

# OpenTheo

## Genesis 17:9 - 18:33



### Genesis - Steve Gregg

In this passage from Genesis, Abraham's covenant with God is emphasized as a defining feature of God's chosen people, rather than just biological lineage. The circumcision of every male child in Abraham's household is also stipulated as a sign of the covenant. The story of Yahweh's visit to Abraham and Sarah highlights Abraham's growing faith and his intercessory prayer for the city of Sodom. Despite his initially doubting God's power, Abraham's steadfast belief ultimately leads to God's mercy sparing the city.

### Transcript

Turning now to Genesis chapter 17. And we're going to start at verse 9. Now let me tell you what has led up to this just in the previous chapters. Abraham has one mission.

Actually at the time we're talking about his name was Abram. Shorter than Abraham. The name Abram means exalted father.

God changed his name in the first eight verses of chapter 17 of Genesis to Abraham. Adding the syllable changed the meaning slightly. From exalted father, Abram, he now becomes the father of a multitude, Abraham.

Now the interesting thing is that he was not the father of a multitude. He had one son at this time. And that son was one that wasn't going to be very significant in the plan of God.

God had told Abram many years earlier that through his seed or through his offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed. And God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees to come to what was then called the land of Canaan. And he just sojourned there in a tent all his life.

He never as far as we know, I don't think he even built a house. He just lived in a tent. And so did Isaac and Jacob the Bible says in Hebrews that they dwelt in tents.

But Abram didn't have any kids. And here God had promised him through his offspring all the nations would be blessed. Abram was 75 years old when God called him to go to the

land of Canaan.

And after about 12 of those years, he hadn't any kids. And one reason for that was not just that he was old. He wasn't too old to father children, but his wife was too old to get pregnant.

And it wouldn't have mattered if she was young because she'd always been barren anyway. She was an infertile woman. And she was now pretty old.

When they came to Canaan she was 65. By the time that she was like 77 or something like that, or 76, she still hadn't had any kids. But she actually came up with the idea that Abram should have a child by her own maid.

In the Middle East this was sometimes done. If a woman can't have her own child, their slaves were considered to be their property. And so her slave girl's body was Sarah's property.

And she could say, well, I'll have a baby through her body. And that was not unheard of. That was not unheard of in the Ancient Near East in that time.

So, I mean, it sounds weird to us. I don't know any woman that would suggest such a thing to her husband in our society. But to have a child was pretty important.

You know, because they didn't have much information about an afterlife. They didn't know about immortality or anything like that. You lived on through your offspring or you didn't live on at all in those days.

That's how they understood it. They didn't understand eternal life. God had said nothing about it, at least not on record.

And so it was important to leave your name and your heritage through a child. And so Sarah actually, whose name was Sarai at the time, her name got changed also, she suggested that Abram go into her handmaid, Hagar, who was a younger woman and could have children. And she got pregnant and had a child named Ishmael.

And that's pretty much where chapter 16 had left off. Ishmael was born, although Abraham thought that this was going to be the son through whom the promises of God would be kept. Because Abram had no hope of Sarai having any children.

And he now had a son, a healthy son. Technically it was his son, I mean he was the father. And so he just, Ishmael grew up with his dad thinking that he was the one, he was the one that God was going to use.

And at the end of chapter 16, it says that Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him. And in the opening of chapter 17, Abram's now 99 years old. So 13 years have passed.

So Abram has one son still, only one, named Ishmael, and he is 13 years old. And of course, 13 is an important age in that society. Even to this day, at age 13, a Jewish boy goes through bar mitzvah and so forth.

Right around that time of coming into puberty is when a child begins to be transferring to an official status of being like an heir of the family and so forth, a man. And so right around the time that Ishmael would have been kind of transitioning into officially the heir of the estate, God appears to Abram in chapter 17 and says, actually, no. There's going to be another son named Isaac.

Now chapter 17 has three parts to it. And in an earlier lecture we covered, I covered verses 1 through 8. In that part, that's simply where God changed Abram's name to Abraham. That's where he became the father of a multitude, though he still had only one child.

And at this point when God said, call yourself father of a multitude, Abram had no idea that there would be any more children to him. It's later in this chapter that God announces, well, Sarah's going to have a son too, named Isaac. But when God tells him, change your name to father of a multitude, and by the way, these Hebrew names, anyone who met him would know what it means.

