic.

In God's eyes homosexuality is an abominable practice and does not only pervert the laws of nature, but is a rebellious spirit which will corrupt spiritually and spread like leaven throughout a society. Fleshly sins are one thing, and in some ways can be understood for we are all human; but spiritual sins are quite another thing. To pervert God's order is to cross a line. God said in the beginning that everything should produce after its kind, but it is an impossibility for any fruit to come from any such union of this kind. It's confusion, an abomination, a mixture, and God hates it. Even before giving the law to Moses, God was making Abram aware of his disgust for the abominable practices which went on in the surrounding nations by sending the highest spiritual authority in heaven next to himself, to show how serious

this situation was.

God hates mixture

Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind:
it is abomination.

Leviticus 18:22

There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor
a sodomite of the sons of Israel.

Deuteronomy 23:17

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lays with
a woman, both of them have committed an abomination:
they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be
upon them.

Leviticus 20:13

Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit
not any one of these abominable customs, which were
committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves
therein: I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 18:30

There is also a commandment in Deuteronomy which
stated that the priests were not allowed to accept money
earned from either male or female prostitution as an
offering to the Lord ...

You shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price
of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for
any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the

LORD thy God.

Deuteronomy 23:18

Abram was learning about this God he had been drawn to. He was finding out what God loved, and what God hated, and this was a vital stepping stone in his life of faith. God and the devil can never cohabit a person's life. Paul says that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. If the Holy Ghost dwells in our mortal bodies then it is impossible for the devil to take up residence there. But if we open the door and allow spiritual rebellion or perversion access, it will drive out the Holy Ghost for he will not share the same temple with devils.

We are not of this world

We also need to know what God accepts and rejects if we are to live a life of faith, for God can only be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and there are certain things we are permitted, or forbidden, to do.

The world do not uphold the same standards as God for he is an holy God who has defined a particular way of life for his people to adhere to. At one time our government based the laws of this land on the 10 commandments, and for that God made us a great nation. All too often the laws of our land now permit us to practice things which our God finds abhorrent, and will pour millions of pounds into informing our children they have freedom to choose their own sexuality. But this is only one of the many ways in which our society has contravened the laws of God.

Well, let the world do what the world wants to do, they will have to answer to God for that one day. But if we intend to follow Jehovah, the God of Heaven and Earth, the God of the Holy Bible, then we have to abide by his rules, for we are not of this world. It does not matter if we are not Israelites by birth for God has broken down that wall which kept us separated – Jews and Gentiles – and has opened up the way for us to be grafted on to the branch as true Israelites. We have been adopted into the Heavenly family, and God has accepted us as his children.

But if, like Abram, we are looking past this earthly life and are seeking to be part of the city whose builder and maker is God, where Jesus will reign as King with complete authority in righteousness and holiness, then Jesus said we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. Nobody said it would be easy, but we have to walk God's way – 'Thy will be done, not mine'.

Step 4

Child of the Flesh

It is quite understandable that Abram seemed to appear a little frustrated, for God had told him where he would end up, but hadn't explained how he would get there.

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me you have given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth **out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir**. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 15:1-6

At last, some clear indication of what was going to happen, but the problem was that Abram had been 75 years old when he left Haran, and Sarai 65. Time was marching on, and after 10 years of trusting God to keep

his promises nothing had yet materialised.

Heartache

It was now too late for Sarai to bear children, and this must have been a terrible situation for her to face. She had hoped with all her heart that she could give him an heir but now had to accept that she was out of the equation. God's latest statement to Abram was that he would have an heir, but there was no mention of her. God had said it would come forth **out of Abram's own bowels**.

I can't imagine how Sarai must have felt when Abram shared his latest communication he'd had with God. She must have been completely crushed and heartbroken to know that she had been pushed to one side, totally inadequate to meet her husband's needs. What was the point of being blessed with all her natural assets if she was just a shrivelled up and dry tree who could bear no fruit. I'm certain she must have shed buckets of tears pleading with the God of her husband to open her womb, but now she knew what his answer was ... a definite 'No!'

What a beautiful woman Sarai was. I'm not talking about her outward appearance now, I mean what a beautiful woman she was inside. She pushed her pain to one side and concentrated on how she could bring her husband's heart's desire to fruition. Alright, she had been denied this wonderful privilege, but she had a handmaid who could become a surrogate mother for her. She must have hated the idea of her husband becoming intimate and planting his seed into the womb of another woman, but her love for him drove her to ignore her jealousy to

enable him to obtain his dream.

Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived.

Genesis 16:1-4

It really upsets and pains me to hear people say that Sarai was impatient or lacked faith. People who speak in this manner lack both feeling and understanding. Maybe they have never loved with such passion as she did, so couldn't imagine the trauma going on in her heart. Her love for Abram would want to keep him for herself, but her faith in the promises God had spoken to him made her sacrifice because she felt she was the one to blame. She was running a terrible risk. What if Abram enjoyed being intimate with another woman? What would she do if her offer became a regular practice and her handmaid ended up as wife number 2? Her head, and heart, must have been in turmoil, I would not like to have been in her situation.

Backfired

How many times have you done things with the most unselfish of motives only to have it backfire on you? Well,

if you are a true Christian you must have experienced this countless of times. I know I have. I remember a particular incident where God provided me with an opportunity to bless my family and show them that I had changed, and was trying to make up to them for all the problems we had encountered during our childhood. If my plan had been allowed to come to fruition, I know they would have been delighted. But, unfortunately, one of my sisters would not believe that my motives were pure, and did her best to slander me. She convinced my siblings I had evil intentions, and was so plausible in her arguments that they believed her. It all went horribly wrong! They hated me.

Poor Sarai, as soon as Hagar found out that she was pregnant she began to despise Sarai. She might not have been as beautiful as her mistress, but she was certainly of more use and made sure she rubbed her fruitfulness in Sarai's face. What profit are good looks if your womb cannot reproduce? The handmaid now had the upper hand, she had been intimate with her mistress's husband and was now bearing his child. Who held the power now? Sarai could do nothing about this situation. She had instigated it, now she had to bear the consequences. She had done it with a pure motive, but Hagar was not of the same spirit, being an Egyptian, and did not know Abram's God. She had been brought up with different standards and would most probably have served Egyptian gods.

Ishmael is born

And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his

son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.

Genesis 16:15-16

After all these years, when Abram was 86 years old, Ishmael, the precious son they had all been waiting for, who had been personally named by God Almighty, the heir to all the promises of Abram, was finally born. There was much rejoicing in the camp for all had been fulfilled.

Apparently ...

Step 5

Circumcision

For 13 years Abram delighted in Ishmael. He had waited until he was an old man, his wife well past the age of bearing even if her womb had been normal, before he had become a father, and he was enjoying every precious minute of it. There was so much to teach his child if he was to take over from him, and there was no time to waste. One day, when Abram was 99 years old, God appeared to him and he fell on his face.

Identity transformation

The first thing God said to Abram was that he was going to change his name – which denotes identity, or character. He was not going to be the father of Ishmael only, but would also be the father of many nations. God emphasised this by saying he would be exceedingly fruitful and his seed would possess the land which had been promised to him.

Behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a **father of many nations**. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee **exceeding fruitful**, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting

covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

Genesis 17:4-9

Bodily transformation

Then God said he wanted Abraham, and all the males in his camp, to irreversibly mark their flesh, throughout all generations, so there would be no mistaking who they belonged to. God had claimed them.

This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

Genesis 17:10-14

Up until this point God had been making all the moves

with both promises and covenants, but now something radically changed and Abraham was expected to make a covenant with God. And not only himself, all those connected with him were required to do the same ... forever! This was a most serious covenant, for it was a blood covenant. Abraham didn't waste any time.

In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.

Genesis 17:26-27

If there was one particular quality that strikingly stood out in the character of Abraham, it was his ability to jump into immediate action when God spoke. He was more than willing. He didn't even question why. What he was about to order his men to do was very painful, and could never be reversed. Whether they liked it or not, if they wanted to remain in his camp they would be marked men from then on, and would be under obligation to serve his God.

Ishmael, who was only 13 years old at the time, together with all the men, were ignorant of the covenant they were about to enter into. This was something they would have to learn all about later on in life after the initial cut off of their foreskin. Some of the men could very well have been resentful of the fact that this was now the condition for remaining amongst the company. One thing was for sure, it was going to cost everybody dearly, for it was a very painful process unless done when 8 days old.