You know, he's going to meet somebody and they say, well, what's your name? I'm Abraham. Oh, you're a father of a multitude. Where's your family? Well, it's this boy right here.

Well, aren't you a little presumptuous, calling yourself father of a multitude? God told me. God told me I'm supposed to call myself father of a multitude. So I'm doing it.

And so that's what in the first eight verses happened. God appeared to Abraham and basically said, I want to change your name from Abram to Abraham because you're going to be father of a multitude. Now that's the first eight verses.

I want to dip in at verse nine now. It says, And God said to Abraham, that was his newly acquired name, Abraham. God said to Abraham, As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your descendants after you. Every male child among you shall be circumcised and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins. And it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Fortunately, there's no one in his family eight days old, so they didn't have to circumcise everyone. Now, everyone from eight days old and up is actually, from that point on, every offspring of Abram had to be circumcised on the eighth day.

But Abram and Ishmael had to be circumcised at age 99 and 13, respectively. Now, being circumcised is not a comfortable operation, I have to say. I can't testify to it because fortunately, I was born at a time when hospitals routinely circumcised little boys, so I don't remember it.

But my sons were circumcised at eight days old and well, let's just say I was able to attend the first of them. The second one, I let my wife take him in. She could not relate.

But there's a lot of pain involved. But on the eighth day, not as much. The eighth day of a child's life, it's interesting that this was discovered long after God chose the eighth day of a child's life to be circumcised.

That's the time of a person's life, in their whole life, when their vitamin K levels are at their highest, which promotes healing and also apparently makes it not quite, it's kind of deadly to pain, I suppose. I know my first son when he was circumcised, he screamed and hollered the whole time, but I think it was mainly because they were strapped down to a plastic thing. I don't even know how much of it was the pain of the circumcision.

But I've known adults who got circumcised. We had an African guy come from Kenya to our school and he said, I think in his tribe, all the boys were circumcised at age 12 or 13 as a rite of passage. I think they do it in front of the whole tribe.

I think they have to not cry and stuff like that. I don't think I could pass that test. But I even knew a guy from Jamaica who was one of our worship leaders at our school.

Before I knew him, he had gotten circumcised as an adult. I thought, if I wasn't circumcised as an infant, I'll tell you what, you wouldn't get me circumcised for nothing. You can pay me that money.

But Abram had to be circumcised at age 99 and Ishmael at age 13 and all the household servants were to be circumcised the same day. That was probably the only time when all those servants wished they had a different master. He had 318 or something like that trained servants that went out and fought later on in a later battle.

In chapter... earlier, earlier, chapter 14. But this is where it's first committed. The 8th day of a child's life, you've got to circumcise him.

This would also be a time when people would be glad to be a daughter rather than a son, I think, if they were adults and had to be circumcised. But he says, this is going to be the mark of the covenant. He says, whoever is 8 days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child of your generation, he who is born in your house, or bought with money.

Now notice bought with money. He had slaves too who were not his relatives. They had to be circumcised too and they would be part of the covenant.

So a Gentile could be part of this covenant. People sometimes say, why didn't God pick the Jews and leave the Gentiles out? God didn't pick the Jews so that they'd get all the benefits and the Gentiles get none. God chose Abram and his seed through whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.

That's the promise. He said, through your seed all the nations all the families of the earth should be blessed. So he didn't just choose Abram's family and leave everyone else out.

He chose Abram's family to be a blessing to all the other nations, to bring salvation to all the nations, to bring the Messiah into the world so that the Messiah could bless all the nations. So I mean, God had a plan for the whole world and even in Abram's own generation, or his son's generation, if he bought a pagan for a slave, he'd circumcise him and he'd be now part of the family. He'd be part of what we call Israel.

There was no Israel yet. That term wasn't used until two generations later. But essentially to be part of God's chosen people didn't require that you have Abram's bloodline, but Abram's covenant requirements.

And we go on and it says, verse 13, he who was born in your house and he was bought with your money must be circumcised. My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant and the uncircumcised male child who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person should be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant.

Now that means that even if Abram had a direct child who was not circumcised, he would not be regarded to be part of the family. So you can see that to be a child of Abraham, right from the very beginning, it was not really a matter strictly of biology or race. It was a matter of Abram had a covenant with God and those who entered into that covenant with him, whether they were Gentile servants or Abram's own offspring, they were part of that covenant family.