Resentful

When working in one of my first places of employment I had the privilege of actually working with a Jew. My curiosity had arisen when I first learned his name, I think it was Isaiah, but whatever it was it was really Biblical. I had never personally met a Jew before so found this really exciting. Passing by his desk one day I beamed a smile at him and said how pleased I was to meet him, and asked what it felt like to be one of God's chosen people.

The look he gave me was incredulous, as though he considered me to be the most ignorant person on the planet. I should have known then that he didn't like what I was saying. But I was not perturbed and assured him that, not only was I a Christian, but I loved the Jews. His body language said everything. He shuffled, coughed, tried to carry on doing his work, but then couldn't control himself.

"Have you ever read the Bible?" He asked.

"Yes!" I eagerly answered.

"I mean the Old Testament?"

"Oh yes!" I said again.

"Well if you think I want to know anything about the God you read about in the Old Testament, you've got another think coming! I don't want anything to do with that God! I hate him!"

I was stunned! Never in my life would I have imagined that a Jew, one of God's special, chosen people, would ever feel that way about God. This man would admit to being a Jew, and made it clear he was most certainly circumcised, but he couldn't hide the fact that he

vehemently hated God.

It had never occurred to me that anyone who had been brought up as a Jew could actually resent it. But after that conversation, when I was just 16 years old, I found that there was a massive difference between being a Jew outwardly, and a Jew inwardly. The fact that they were circumcised mattered not, for it didn't prove where their loyalties lay. Some Jews followed God from their heart and conviction; some followed because that was the way in which they were brought up; but some totally rejected God and left him completely out of the equation. This poor Jew had missed the plot.

The very selfsame day that Abram's name (identity) changed to become Abraham, he also went through a physical change where part of his flesh was cut off in circumcision. Both transformations took place on the exact, same day. God had radically changed Abram and from that day forward he would be known as a new man.

When God instituted circumcision he told Abraham that a child should be marked when only 8 days old. God intended that from the very beginning of its life the babe should be separated and nurtured as his. The child had no knowledge of what had been done to him, it was something he would have to learn in future years.

Paul understood the significance of the circumcision that God wanted. Cutting the flesh was only the outward manifestation of what should have taken place inside a person's heart. But God saw, just as I did during that encounter with my first Jew, that this was not always the case. Some people didn't want to know the God who

owned them.

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.

Deuteronomy 10:16

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

Jeremiah 4:4

What about now?

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Romans 2:28-29

What is Paul talking about in this scripture? When writing to the Romans, in chapter 2, he taught that for those Jews who did not live by, or keep the law, their circumcision was counted as uncircumcision; and if Gentiles who were uncircumcised kept the righteousness of the law, their uncircumcision would be counted for circumcision. So does that mean, that the outward sign of circumcision has been done away with?

Baptism

It seems obvious that God would still require a sign in order to prove the commitment of anyone intending to

serve him, but circumcision hadn't been foolproof in that it was not a voluntary act. Babies have no notion of what circumcision means, and often choose to walk a different path which does not include serving Jehovah later on in life. Let us take a look at what the disciples taught when either Jews or Gentiles became believers that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost ... Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:38-41

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, then they were baptized both men and women.

Acts 8:12

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what hinders me to be baptized? ... and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Acts 8:36-38

And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straight away.

Acts 16:33

From the above scriptures it seems evident that the first thing a new believer in Jesus Christ needed to do was have a change of heart, then mark it by symbolically dying to their old life. God still requires a covenant of circumcision, but it now has to be the putting off, not the cutting off, of the body of the sins of the flesh.

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: **in whom also ye are circumcised** with the **circumcision made without hands**, in **putting off** the body of the sins of the flesh by the **circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism**, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:10-12

A cutting off of the flesh most certainly needs to take place, but the cutting off was always meant to be done in the heart, not merely in the outward flesh, both willingly and sacrificially. Baptism is actually going a stage further than circumcision, for it is not just mutilating the body, it is putting the carnal nature to death, which I would argue is far more severe and serious. The disciples never appealed for people to give their lives to Christ, this was something they cried out for after hearing their preaching. They asked Peter, **"What must we do then to be saved?"** The appeal always came from the hearer, never the preacher, because they need to have a revelation from God as to who Jesus is.

When writing to the believers in Rome who had lived their lives following the law of Moses, Paul explains what had taken place in their spiritual experience since being

baptized, as with God experience always came first, then the teaching followed.

Don't you know, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death has no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he lives, he lives unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 6:3-14

Don't you know, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law) how that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman which has an

husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he lives; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

Romans 7:1-6

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:8

For this very reason Jesus was himself baptised by John **to fulfil all righteousness**. He needed to be circumcised in his heart before being driven by the spirit of God into the wilderness for his flesh to be tempted and completely subdued. He could not embark on his miraculous ministry until his 'flesh' had been cut off, for even this precious son of God had to battle with the carnal, sinful nature he had inherited from Mary.

Back to Abraham

Circumcision was very painful, but once Abraham had done this, changes took place in his life. God was now ready for a relationship which was to become much more

personal.

Step 6

First Bombshell

Isn't it just like God to come in with an, "Oh, by the way, there was something else I wanted to say ...!" ?

As if Abraham didn't already have enough to cope with, God then dropped a bombshell.

As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

Genesis 17:15-16

What a statement! Where did that come from? What a world of significance in those few words! What a bombshell!

These last few words that God had just said sent Abraham's mind reeling. What was God talking about, Sarah would have a child? God had already given him a child! He had Ishmael! He was content with this child whom he had devoted his life to. Surely he was hearing wrong. Abraham laughed, he was completely staggered at what God had shared. What was God thinking of?

Abraham wasn't worried any more about not having an heir – Ishmael were here! He loved this boy, he was his flesh and blood. Was Ishmael not part of God's plan?

Abraham may well have believed what God had promised him, but he certainly didn't know how God intended to bring it about, nor what he would encounter on his journey. The flesh always has to come first. It's a spiritual and scriptural principle.

Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

1 Corinthians 15:46-47

Abraham had not been told before now that the child of promise would come via his barren wife, he was merely informed that his seed would come from **his loins**. He did not lack faith, nor did he run out of patience, he fulfilled God's plan to the very letter and was righteous in all he did, because everything he ever did was through faith in the promises of God.

Ishmael had to be born first for that's the way God, in his wisdom, works. God's day starts with the night **and the evening and the morning were the first day**. Without a sinner we couldn't have a saviour : no Adam – no Jesus; no old covenant – no new covenant; no heaven and earth – no new heaven and earth; we first have to have the antichrist – then we have the Christ. The list could go on.

Almighty God pays a visit

One of the most astonishing passages in the whole Bible is to be found in Genesis 18 where God, accompanied by 2 angels comes to pay Abraham a personal visit. This would most certainly have taken place immediately after his circumcision, it is even possible that he was still recovering from his ordeal when God met him for he was sitting in the door of his tent shielding himself from the midday sun. Oh, to have an encounter like this!

And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as you have said. And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hastened to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.

Genesis 18:1-8

This is indeed staggering. God Almighty had knocked on Abraham's door ... In person! He made a physical appearance! The Bible states, in the gospel of John, and also the epistle of John, that no man has seen God at any time; but I think it must be God in his true spiritual body and glory that no man has seen, not in the physical disguise he wore here. For God most certainly is not a human being, even though we are made in his image.

Sarah shocked

It's hard for my mind to get around the fact that God agreed to hang around while Abraham gave everyone their various tasks in order to prepare a meal for these very special guests. They didn't have fridges or freezers where they could defrost something quickly; neither did they have food stores where they could buy food already prepared. They had to kill, then cook, a calf; make, and bake the bread. It must have taken hours to get this meal ready. But God waited graciously. Then he and the angels ate the food which was prepared showing they appreciated all the trouble Abraham and his co-workers had gone to. With a satisfied smile, he then asked where Sarah was.

The fact that God called her 'Sarah' proved beyond doubt his own identity, for nobody other than Abraham and God Almighty knew her as anything other than 'Sarai'. And, judging by her response to what God then said to her, I couldn't imagine that Abraham had yet shared with her this particular part of God's conversation with him. He had initially laughed at the suggestion himself.