And a person who was physically related to Abram, if he wasn't circumcised, he'd be cut off. So we can see that membership in the people of God was never based entirely on who your parents or grandparents were. You didn't even have to have any Abrahamic blood in you in order to be part of Abram's people.

You just had to have the covenant. Mark, if you were one of Abram's actual children and you weren't circumcised, you're cut off from the people. If you're a Gentile and you come into the family and get circumcised, you're part of the people.

So God's people have always been defined by covenant, not by race. It's true that God chose this one family to give them the covenant. And he worked with that family through Abram, Isaac, Jacob, the 12 sons of Israel, calling them out of Egypt, eventually making them the nation of Israel.

And he made another covenant with them at Mount Sinai. But the point is that God had this family that he chose to work through. But as far as being one of God's people, you didn't have to be part of that family.

Even when the nation of Israel was established, it was a mixed multitude that came out of Egypt with them. There were Gentiles there, too. And God made his covenant with them.

And he said, when he made the second covenant, the one that he made at Mount Sinai, he said to them, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, those are the terms. He didn't say if you're descended from Abraham. He said, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you'll be a peculiar people unto me above all the earth for all the world.

And you'll be a nation, a holy nation, a kingdom of priests unto me. So, to be part of the holy nation, Israel, to be part of the kingdom of priests, required that you keep the covenant. That's what God said, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, then this applies to you.

Some of the people there at Mount Sinai were, in fact, Gentiles, who had come out as part of a mixed multitude with Israel out of slavery. So you could be a Gentile or a Jew. It didn't matter what race you were.

God has always accepted or rejected people on the basis of covenant. Do they keep the covenant or reject the covenant? This started before Sinai. This started in Abraham's time.

And it started with circumcision, which was the mark of the covenant. So, you know, I mean, it's quite a mistake to think that just because someone has Abrahamic blood, that they are special people to God. I mean, what did John the Baptist say in Matthew 3? He said, don't think to say within yourself, we have Abraham as our father.

God could have these stones raise up Abraham's children. In other words, these stones, frankly, can never literally be Abraham's children. God could make people of them, but they wouldn't be descended from Abraham.

They were a stone a few minutes ago. But a child of Abraham doesn't have to be descended from Abraham. God could take a stone and make a new man, and he could become a child of Abraham too.

And, of course, in John 8, Jesus said to the Jews who were opposed to him, he said, I know you are Abraham's descendants, but if you were Abraham's children, you would do the deeds of Abraham. So he's saying, I know you are descended from him, but you're not really his kids, not in any sense that matters, because you don't have the faith of Abraham. He said, you're of your father the devil, he said in that passage.

And yet they were Jewish. And Paul said in Galatians chapter 3, only those who are of the faith of Abraham are the children of Abraham. So, again, it's not physical descent from Abraham.

A rock doesn't have any physical descent from Abraham, but it could be a child of Abraham if God wished to make it into one. The idea is the children of Abraham are spiritually a spiritual class of people of the faith of Abraham. Let me show you something in Romans real quickly about that, because many people don't understand this, but it's from the Old Testament to the New.

I mean, from the time that God made the covenant with Abraham to the New covenant time. In Romans chapter 4, Romans 4, verse 9, Paul says, does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only? Now, by the circumcised he means the Jews. By the time of Paul the term, the circumcised, or the circumcision meant Jewish people.

And the uncircumcised, or the uncircumcision meant Gentile people. So, he says, does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only or upon the uncircumcised also? Is it only for Jews or for Gentiles too? He says, for we say that faith was counted to Abraham for righteousness, how then was it counted? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised? Now, as it happens, God declared that Abraham was justified by faith in Genesis 15, 6. Genesis 15, 6 says Abraham believed in the Lord and it was counted to him for righteousness. That's Paul's favorite proof text for justification by faith, but that was two chapters before Abraham was circumcised.

So, he was accounted righteous before he was a Jew. He was a Gentile. Abraham was a guy from Babylon.

He wasn't Jewish. There were no Jews. He was just a Gentile until this covenant was made.

And when he got circumcised, that was the beginning of the circumcised race of people that came from him. Now, but he was justified by faith, it says in Genesis 5, 15, 6, but he wasn't circumcised until Genesis 17. So, he was righteous before he was circumcised.

That is, he was acceptable to God and justified by faith before he was a Jew. And what Paul is saying, therefore, this blessing is not just for Jews. Abraham wasn't a Jew when it happened to him.

He said he became circumcised, but when he was uncircumcised is when he was righteous. So, Paul is making the point, being a Jew or being not a Jew, being circumcised or uncircumcised, it doesn't really count for any status with God. If you're a Jew and you break the covenant, like Judas Iscariot, or like Caiaphas, or like King Manasseh or any number of apostate Jews in the Old Testament, they're not in.

They're out because they break the covenant. Now, then Paul says in verse 11, and he

received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had while he was still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe though they are uncircumcised. So, Abraham's the father of everyone who believes, even the Gentile people who believe.

He's still their father. He's the father of all who believe, though they're uncircumcised, that the righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of the circumcision to those who are of the circumcision. Now, there's also a place in Galatians chapter 3 where Paul says that, you know, those who are of faith, they're the children of Abraham.

And he says at the end of Galatians 3, the last verse, he says, if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and the heirs according to the promise. Well, we might ask ourselves, well, then what's the point of Jewishness? What's the point of, why was the law given and so forth? Why were there Jews? We have to remember that the Jews were, Abraham wasn't even selected until like, oh, about 2,000 years into human history. I mean, Adam was 2,000 years before Abraham.

Noah, Enoch, those guys, they were all God's people before Abraham was born. And it's like in the Old Testament period, it's 4,000 years long, it was halfway through before Abraham was chosen. Half of the Old Testament time, there was no circumcision, there was no Jew, there was no Abraham's family, there was no Abraham yet.

So Abraham and his family really make up a pretty small portion of significant biblical history. The last half of the Old Testament period, and up until the New Covenant comes, and of course the remnant of them came to be followers of Christ. We call them the disciples.

The Jewish people who believed followed Jesus. The Jewish people who didn't believe, well, their kingdom was destroyed in 7 AD by the Romans. The temple was burned down, the Jews were scattered, they're still scattered.

I mean, sure, some have come back to Israel, but not even half are back in Israel. The majority of Jews are scattered throughout the world right now, and always have been, ever since the Babylonian exile. So, the family, the physical family of Abraham had a significant role in bringing the Messiah into the world.

That's what they were for. It says in Galatians 3.16, Paul said, Now to Abraham and his seed the promises were made, then Paul says he doesn't say seeds plural, but seed singular, which is Christ, Paul says. So Christ is the seed through whom all the nations will be blessed, and the Jewish people were the family that would bring the Messiah into the world.

Once he arrived, they had the same obligation everyone else did, follow the Messiah, or be lost. You know, I mean, it's like they were special in their mission, that God chose

through Abraham that through his seed the Messiah would come, and through him all the nations would be blessed. Well, that happened.

Mission accomplished. They brought the Messiah into the world. Now, new assignment, come into the new covenant.

Now, follow the Messiah, Jew and Gentile. And if a Jew or Gentile follows the Messiah, they're still in the covenant, the new covenant. If a Jew or Gentile doesn't follow the Messiah, they're not in any covenant, because the new covenant nullified the old covenant, it says in Hebrews.

Hebrews 8, 13 says where there's a new covenant, the old covenant is obsolete. So, what distinguished people as God's people through the old covenant, well, that covenant is obsolete now. There's a new covenant.

Anyone from the old covenant can become part of the new covenant. Any human being on the planet can. But any human being who doesn't come in terms of the new covenant, follow Christ, they're not part of any covenant.

There's no covenant except the new covenant left. The others are obsolete. Now, the covenant with Abraham isn't exactly the same as the covenant made at Sinai.

Because this is the circumcision covenant, that was incorporated into the Sinaitic covenant later on. But here, a person didn't have to identify as Jew, there were no Jews yet. But if you were circumcised, that meant you accepted the covenant terms, and you were in the same people of God that Abraham was in.

And it was not a matter of biology, it was a matter of covenant. That was true at Mount Sinai too. You didn't have to be Jewish or Gentile, either one.

Well, you were either one or the other. But it didn't matter which you were. If you keep the covenant, you're part of the Holy Nation, God said, and the peculiar people.

And that's true of us too. I mean, we have accepted Christ in terms of the new covenant, so have many thousands of Jews. There are many thousands of Jews who have received Christ and have come into the new covenant, and an even larger number of Gentiles.

This group are the covenant people of God. The remnant of Israel, and we could say the remnant of the Gentiles too. Now, that's where he puts this covenant in place.