And God said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

Genesis 18:10-12

I can just imagine the scene. Sarah is busy inside the tent tending to all the needs of her husband and visitors, realising that this encounter is way out of the ordinary, for extremely important guests, Abraham's God and company, have come to see him. She herself is getting a little flustered as Abraham is acting completely out of character, and cannot relax.

Because she was a woman she was relegated to the kitchen to serve behind the scenes, but the tent curtains made very thin walls.

Sarah had been humbled

You know, I could really feel for this woman, she had been truly humbled. Being the wife of the leader of the tribe, she had been unable to hide the fact that she was barren. In her society it was a terrible shame for a woman to be unable to bear children. It was bad enough if all you could produce were females, but not to produce at all was an awful stigma. She had hoped with all her heart that God would change his mind and open her womb, but after hoping year after year, and then passing through her

menopause, she came to the point where any hope that she would ever be a mother completely died within her.

Hagar, her handmaid, had given Abraham a child, but as Hagar had nursed the child herself she couldn't even attempt to compete with the special bond between mother and son. Ishmael would always be Hagar's. No, she had been found inadequate. All she had was her beauty, and in time even that would fail her.

But what was this they were saying? She heard her name spoken! With ears straining she must have been listening intently to all their conversation. Any wife would do the same ... well, I would anyway! But her ears would have pricked up at the mention of her name, and her reaction showed that this was indeed news to her. Such news that she couldn't take it in, and laughed to herself incredulously.

Put yourself in her shoes. How would you have reacted if God told you he would give you a baby when you were 89 years old, after waiting 25 years for it? Especially if it was your heart's desire when you were a young woman with all your life before you? Astonishment? Well, I know for certain that you wouldn't have reacted as Sarah did, for you wouldn't imagine you'd live as long as she did. But things were different back then.

She might have been 89 years old then, but she still had many more years left in her and didn't die until she was 127. And did you know that Sarah is the only woman in the bible to have her age recorded? This woman really made history and was meant to be taken notice of!

Yes, God had to perform a miracle in her body for at her age, even if fertile, it would have been impossible to have children after having gone through the menopause. But she believed, and held on to the promise, because she had heard the voice of God for herself, and anyone who has ever heard his voice knows that when God speaks, things happen.

God speaks to Sarah

It was very much a 'man's world', and God didn't speak directly with Sarah when sharing this news. He talked to Abraham. The fact that Sarah was able to overhear was indeed a kindness to her, but all the time God was addressing her husband.

Yet when God knew that she had laughed, and this wasn't done audibly for she laughed within herself – she must have clasped her mouth with her hands as her stomach laughed involuntarily. But God heard it and asked Abraham why she laughed. Sarah obviously felt very guilty knowing that she had been found out, and spontaneously tried to justify herself. She came out from behind the tent wall.

Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, No; but you did laugh.

Genesis 18:15

The Lord looked directly at her and held her gaze. There was no condemnation, for she was the wife of his beloved friend. Indeed, she also was his friend – Abraham and Sarah were one flesh. He spoke to her for the first time, and I'm absolutely certain that hearing that

voice filled her with all the faith she needed to carry on believing, for however long it took.

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

Hebrews 11:11

God was putting Sarah on the map. When he changed her name she became a princess, for that is what Sarah meant. He was now her God. She had heard his voice for herself ... The voice of the Lord is POWERFUL!

Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundered: the LORD is upon many waters. **The voice of the LORD is powerful;** the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; yea, the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD makes the hinds to calve, and discovers the forests: and in his temple does every one speak of his glory. The LORD sits upon the flood; yea, the LORD sits King for ever. The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.

Psalms 29:1-11

Step 7

Second Bombshell

The stepping stone that Abraham was on now was indeed a massive one. God had just been to his house and spent hours with him talking of the future. He had finally found a very real and personal relationship with his God where God actually wanted to spend time with him.

Sadly the Lord and his companions had to take their leave, and Abraham went with them to bring them on their way. But it seems the Lord had second thoughts.

And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him.

Genesis 18:17-19

Every step that Abraham had taken so far had been carefully monitored by God, and he had not been disappointed. Whatever God had requested of Abraham he had immediately obeyed, without question, even to the point of instituting circumcision in his camp. God

was well pleased and was on the very verge of letting his guard down by allowing an intimate friendship to develop between himself and Abraham. He stopped and spoke to the angels who had accompanied him, letting them know that he had found a man of rare quality.

It was once recorded of Jesus that he **would not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man**, but God had observed this man. He had watched the way he had handled not only the child entrusted to him, but also the way he had handled all his household. He had seen the way Abraham had taught them to honour, obey, and serve him.

This man had earned God's attention and respect for he had obeyed a call, and left behind him a very perverse and wicked world in the hope that he could find his God. And also God had found a man, for there was no way that God would fulfil his promise to Abraham, if Abraham had not been considered worthy.

God is neither desperate nor stupid, and if Abraham had not fulfilled the conditions, then God would have looked for someone else. These are important principles for us to bear in mind when God speaks to us. If we don't act when he calls, there is no guarantee that he will call again, for God is looking for obedience before he gives trust. We must act on his instructions to progress towards our purpose, if not we cannot guarantee there will be a second chance.

Telling a secret

And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom

and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

Genesis 18:20-22

God told Abraham a secret, that's what friends do. He hadn't shared his intentions with another human being but considered Abraham worthy. He must have deemed it only fair to warn him of the pending doom that lay over that city, especially as he had family in Sodom. This caused Abraham's alarm bells to go off.

Abraham was under no illusions as to what God would find there. If he was looking for wickedness, then he would find plenty. The place was rotten to the core, indeed so rotten that Melchizedek had forbidden him to sully himself with any spoils when rescuing Lot. It would have defiled him. This was indeed another bombshell for Abraham.

Moved by fear

Moved by fear for Lot, Abraham became very bold and challenged God's righteousness by asking him a very direct question.

And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? **That be far from thee to do after**

this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: **Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?**

Genesis 18:23-25

I don't know whether God was shocked or pleased at Abraham's audacity. When Peter asked concerning John, "What shall this man do?" Jesus as much as said, "Mind your own business!" The men who were with God carried on towards Sodom but it certainly made God stop in his tracks. Abraham knew his place, as far as he was concerned he was just dust and ashes talking to Almighty God, but he had to think fast.

And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spoke unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake.

And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.

And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.

And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will

speaking yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

Genesis 17:26-33

He couldn't go any further, he felt that he had pushed too far already, but he felt satisfied that there would be at least 10 righteous people in Sodom. He could count them ... Lot; his wife; 2 unmarried daughters living with him; at least 2 other daughters who were married, with their husbands; and surely at least 1 child to each of these daughters. Yes, he felt comfortable that he had brought the number low enough to save the city for Lot's family.

Obviously, he wasn't in Sodom to find out what happened personally, neither was there anyone who could run from Sodom to give him an account of what had taken place, as God had destroyed them all. Only those who have read the scriptures know what truly happened when the angels visited that wicked city. All Abraham saw from where he lived was the smoke of the city ascending up towards heaven.

And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the LORD: and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

Genesis 18:27-28

What anguish of spirit he must have felt that day

seeing that sight. Lot was his own flesh and blood. He must have felt terrible having allowed him to leave the protection of his people. All his relatives had been stripped from him slowly, but very surely. We will never know whether God told his friend what he had done for Lot, but one thing is certain – Abraham had influence with God. Even though 10 righteous people couldn't be found, God knew exactly why Abraham was pleading so hard, and rescued his nephew's household before he destroyed the city. How gracious God is to those who love and serve him.

When God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.

Genesis 18:29

Lot must have believed all along that Abram had heard God. Yes, he must have had some faith for, even though he ended up living in Sodom, the Bible records in 2 Peter that he was a righteous man dwelling among unrighteous people ...

And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked (for that **righteous man** dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds): the Lord knows how to deliver **the godly** out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

2 Peter 2:7-9

Lot may not have had the same relationship with God as Abraham had, but he was godly. Your family may not

have the same relationship with God as you have, but if they are godly then the Lord knows how to deliver them out of their temptations.

Step 8

Enemy Attack

The spiritual world is far more real than the natural world. When something dynamic is about to happen in your life then make no mistake the spiritual realm will be aware of it. There will not only be those who are for you, but also those who oppose you. But before every massive event in God's calendar you will necessarily have to face massive trials.

Just before Jesus was launched into his ministry he was led into the wilderness by the spirit just so that he could undergo a period of testing. Before Joseph was made the Prime Minister of Egypt he had to face the cruel hardships of prison. We never work our way up the ladder of success with God. His ways are not our ways, and with him the way up is via the way down. This testing time is not to be feared, indeed James encourages us to embrace our trials for they are fashioning us and preparing us to complete the work God has called us to do.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations; knowing this; the trying of your faith works patience. Therefore, let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect, entire, and wanting nothing.

James 1:2-4

God had spoken a personal word to both Abraham and Sarah to the effect that they would have a child together brought about by a miracle, for Sarah's womb was not only barren, it was dead. So before the promise could materialise, they needed a test.

Sarah refined

And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.

Genesis 20:1-2

The only way I can understand how Sarah must have felt is to look at myself and the situations I have been in. Even though she was beautiful at 89 years of age, she still knew she was getting old, and that her husband had been fulfilled through Hagar's womb and not her own. She could quite possibly have been feeling very inadequate and surplus to requirement.

I remember feeling pretty useless and unattractive after giving birth to my third child at 47 years of age. I was constantly tired and had no stimulating conversation to offer my husband. For a long time I had been jealous of Maurice being out practically every night of the week preaching in different house groups, having quality fellowship, and leaving me at home to look after the children, but I had at last accepted my lot in life. I'd almost convinced myself that my days of usefulness to

God were over and I had to sit out the rest of my days in the background.

Unexpected attention

One day I went to my supermarket to do my weekly shop and noticed one of the security guards watching me. I wasn't doing anything wrong so didn't get alarmed. The problem was wherever I was in the shop he seemed to be there, and constantly watching me. For a couple of weeks this procedure continued until one day I was waiting in the queue for the cashier when he tried to make conversation with me, saying how attractive he found me, and asked for my telephone number. I blushed involuntarily and made some stupid remark that I can't even remember, as I was so bemused and flustered.

I couldn't get out of the shop quickly enough, and got home as soon as possible. But I can't begin to tell you what that encounter did to my spirit. I felt like a woman again, attractive, desirable. When I looked at myself in the mirror I saw a woman rather than a tired, washed out mum. There's nothing like the attention of a man to boost your confidence. I began to imagine things. What would happen if ...?

Suddenly, I realised what was going on and how insidious the devil was. He strikes when we are at our weakest point, when we are most vulnerable. He will flatter and charm ... anything to take us out of God's plan and purpose, because all he wants to do is ruin our lives and cause us to come under God's judgement. The devil doesn't care who he brings down, just so long as he foils God's plans.

As soon as I realised what was going on I decided to do my shopping elsewhere. The temptation was causing me too much emotional stress, the attention was too heady. A couple of weeks after this incident Maurice booked 2 tickets to India. He told me God had been speaking to him recently saying that we both had work to do for him out there. This was the start of a new era in my life. Coincidence? Never!

Destiny almost stolen

If it could affect me like that, what did poor Sarah feel when this man, the King of Gerar, paid her attention? Believe me, the devil is not stupid and knows exactly how to tempt us. If he decided to manipulate and use this king to tempt Sarah just after God had spoken personally to her, then it was because this was where she was most vulnerable, and this was her weakest moment. He knew what he was doing, and Sarah was in real danger of making the biggest mistake of her life.

I don't know why Abraham decided to leave Mamre, maybe he felt uncomfortable being so close to the cities God had destroyed. One thing is for sure, he was moved by the spirit, just as Jesus was moved into the wilderness, so that his heart could be exposed before God.

What was it about this woman? At this stage she was 89 years old, yet was still so beautiful that Abraham felt the need for them to pose as brother and sister. Whatever we have been taught about Sarah in our Sunday School classes just wasn't true. She was not old and dodderly, she

was still gorgeous and very desirably. So lovely, in fact, that the King of Gerar took her for his wife and placed her in his harem.

If the love he'd had for Sarah was more shallow he could have easily been satisfied with Ishmael, and any other children he could produce to other wives he might take, for he knew there was nothing wrong with his own body now that he was already a father. But, once again, Abraham was driven to distraction with jealousy for the love of his life had been stolen again.

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, you are but a dead man, for the woman which you have taken; for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, will you slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? And she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart; for I also withheld you from sinning against me: therefore suffered I you not to touch her.

Now therefore restore the man his wife; for **he is a prophet**, and he shall pray for you, and you shall live: and if you restore her not, know that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours.

Genesis 20:3-7

When asked by Abimelech what he had seen in Gerar to make him fake his identity, Abraham told him it was because he thought he was in a godless place. But when

God appeared to Abimelech in a dream he immediately knew who he was and called him 'Lord'. He even reasoned with God and tried to justify his actions. I can't honestly see any sin in Abimelech as he was under the impression that Sarah was unmarried, yet God defended Abraham to the hilt and caused all the women of the country to be barren 'for Sarah's sake', whom God had also claimed.

Touch not

Abimelech restored Sarah to her husband and as a mark of respect he gave to Abraham valuable gifts, and offered him a settlement in any part of his country; while at the same time he delicately and yet severely rebuked Abraham for having practised a deception upon him in pretending that Sarah was only his sister.

Among the gifts presented by the king were a thousand pieces of silver as a 'covering of the eyes' for Sarah; either as an atoning gift and testimony of her innocence in the sight of all, or rather for the purpose of procuring a veil for Sarah to conceal her beauty. It was also a reproof to her for not having worn a veil which, as a married woman in their culture, she ought to have done; it would have saved him considerable trouble.

Although it is often apparently plain to see error in the lives or actions of those whom God has chosen, it would be wise of us all to look at the lesson being taught by this particular passage of scripture, for we are being shown a divine principle. God's ways are not our ways.

Our natural understanding of 'right' and 'wrong' shows us clearly that Abraham and Sarah were at fault for they gave a completely wrong impression of their relationship during their travels. One could even go so far as to say that they placed a huge stumbling block before the eyes of other men with their misrepresentation. Yet when Abimelech tried to reason in this way with God concerning the incident he was silenced. God simply said, he is a prophet. In other words, "He answers to me, not you!" In fact God seems to have very set principles concerning masters and servants. He even reiterates this incident in Psalm 105, and shows his sentiments in the way he displays his partiality towards his own. David was specifically talking of Abraham and Sarah in this Psalm.

God suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.

Psalm 105:14-15

Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.

1 Chronicles 16:22

The owner is master of his own property. A man's wives, children, servants, animals, lands, are all his possessions, but the law of God makes provision and instructs men how to handle and care for them.

Jesus was sinless

I remember some years ago taking part in a dramatic sketch in which the setting was Jesus in the Judgement

Hall before Pilate. There were two groups – his disciples, and the Pharisees – and both groups had to give reasons why they thought Jesus was either not worthy, or worthy, of being put to death.

Unfortunately, I was very good at arguing in those days so was placed on the side of the Pharisees. I entered the battle with gusto and, because I had a good knowledge of scripture, was able to fight ferociously. But I went home that night really perturbed, for I had convincingly beaten down the opposition with the facts I had brought to light concerning Jesus' behaviour which had apparently contravened the laws of what was 'right' and 'wrong'.

For instance, I stated that he'd disappeared without forewarning his parents when he was 12 years old, only to be found in the temple debating with the priests. When challenged by his mother for stressing them out for the past 3 days he didn't even offer an apology, he just expected them to know what he would be doing, and said, '**Didn't you know I would be about my Father's business?**' I would have called that sin, wouldn't you? If my child had done that at 12 years of age he would have been severely smacked, and would have remembered it for a very long time.

Then, again, the time when he made a whip and attacked the money changers in the temple, overturning their tables, and throwing them out. I could understand he was very zealous for God, but surely there was a way to go about these things. If someone were to go into a youth meeting at the church and overthrow all the snack bars, coffee tables, pool tables, and book/CD/DVD

stands, there would be a riot. Protocol demands that we go and speak with the Pastor first, so why didn't Jesus go and speak with the Jewish Council or Elders before he vented his fury with such passion? You can't take the law into your own hands. If everyone were to do that there would be anarchy!

I came up with many more apparent sins to throw at the disciples during the sketch, but it didn't please me, it gave me questions. If I could see apparent sin in the life of Jesus, whilst the Bible called him sinless – indeed, he was the spotless Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the whole world – then my definition of sin had to be wrong.