And it says in verse 15, we're in Genesis 17, 15 again, Then God said to Abraham, As for Sarai, your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. The word Sarah means princess. Imagine giving a 90-year-old woman a new nickname.

Honey, from now on I'm going to call you princess. She's 90 years old. She's my mother's age.

I mean, that's kind of cute. But it kind of treats her like a younger woman in a way. I mean, why not call her the queen? Why princess? She's going to be royalty and she's 90 years old.

Why not be the queen? Because she's going to be rejuvenated. She's going to be able to have a child. And he says, I will bless her and also give you a son by her.

Now, God keeps going, but Abraham's mind kind of sticks there for a moment. It makes him laugh, actually. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations.

Kings of peoples shall come from her. And, of course, that is true. The Edomites came from her.

The Midianites came from her. No, the Midianites did. They came from Keturah.

But, frankly, the Jews and Edomites and any of the nations that were non-Jewish that came from Abraham were her children then, except for the Ishmaelites. Now, then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart, which means he didn't say it out loud, shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old? He was 99 at that point. Obviously, he'd be 100 when the child would be born.

And shall Sarah, who's 90 years old, bear a child? And Abraham said to God, oh, that Ishmael might live before you. Now, Ishmael was 13 years old, and we have to assume that Abraham would become quite attached to him. We think of Ishmael as the rival, you know, the bad guy.

He's the antagonist in the story. He wasn't any antagonist at age 13. He was Abraham's beloved son and only son.

He was the one that Abraham was assuming all the promises could be fulfilled through this my son, this stalwart young 13-year-old just passing into manhood. He was devoted to Ishmael and had every reason to be. And God said, no, I'm going to give you a child by Sarah.

And Abraham laughed. It sounds so ludicrous. You've got to be kidding me.

She's 90 years old. It's hard to imagine even any part of that. You know? And I've already got Ishmael.

May Ishmael live before you. Why don't you just choose Ishmael and do what you said you're going to do with him? Yet, Ishmael was a child of flesh. And God wanted him to have a child of a promise.

Paul makes this point in two of his epistles, Romans chapter 9 and in Galatians chapter 4. He both says, Abraham had two kinds of sons, Ishmael and Isaac. One was a child of the flesh and one was a child of the promise. And Paul goes on to say, the Jewish people

who reject Christ, they're children of the flesh.

I mean, they're descended fleshly from Abraham. But the promise is not to the children of the flesh, but the children of the promise. And then he goes on by the end of chapter 4 of Galatians and we brethren, writing to Jews and Gentile Christians in Galatia, we brethren are the children of the promise, as Isaac was.

And so Paul sees a type of two kinds of sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. One was born without any miraculous power. One was a man who could impregnate a woman sleeping with a young woman who could have a child.

Nothing miraculous about that. It's all flesh. It wasn't the work of God, it was the work of the flesh.

And yet Isaac was an impossible child. So impossible that Abraham laughed when he heard the plan. And in the next chapter Sarah hears of it and she laughs too.

It's ludicrous. But that's what God chooses. He chooses the foolish things to confound the wise and the weak things to confound the strong.

He didn't want any flesh to glory in his sight. And Ishmael was just a fleshly son of Abraham, just like many people are in the world today, the Jewish people, the ones who reject the Messiah. Just like Caiaphas did and Judas did and all the Jews that persecuted the Sanhedrin that persecuted Stephen, killed him.

They're all, really, they're the same as any Jew who doesn't receive Christ because, frankly, the Jewish religion is anti-Christian. I have a Jewish friend who became a Buddhist. And he was a Buddhist most of his life, then later he became a Christian.

And he said it was so much harder telling his Jewish mother that he'd become a Christian than it was telling her he'd become a Buddhist. She didn't mind him becoming a Buddhist. Becoming a Christian, though, there's rivalry.

There's always been rivalry, historically. Not so much now. Although in the minds of the Jews there still is.

But, I mean, throughout history the Catholic Church persecuted the Jews. Hitler was regarded to be a Christian by the Jews. I mean, anyone who's not a Jew is called a Gentile or Christian to them.

And so, the Jews have had this rivalry or this attitude that the Christians, they're the enemy. And yet, Paul says that we are the children of the promise. We are who have the covenant with Jesus.

And the others, they're just like any unbeliever. It doesn't matter who their ancestors are. Because God doesn't judge you by your ancestors.