If God was happy with what someone did, then who was I to say it was wrong. Surely my opinion could only be based on the fact that I had eaten from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and those who belong to God must refuse to eat from that tree.

Leave well alone

God has written down his laws and given us principles to live by. Because the written word was so difficult to follow in that people were forever looking for, and finding, loopholes, Jesus came to live in this world for 33 years to show us that it is possible to live a sinless life. God wrote the law, but Jesus actually showed us how to live it. Even though Jesus fulfilled the whole law, his obligation was to God. Conscience is formed by culture and often prohibits us from obeying God, for we can't always tell the difference between commandments of God and traditions of men.

Who are you that judges another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Yes, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

Romans 14:4

Wherefore, henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yes, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

2 Colossians 5:16

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Galatians 6:15

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

2 Colossians 4:7

Step 9

Isaac Is Born

The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him, and Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. Sarah said, God has made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. She said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? For I have born him a son in his old age.

Genesis 21:1-7

After only 3 months of God speaking a personal word to Sarah the Lord visited her and she conceived, then 9 months later she was holding her precious baby in her arms.

Wow! Can you believe it? Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90, and God had at last given them the child that they had waited 25 years for. Yes, if God speaks, God can be trusted to fulfil his promises.

Nothing will hinder God from fulfilling his promises except our unbelief. At each stage Abraham, and Sarah, were tested to see if they still believed what God had said before he allowed them onto the next stepping stone. God's promises are not automatic, they are always conditional. What they had hoped for, had now become tangible – it was the evidence at last – their faith.

Circumcised seed

Both children were in reality Sarah's. Ishmael was born of a surrogate mother but he was the child of the flesh, from her heart and head – conceived **before Abraham was circumcised**. Isaac, however, was born miraculously of her own flesh and was the child of promise, from her own womb – conceived **after Abraham was circumcised**. This meant that Isaac was from circumcised seed. Abraham circumcised himself because he believed what God said and was making a covenant with him. He was underscoring his faith – Isaac was born of faith, not only the faith of Abraham, but also the faith of Sarah.

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

Hebrews 11:11-12

God certainly had a high regard for Sarah, for throughout the story of Abraham, Sarah is identified with him until

the time of her death. In the allegory of Galatians Sarah is the type of the 'Jerusalem which is above'.

For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free-woman. But he who was of the bond-woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free-woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which genders to bondage, which is Hagar.

For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, **which is the mother of us all**. For it is written, Rejoice, you barren that bears not; break forth and cry, you that travails not: for the desolate has many more children than she which has an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

Galatians 4:22-29

It was always God's intention that we were circumcised, not only in our flesh but also in our hearts.

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.

Deuteronomy 10:16

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

Jeremiah 4:4

It is important to note, therefore, that unless we have been circumcised it is impossible to receive what God has promised. In the Old testament it was relatively simple in the fact that they could do something physical, but for us we need to cut away all fleshly things that would hinder us from fulfilling God's purposes.

Zipporah could not go

When God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh to let his people go, he threatened to kill Moses because he hadn't circumcised his children. There was no way that God was going to allow uncircumcised flesh to represent him. Moses had to go God's way, or not at all.

And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand ... And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.

Exodus 4:20 & 24-25

God had originally sent Moses with his wife and sons, but because Zipporah was disgusted at the practice of circumcision, and called Moses a 'bloody husband', God would not permit her to go with him. She was a woman, and certainly could not be circumcised in the flesh like a male, but there was such a reluctance and aggression

in her which made it obvious that she certainly was not prepared to be circumcised in her heart either. God will not permit unyielded hearts to represent him. God is not impressed by our fits of temper. Either we change, or his plan changes. There are many more 'footballs' waiting to be used – don't ever think we can hold God to ransom!

Jericho

During the 40 years that the children of Israel wandered the wilderness nobody had thought to continue the practice of circumcision. But before God allowed them to go into the promised land and capture Jericho, he made all the males circumcise themselves. There was no other way to go in, everyone had to comply.

At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time. And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt. Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised. For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD swore that he would not show them the land, which the LORD swore unto their fathers that

he would give us, a land that flows with milk and honey. And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way. And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.

Joshua 5:2-9

|saac circumcised

Isaac was the first of a new breed. When he was just 8 days old Abraham circumcised him. For 7 days he lived in the flesh, but then on the 8th day, the beginning of a new era in spiritual terms, he became a new creature.

And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

Genesis 21:4

Step 10

Hagar

I must remind you here that Hagar was not an evil woman. To think of her as a bad woman would be totally misguided. She was not evil, she was just a normal, flesh and blood woman who had been chosen by God to show the difference between the flesh and the spirit.

Hagar had been a meek and submissive handmaid when Sarah asked her to bear Abraham's child. Sarah would never have asked her to do her this service if she were otherwise. Hagar was just acting in obedience, and I'm sure didn't have any ulterior thoughts of usurping her mistress in her head ...until she found she was pregnant. It was only then that her attitude changed – and quite dramatically! It got so bad between Sarah and herself that she ran away whilst pregnant only to be sent back by an angel.

And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.

Genesis 16:4

What a shame that Hagar reacted this way, but that is the way of flesh, it seeks its own.

For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four

which it cannot bear: for a servant when he reigns; and a fool when he is filled with meat; for an odious woman when she is married; **and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.**

Proverbs 30:21-23

Now that she was pregnant with the child of the leader of the tribe, she must have felt very important, indeed of more significance than her mistress for she was bearing his seed, which his wife was powerless to do. For 14 years Hagar must have felt as though she had the upper hand for she was the mother of Abraham's only son, and it was to her that Ishmael would always run for comfort, as she had nursed and bonded with him in a way Sarah could not.

It must have been devastating for her to find that Sarah not only conceived, but was able to give birth to Abraham's love child. And, all credit to Abraham, it doesn't appear from scripture that he ever intimately touched Hagar again after she gave him Ishmael, as I am sure there would be more children to show from their union, for scripture shows that after Sarah's death Abraham took another wife and had 6 sons to her. No, this was a 'one man – one woman' relationship. Just the way God intended.

Sarah the 'Mother'

And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she

said unto Abraham, Cast out this bond-woman and her son: for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

Genesis 21:8-11

Now, this was a different Sarah to the one we have seen before. She was no longer feeling, or speaking, as a meek woman, or submissive wife, she was now reacting as a mother – a 'She Bear'. Somebody had touched her child, and she was not going to let anybody hurt or threaten him. The worst thing was that it wasn't Hagar who was mocking – it was Ishmael, who was in Sarah's mind, the true rival. She had been subjected to Hagar's attitude for a very long time, but this was another matter, and she wasn't prepared to put up with it.

All her protective instincts rose to the surface. She had seen something in Ishmael and his mother which would have probably gone undetected by Abraham, for there was no rivalry as far as he was concerned. He loved both boys, they were both his children and brought him great joy. But Sarah was Abraham's wife, and she was now fighting for her place in this family triangle. She was jealous with a godly jealousy.

Let us remember again what the Bible says about Sarah. She was a woman to be emulated for she sets us all a tremendous wifely example.

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation

coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

1 Peter 3:1-7

So her plea that Abraham cast out this bond-woman, and her son, must have come as a complete surprise to him. Now that she had Isaac, her own flesh and blood, she had already given up ownership of Ishmael, for she classed him as the '**son of this bond-woman**'.

Abraham the 'Father'

This plea was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. He couldn't understand why she had such a problem. He loved both children for he was their father. He took the problem to God, but found no comfort there for God backed Sarah up in what she had said, and told him to take notice of her and do what she asked.

And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bond-woman; in all that Sarah has said unto you, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

And also of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

Genesis 21:12-13

We cannot measure pain, for everyone experiences pain at different levels. But I truly believe that those words must have felt like arrows in the very heart of Abraham. This was not just pain, it was agony, torture, crushing grief, and inside he must have been dying. He had found no fault in the lad. Ishmael was a good boy, who had given his father immense pleasure. It wasn't his fault that he'd been born, nor that he'd been born to Hagar. These circumstances were none of his doing, yet he was being rejected, and had to be cast out.

Abraham sets such an incredible example. Who can follow in his steps? For the sake of his God, he denied himself to the point that he rose early the next morning and, after giving to them bread and water, sent both Hagar and Ishmael out of the camp to wander in the desert, leaving them both in God's hands. This man knew how to love with all his heart. This man knew how to sacrifice. This man had been truly tried and tested, and I'm certain he could have said with Job ...

Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Job 1:21

Final preparation

Sarah was Isaac's mother, and mothers are very different

to fathers. She felt no compassion seeing the backs of Hagar and Ishmael, yet she was in no way an evil woman. She knew what it was like to feel pain and could identify with her husband, but for her this was the end of a long, drawn out era. She not only felt relief, but thankfulness that God had endorsed her feelings, and freed her from this unbearable trial. At last, she had been vindicated.

Let us look at the allegory in Galatians again for Sarah is depicted as the 'Jerusalem which is above'...

For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free-woman. But he who was of the bond-woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free-woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which genders to bondage, which is Hagar. For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But **Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.** For it is written, Rejoice, you barren that bears not; break forth and cry, you that travail not: for the desolate has many more children than she which has an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what says the scripture? **Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman.** So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free.

Galatians 4:22-31

God did not hate Ishmael, in fact God promised that he would bless him and make of him a great nation because he was Abraham's seed. God promised to take care of him. But things had taken a dramatic turn in the relationship between Abraham and God. Since circumcision God had expected Abraham to do things which were very costly to prove where his loyalty lay. He had to prove where his heart was, for talk is cheap, and words come easily, only actions prove the heart. **'Faith without works is dead!'**

He had been asked to sacrifice things – firstly to mutilate his flesh in circumcision; then to cast out his son never to ever see his face again. Ishmael would never in a million years be able to understand fully what he had done wrong, or why he had been rejected and usurped by his younger brother. These were all burdens which Abraham had to bear, which added to his suffering.

Seeing God for yourself

Yet, I am convinced that because God and the 2 angels came to visit Abraham before the birth of Isaac, waiting for, and then eating the meal that was prepared for them, and sharing intimate fellowship with him, he would never have been able to obey such a seemingly cruel, demanding request. Abraham had spent personal, intimate, hours in the very presence of God Almighty, and it changed his life, and values, forever. There was nothing that he would withhold now that he had seen God for himself.

We cannot give more than we have received. We only have faith in the measure that it has been given. Abraham was able to give because he had received revelation – he knew, and had personally seen, his God. Once we have that personal encounter with our God, which is a must for every single individual lest we end up with mere religion, it will change our perspectives forever. Relationship with God is a gift. No revelation – no relationship.

God had an ultimate test in mind, an ultimate step for Abraham to tread, alone; and without the other previous steps of faith, it would be impossible for him to get to the place where he would be able to fulfil God's prophetic plan for his life.

Giving in to our flesh will always stop us from getting to our destiny in God. God does not pity the flesh for, in truth, it is his enemy.

Step 11

For Such a Time as This

My Pastor once told me that there was no such thing as a small decision, for every single decision we make affects the rest of our lives. Where we go determines who we meet. What we listen to determines how we think. Everything we do has consequences.

Did God Speak?

At any stage Abraham could have easily altered his future by taking matters into his own hands. He had moved from Ur, then Haran, at God's bidding and come into the land God said he would one day inherit. If he had lacked the patience to wait he could have set about conquering the land 'acting in faith', for we know that he went to war, taking with him the armed men who had been trained in his house, when he set out to free Lot and those who had been captured by the surrounding countries.

When God promised that his seed would be innumerable and as the sand of the sea, he could easily have 'acted in faith' again by taking more wives and producing offspring. Why did he sit back and wait for it all to happen? What sort of faith is this that Abraham is portraying with his lifestyle? How do we know when to have 'faith' and when to do 'works' – for we know that

faith without works is dead?

The answer is simple really. It all depends on what God has said. For instance, when God told Abraham to leave his father's house in Haran and travel to a land he would direct him to, it was an action word. God actually told him what to do – leave and travel. For this type of word Abraham simply needs to 'do'.

However, when God told Abraham, as he did, that his seed would be as the stars of the sky and sand of the sea, Abraham was to have faith, but do nothing other than what he was doing already; to carry on having a loving relationship with his wife, and leave the future to God. To fulfil a promise like this would take a miracle anyway, it was not in Abraham's power to do this naturally even if Sarah was very fruitful. Only God, and time, could achieve this.

Nevertheless, it all hinges on whether we are able to hear God's voice or not. So many people are unsure of God's voice, and need to qualify what they have heard, or think they have heard, in various ways: they need to check it with their Pastor or mature men of God; check it with scripture; then check it with the witness of the spirit. If it passes these tests then they can assume it was God's voice.

Knowing God's voice

It is of paramount importance that we all know God's voice, and if you say you don't know his voice, then I would question everything about your spiritual walk.

How can you be sure that God is who he says he is, and that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God, unless you have heard his voice? The Bible says that this information is only given by revelation, so if you are convinced God and Jesus are who they say they are, then you must have heard their voice at some point.

All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knows who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.

Luke 10:22

I have been introduced to complete strangers over the telephone, but within a matter of a few phone calls have been able to recognise to whom I was speaking without their having to tell me. I am certain that every single person on the planet, including small children, experience this phenomenon.

If it is the case, that we can all distinguish individual voices out of the hundreds of voices we come into contact with, day in, day out, why is it so difficult to hear and recognise the voice of God? If my husband spoke to me over the telephone and asked me to do something, I would not have to check it out with my Pastor, or even my son, I would know his voice. If I spoke with my son over the telephone and asked him to do something for me, I would not dream that he would check it out with his brother or sister, I would just expect him to do as I asked. So why do we have a problem where God and Jesus are concerned?

Perhaps the problem is that most people just have religion, not relationship. They obey the rules in the handbook – the Bible – because it feels safe, and would refuse to obey even God if told to do something which they couldn't find any scripture indicating that he'd done the same thing on a previous occasion.

God speaks

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom you love, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

Genesis 22:1-2

OK, we had better stop right there. What did God say? If we had heard a voice telling us to do what this scripture is saying we would run right round to the Pastor, and check it against the 10 Commandments, because our spirits would definitely not feel at peace with this one. So Abraham has completely exposed each one of us, because Abraham heard what the voice said and knew, without checking with anyone, or anything, that it was the voice of his beloved Master who was talking with him.

Abraham was not a novice at hearing and obeying his God, he had already been through his schooling. He knew what it was to lose the woman he loved passionately, and receive her back from God again. He also knew what it was like to give up, and cast out, his first-born son who

had brought him nothing but joy and pleasure, and the child's mother, never to see either of them again. If Abraham had not come through these tests, then it would have been pointless God asking him to sacrifice Isaac for he could never have done it. But Abraham had been circumcised – he was exposed before God both in his flesh, and in his heart; and God had also exposed himself to Abraham. Abraham knew the character of his God – he was very jealous and wasn't prepared to be Number 2 in anybody's life. He wanted everything – heart, mind, soul, and strength, and wouldn't compromise. Yet it was this very God whom Abraham had grown to love and trust.

Unlike the vast majority of us Abraham didn't even question what he heard, he just knew what he had to do. It would be quite ridiculous to relate to Sarah what God had just said to him, she would have said what any one of us would have said, "You're out of your mind, Abraham, and hearing voices. That wasn't God, that was the devil, because God would never tell you or anybody else to do a thing like that – ever!" So it was a good job he kept it to himself and just did as he was told.

Immediate response

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye

here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

Genesis 22:3-6

In all my Christian walk I don't think I've ever personally come across anyone who has responded this quickly to God. Abraham's response was immediate! Whatever he was feeling inside he was able to control, because he didn't arouse suspicion. There was no time wasted in hanging around praying to see if God had changed his mind, he just saddled his ass and got everyone ready for the journey. Sarah wasn't worried about a thing because he carried this burden alone and didn't tell her about the trial he was going through. Isaac was oblivious of what was in store for him. He joyfully went with his father to sacrifice to the Lord his God.

Every step Abraham took must have been agony. This was his 'Gethsemane'. I don't, for one minute, think that he was a happy man on that journey. For 2 days he walked the miles towards the land of Moriah waiting until the Lord spoke to him again, listening to the happy banter of his young son who was only a lad. Then, on the 3rd day, God spoke again to Abraham and he saw the place where he was meant to sacrifice his son. I can imagine the thudding of his heart knowing that he was about to face his worst nightmare. Keeping his voice under control he told the young men who had accompanied him to stay with the ass whilst he and Isaac went further on to worship, but then added that they would return to them.