Remember when Ezekiel says, you know, a father will not die for his son's sins and a son will not die for his father's sins? Same thing. A son's not rewarded for his father's virtues. Ezekiel 18 goes right through that.

If a righteous man has a son who's a scoundrel, well, that son will die in his sin. All his father's righteousness will not be applied to him. God doesn't judge people by who your parents, ancestors, anyone was.

God doesn't judge people by race. He judges by faith. He judges by covenant.

It was so in Abram's own day when all his servants got circumcised. They were not Jews. He hadn't birthed any Jews yet.

He hadn't even birthed Isaac yet. But he had these pagan servants and they were all circumcised. They became covenant people in Abram's family.

And so Sarah's going to have a child. Abram laughs at that and says, well, why isn't Ishmael okay? Well, Ishmael isn't okay because he's not the child that God promised. He's a child of the flesh.

And so in verse 19 it says, then God said, No, Sarah, your wife shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you because I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly.

That is Ishmael too. He shall beget twelve princes and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.

And then he finished talking with him and God went up from Abraham. Now, it says this is an everlasting covenant that God made through Isaac. Of course, it is an everlasting covenant God made through Abraham.

But what is the covenant? The covenant is that through his seed all the nations of the earth be blessed. So, first it was Abraham. Now it's singled out of his two sons.

He later had six sons by Ketheros and ate all together. But now it's only one of the eight children of Abraham gets to carry that through and that's Isaac. Isaac is going to have two sons and only one of them is going to be chosen, Jacob.

The family is narrowing down because Jesus can only come through one set of great-great-great-grandparents at a time. There is only one couple that can produce the next generation. It's going to be eventually Jesus.

And so Isaac was chosen for that. We will find later on Jacob was chosen in his generation for that. Later Judah was chosen and then from Judah's family David was

chosen.

So we see the narrowing down. But it's an everlasting covenant because God was not going to break this covenant. He is going to bring the Messiah into the world through this family, through Isaac, through this family line.

It's interesting because I'm going to bless Ishmael too. I'm going to make twelve princes from him. I'll make him a great multitude.

We usually think, I think I was taught in my early Christian training to think of the Ishmaelites as the bad people. Why? Well, because the Arabs are believed to come from the Ishmaelites. And the Arabs are Muslims.

But there weren't any Muslims at this time. There weren't even any Muslims in Jesus' time. Muhammad came up like 600 years later.

The Arabs were not always the bad guys. They were always not the Jews. And the Jews were chosen to bring the Messiah and the Arabs were not.

But the Arabs weren't worse people in terms of their relations with the Jews than say the Babylonians or the Assyrians or other people who are not Arabs. They had their unfriendly times. There were certainly times when certain Arab groups were hostile toward the Jews.

I was taught growing up that the Bible teachers were going to be this eternal hostility between the sons of Isaac and the sons of Ishmael. Like there's supposed to be like this unending hatred between the Jews and the Arabs. And having been taught that, we were always encouraged, of course, we're going to take the Jews side and we're going to think of the Arabs as bad guys.

Well, Arabs do some bad things, especially Muslim extremists certainly do. But the Bible doesn't ever say anything particularly bad about the Arab people and does not ever predict that the Arabs and the Jews are going to be perpetually enemies. You know, when I got older and said to my father, I said, where were they getting that idea? I just had it in my head.

The Arabs are bad guys. God always said they'd be the enemies of the Jews. It doesn't say that anywhere.

It doesn't say that anywhere. But, of course, the Ishmaelites were not the chosen people. So, eventually, they had to separate off and they didn't get the inheritance.

But everything God says about Ishmael here is good. I'm going to bless him. I'm going to multiply him, make twelve princes of him.

I'm going to make his name great. He'll be a multitude too, but he's just not the one.

He's not Isaac.

It's going to be through Isaac that I fulfill my promises. So, Ishmael, at age 13, learns he's not going to be the richest man in the area someday. He's going to be nothing.

And it's all going to go to another baby who's not yet born. We find that after Isaac's born, Ishmael's kind of hostile toward him as a young teenager, toward a rival heir, sort of like sibling rivalry. But they got together, Isaac and Ishmael got together as adults and buried their father peaceably and so forth.

There was no everlasting hostility between them or anything like that. Okay, so in verse 23, Abram took Ishmael, his son, and all who were born in his house, all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day as God had said to him. Abram was 99 years old when he was circumcised and the flesh of his foreskin.