And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

Genesis 22:7-8

Tried to the limit

Isaac had no idea of what lay ahead. He was enjoying this great adventure thinking, in his innocence, that he was completely secure. If his father said God would provide a lamb, then he was content with that answer and believed that God would do just that. The Bible tells us that God will never tempt us, or try us, above what we are able to bear, but with every temptation will give us a way of escape. It sounds really encouraging to know that God will not push us further than we can go. The problem is, none of us knows what our limit is. The other problem is, God does not pity the flesh. He has promised that there will always be a way of escape, but does he ever want us to take it? God will surely put each one of us into a position where we have to go through our own personal 'Gethsemane' for that is our ultimate test. Circumcision means the flesh – the old nature, the selfish part of us – has to be cut off for, as it is written in Romans 8:8 **'they that are in the flesh cannot please God'**. This is not a game, brethren, this is serious stuff.

And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the

altar upon the wood.

Genesis 22:9

There is no sense of a struggle here, Isaac had no doubt that his father loved him. God knew when he came to visit Abraham with the 2 angels, that he would bring up his family and household to serve the Lord, so Isaac knew all about obeying the voice of the Lord, Abraham had taught him well. It is a credit to Abraham to read about the submission of this lad. I imagine he would be around 12-13 years old, a similar age to Ishmael when Abraham was told to cast him out. The boy could easily have panicked and run down to the servants waiting with the ass, but he allowed his aged father to bind him, pick him up, and lay him upon the wood knowing that he would shortly be killed and burnt. This was a very serious situation he was in. Our God is a very jealous God, the first commandment was: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me'. God will not share his glory with flesh. He will never settle for being second best in anyone's life. He has to be Number 1, because that is his rightful place.

This was the most costly sacrifice Abraham had ever been requested to make, and it was indeed pushing him to the very limit of his endurance, but he was determined that he would not fail his God. He would not withhold his precious son of promise from this God whom he loved. This was the most sacred act of worship Abraham had ever offered to God. There was neither joy, nor songs of praise in his heart, just tears as he laid bare his soul. He was giving his all. That very day he died completely to self.

I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

Psalm 116:14-15

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

Genesis 22:10

How trite our worship today when all we want to do is sing songs and feel good. This is not worship for very often it doesn't even touch our spirits, let alone God. God is looking for humble, broken, and contrite hearts.

How could he do it?

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Hebrews 11:17-19

How could he do it? He'd had a personal experience and encounter with his God. He had spent quality time with him. It had altered his life forever. He now had concrete faith in God. There is no other answer. He simply believed that God was faithful and would keep his promise to him. The trials and tests he had been through had brought him to this place. He had already seen God work miracles when Sarah had been given back to him from the most powerful men on earth.

Because God had told him that **in Isaac shall thy seed be called**, he believed that God would do a miracle and, even if sacrificed in obedience, God would raise him from the dead because this was the child of promise. He knew God's voice and had heard him speak, and the voice of the Lord is powerful!

God had exposed himself to Abraham, for Abraham knew the real God. He was lavish with his blessings, yes, but he wasn't a 'sugar daddy'. He could heal a barren womb and perform wonderful miracles, but he wasn't a doctor. He could protect and comfort, but he wasn't an insurance agent. He was a very jealous God who demanded obedience and sacrifice, but only from hearts full of love for him. Nothing less than love would bring him any pleasure. Abraham knew him, and Abraham loved him.

At last, God had found a man who loved him for who he was; he didn't need to hold back any more; didn't need to test any more. Abraham had come through with flying colours. This man was truly his friend.

And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In

the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, says the LORD, for because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have obeyed my voice.

So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

Genesis 22:11-19

True Worship

Wow! God was sooooo good! He had intervened right at the very last moment and spoken to Abraham telling him to stop what he was doing, he was not to hurt the lad. Instead God provided himself a lamb, just as Abraham had told Isaac, caught there in a thicket in such a miraculous way! Abraham's heart must have almost exploded with joy knowing that, although he had been willing, God did not require this ultimate sacrifice. A contrite and humble spirit offered from the very depth of a loving heart was the sacrifice God was looking for, and Abraham had shown God that nothing, and nobody, took a higher place in his heart. Abraham had no idea that he was only being tested, for him this was the real thing – he painfully, yet willingly, experienced

the agonising reality of sacrifice and true worship for his God.

What relief for Isaac! His young heart had at last stopped beating in panic waiting for that knife to be plunged into his throat. God had stopped his father from taking his life, stopped him from lighting the wood beneath his listless body, and stopped him from offering it as a burnt sacrifice, a mutual gift for their jealous God.

What a Testimony!

They must have been whooping and dancing up there on that mountain top together – the father with his beloved son whom God had given him back, as it were, from the dead. What a wonderful testimony Abraham had to share with everyone!

But, no! Abraham could not breath a word of this to anyone. This was between himself and his son. If word got back to his dear wife, Sarah, she would never trust him alone with the boy again! Who knew what God could ask of him in the future? Who knew what lengths he would go to in an attempt to pacify this jealous God? She would be living in constant fear.

Abraham set a marvelous example here. He proved his trustworthiness to God by keeping all that had taken place in his heart. He couldn't share this as nobody else would be able to rejoice with him. They just wouldn't understand. In like manner Mary – who experienced the most miraculous of all wonders in being allowed the privilege of bearing the son of Almighty God – could not rejoice with those around her at still maintaining her

virginity yet being a mother. She had to keep everything in her heart, thus proving her trustworthiness also. There are many things which take place between us and God which should remain a secret.

Conclusion

Jesus is Searching for Faith

When looking at the faith of Abraham I find that it is a far cry from what we consider to be faith today. He never evangelised, healed the sick, broke down idols, or pronounced prophecies and judgements. He simply heard the voice of the Lord and was obedient to it without asking any questions.

When told to act, he set about his tasks immediately. When given a promise, he waited patiently. When asked to surrender, he sacrificed willingly, fighting back the pain, and giving his love out of a contrite heart. Yes, faith without works is dead. We have to prove our faith by the way we live. Talk is cheap for words come easy. We have to prove, by the things we surrender, that we believe God.

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? See how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for

righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

James 2:20-24

What is Jesus looking for?

What is Jesus looking for? Jesus is looking for faith. It's as simple as that! Many times Jesus was astonished when people showed that they were putting their faith in him, usually because they were not Israelites but had watched his life, or heard about him, and recognised that he was a special person, a chosen man of God.

For instance there was the occasion when a Roman Centurion's servant was sick and he sent messengers to ask Jesus to heal him. When he found that Jesus intended to come to his house to perform the healing, he objected by saying that he understood about authority as he, himself, was in a responsible position with men under his command. He told Jesus, that because he had authority from God, he was just to speak the word and his servant would be healed.

Scripture says that Jesus marvelled because he hadn't come across faith like this in all Israel, and they were God's people! So he spoke the word and healed his servant.

On another occasion a Canaanite woman came to Jesus crying for him to have mercy on her daughter who was vexed with a devil. At first he totally ignored her. When his disciples asked him to send her way because she kept crying after them he bluntly told her that he'd only come

to help Israelites. She wouldn't be put off and pleaded for help, but he answered that it wasn't right to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs.

Instead of taking offence the woman agreed with him and accepted the fact that she was nothing more than a dog in the eyes of the Israelites, but reminded him that even dogs were allowed to eat the crumbs which fell from their masters' tables.

Jesus was shocked at her answer and remarked upon her great faith. He was so pleased with the way she had responded that he did what she asked and delivered her daughter from the demon.

Without faith it is impossible to please him: he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

It's amazing what having faith does for people. There have been times when my children have come to me with seemingly impossible problems such as when they have accidentally broken something which really meant a great deal to them and they wanted it fixing. I've sometimes viewed the item and thought, "Oh no, there's no way I can fix that!" Yet, because they put their trust in me and expected that I could fix anything, it pulled the best out of me, and somehow I managed it. Their very faith in me made me try all the harder.

I heard a lovely story once of a well known evangelist who was in his office deep in conversation with some

visitors. His office door burst open and his young daughter came running in with a tangled skipping rope in her hands. She flung it in front of him on his desk then ran out again to play in the garden with her friends.

Without thinking the evangelist picked up the rope as he carried on his conversation, and began to unravel the knots. About half an hour later the little girl came bursting into the room again, grabbed the rope, and with a quick, "Thank you", ran off again to play. Watching her with amused admiration he turned to the people he was speaking with and said, "Why can't we be like that with God?"

Shall He Find Faith?

Jesus told a parable with the intention of encouraging people to pray, and not give up praying. But when looking intently at the wording in the parable I find some things which intimate that 'prayer' to Jesus was not what 'prayer' is to us ...

There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; **yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.** And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge says. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, **though he bear long with them?** I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.

Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?

Luke 18:1-8

The Lord said, "**Hear what the unjust judge said**" – in other words, "Take note of his words", for they will tell you something important!" He was only avenging this widow because she was continually nagging and troubling him, and he didn't want to be wearied by her any longer. Is that how you want God to answer your requests? Because he can't stand your continual whingeing and complaining?

Yes, God will avenge those who cry day and night to him, but he lets you know that he is exercising long-suffering listening to all the complaints. Just like he provided water and quails for the children of Israel in the wilderness. They murmured and grumbled so much that in the end he gave them exactly what they wanted, but it led to leanness of soul, and they pigged out so much on the quails that they vomited it out of their very nostrils.

Abraham never wearied God. When God promised him something, the Bible does not record that he 'prayed it through' as we like to do. No, if God said it, then God could bring it about in his own time. He never wearied God with questions, nor put pressure on him for answers. Abraham was going to believe – whether he saw it come to pass in his life time or not. Many of the heroes of faith died without ever seeing what God had promised them, in fact scripture says they had the better reward because of this.

The parable ends with these words ...

Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?

Luke 18:8

Nevertheless

Nevertheless – that little word means whether you have your requests met or not, will you still have faith? Jesus didn't promise us a trouble free life, but he did promise that he would never leave us, nor forsake us; that he was going away to his Father, but that he would come back for us, and receive us unto himself, that where he is we shall be also; that they who suffer with him will eventually reign with him; and that we are to keep watching and waiting for his return and encouraging ourselves knowing that what he has said he will do, he will certainly do.

That is all Jesus is looking for – people who are holding on to his words and believing that if he said it, he will perform it. Whatever God, or Jesus, have said to you, hold on to it, keep on believing until you receive the promise, for God is Almighty and can bring about the impossible. Is there anything too hard for the Lord?

God does not make friends easily. Because Abraham trusted God, God trusted Abraham. It takes trust and confidence to form real friendships, and Abraham achieved it. If we are of Abraham's seed, naturally or spiritually, we will show his traits, indeed God is looking for proof of our origin. That means we have faith and

obey God, like Abraham, it is possible that we can also achieve a relationship in which Jesus, God's son, can call us his friends, for if we are born of God we are 'children of Abraham'.

And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the **Friend of God**.

James 2:23

But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of **Abraham my friend**.

Isaiah 41:8

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does: **but I have called you friends**; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

John 15:15

Like Father - Like Son

Abraham was the friend of God, but Isaac was his friend's son. Abraham was indeed a prophet, and was chosen to prophecy the most sacred of all prophecies, that one day God Almighty would give his own son as a sacrifice which would take away the sin of the whole world.

Isaac, being just a lad, was obedient – just like Jesus was – even to the death of being sacrificed as an offering to God. He put up no resistance, and foreshadowed Jesus Christ perfectly. He trusted his father completely, even though he held a knife to his throat. Can you trust God

completely, no matter what happens in this life? Can you believe the God of this scripture? ...

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

In the very first video that Maurice and I made, entitled 'Moving On', Maurice made a very bold statement which I have never forgotten, for it was unpremeditated before he spoke it. He was saying words to the effect that if all Christians had was a God who could be a their 'sugar daddy' by providing for them; their 'doctor' by healing them; and their 'insurance agent' by protecting them; then they were just looking for what they could get. But if he could prove to the world by his lifestyle that his God was worth serving, no matter what happened to him, then he considered that to be a life well spent.

Since making that video we have been tested in many ways. We have not received preferential treatment so far as trials have been concerned, but we have trusted God through it all, believing that nothing can happen to us unless God allows it, and that every test will be for our ultimate good and perfection. And just as Maurice said on the video, we have proved in our own lives, that our God is worth both serving, and loving.

Abraham was chosen to prophesy the most sacred of all events that ever took place on this earth. He was on the very verge of giving his own, beloved son, as a sacrificial love offering, but God, in his mercy, would not allow him

to go through with this because he had gone far enough. He had proved his heart and motives. God would fulfil this prophecy completely himself much later on.

Abraham prophesied God

How wonderful our God is. He knew the problems flesh and blood faced so he sent Jesus, his son, to this earth to live amongst us, showing everyone for 33 years how to live lives that would please him. Then Jesus allowed himself to be bound, just like Isaac, and put to death on a cross, shedding his blood so that he could take away the sins of the whole world. For without the shedding of blood God cannot remit sins. This is God's free gift to mankind.

Many people believe in God, but unless they have accepted the sacrifice that God made when he gave the life of his own precious son, Jesus the Christ, to atone for all their sins, there is no way that they can receive the promise of inheriting eternal life in the city whose builder and maker is God – the very city Abraham was looking for when he left all to follow the voice. Abraham had 8 sons that we know of borne to Hagar, Sarah, and Keturah, but it was only through the line of Isaac that God fulfilled his promise. It is only through Jesus Christ, that God's promise can be fulfilled in our lives.

Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, **in Isaac** shall thy seed be called.

Romans 9:7

God speaks to Isaac

We must remember that God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. They each know God in a unique way because they are individuals with unique characters. Isaac claims a relationship with God because his God speaks to him and gives him a personal promise:

And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and **in thy seed** shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; **because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.**

Genesis 26:4-5

Let us all go on to
perfection and walk
in the footsteps of our
forefathers.

BOOKS BY JOANNA BARRATT:

Play The Man: What women look for in men

We know what a man looks for in a woman - vivacious, voluptuous, and very often blonde - but what attracts a woman? Joanna shares honestly from her experience, both as a single and a married woman, what she feels women are looking for in their men. This book is full of insight and biblical revelation. Every man should read it!

ISBN 1-904592-08-2

Experiences From Life

The Sermon on the Mount is the manifesto Jesus gave his disciples regarding the lifestyle he expected his disciples to adopt. Joanna's husband, Maurice Barratt, has 60-1 hour teachings covering this passage of scripture. Each chapter of Joanna's book starts with a précis of Maurice's respective teaching followed by what happened when she attempted to put it into practice. She is really honest and shares her trials, and failures, and shows how God used it to change her character. This volume covers Matthew 5:1-12.

ISBN 1-904592-15-5

Learning from life

This second book in the the trilogy. Inspiring, practical, sometimes funny, but always challenging! Taking a practical look at the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5:13-6:32.

ISBN 1-904592-20-1

Lessons from Life

In this third and final book in the trilogy, Joanna continues with her unique style, and covers the remaining verses from Matthew 6:24 to the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

ISBN 1-56592-197-6

The Power of Women

Women have a power that transcends both the physical and mental realms. The heart of a woman is so different from that of a man, and she is able to have tremendous influence and input into a man's destiny. Joanna illustrates from the bible, and her own colourful life, just how powerful women can be. A godly woman is a wonderful asset to further the man to fulfil God's will in his life, but an ungodly woman can bring down mighty, strong, men, and ruin their god-given purpose.

ISBN 978-1-904592-56-3

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like ...

Jesus told many parables, and Joanna looks at them in a new light, and as usual shares her experiences as illustrations of what Jesus really meant by them. Expect to have your views on the kingdom, and the parables, challenged as you read this revealing look at the kingdom of heaven and the future rewards, and sometimes dire consequences, for the followers of Jesus.

ISBN 978-1-904592-67-9

All books are available from

www. Amazon.co.uk,
or from
www.barrattministries.org.uk

Joanna is a professional singer and has recorded
over 15 Albums.

They can be downloaded as MP3 files, or ordered
as CDs on
www.barrattministries.org.uk

She also has filmed an hour long DVD called
'The Blood and the Cross' featuring songs from her
CD 'My Chains Fell Off'.

This video also has signing for the deaf.

Order from above web site.