And Ishmael, his son, was 13 years old when he was circumcised and the flesh of his foreskin. The very same day Abram was circumcised and his son Ishmael and all the men of his house born in the house and bought with money from a foreigner were all circumcised with him. Now have you ever wondered why circumcised? I mean, if God's going to say, I'm going to have some sign on your body that is the sign that you're faithful to my covenant.

I think I'll just have you cut off your foreskins. You know, and I remember seeing a comic once, a cartoon, Moses was on the mountain talking to God and saying, now wait, the Arabs get the oil and we have to cut off our what? Moses in that cartoon was not, he thought they were getting a raw deal. But of course they're getting God and God's worth more than oil.

The Levites didn't get any inheritance but God was their inheritance and they were the privileged ones. Why not pierce their ear? Yeah, I know. To show you're my covenant you have to grow out your little pinky fingernail and never cut it.

Then everyone who sees you will know that, oh, that's one of those people, one of those Abrahamic people. Now, why wasn't it something like that? You know, it's interesting that of all the things he could have done, he could have said you've got to wear a mohawk or wear an earring or a nose ring. He could have said any of that and anyone could tell by looking at you, oh, you're one of those people.

And it's supposed to be a sign. Right. But who sees if you're circumcised or not? You don't walk around town, you know, advertising that you're circumcised.

How is that a sign? Why was that chosen of all the things God could have chosen? Well, let me tell you what I think is the answer. I've never heard anyone teach this but I've had to think about it a lot because I teach the Bible. I had to answer my own questions before

I could answer other people's.

Here's what I believe. We see in the Bible, both in Jeremiah, actually in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah and in the New Testament, that physical circumcision doesn't count for anything. It's something else.

Circumcision of the heart. Jeremiah 4.4, I think he said, circumcise your hearts and not your foreskins. And of course Paul says in Romans 2, 28 and 29, he is not a Jew who's run outwardly.

Neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who's run inwardly and that circumcision which is of the heart. Paul says in Philippians 3.3 to the Gentile Christians in Philippi, he says, we are the true circumcision who worship God in the spirit, who rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. The true circumcision.

In Romans 2, actually, he said to the Jewish reader, he says, now you Jews who are circumcised, you don't even keep the law. But these Gentile Christians who are not circumcised, they keep the law better than you do. You say you shouldn't commit adultery, but you're committing adultery.

You say you shouldn't steal, but you steal. These Christians, they don't steal, they don't commit adultery. They're living the life that you should be living.

And they're not even circumcised. And Paul said in Romans 2, shall not the uncircumcised man who keeps the law be accounted circumcised? And you who with your circumcision do not keep the law will be accounted uncircumcised. That's when he said he is not a Jew who is not related, and that's not circumcision which is of the flesh.

What Paul is saying is physical circumcision it doesn't mean a hill of beans to God. There's three times in his other writings he said, in Christ Jesus circumcision avails nothing, uncircumcision avails nothing. In one place he says, but keeping the commandments of God.

In another place he says, but a new creation. And in Galatians 5.6 he says but faith that works through love. These are the things that matter to God.

Circumcision is not one of them, Paul says. So why did God choose circumcision? Because circumcision represents something in the heart. But that still doesn't explain why that particular body part.

But it might. Because the ritual laws of the Old Testament represent spiritual things. Obviously circumcision of the heart is a spiritual condition.

Physical circumcision is a ritual condition. What part of the body could God have chosen

to represent the unseen part of man, which is the heart? Man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart. The heart is the unseen part of man.

You don't know what's in a man's heart. It can show in his actions and so forth, but by looking at a man you don't know what's in his heart. But that's because he's circumcised in the hidden man of the heart, in the hidden part that no one sees, only God sees.

If you're going to pick a part of the body that no one's going to see, only God, the reproductive organs are the most private parts. And I believe that God chose the most hidden part, the most private part, to represent that part of man that is unseen by man, the heart. That the sexual organ, by it bearing the mark of God's covenant, represents the unseen, what we don't show to the public, what's not visible to the public, the heart.

It bears the mark of God's covenant, if you're born again, if you're regenerated. But there's another thing. Abraham's whole purpose in life was to have a baby, for which the sexual organs are employed.

Now, he didn't have the, you know, he wasn't going to set up a nation like Moses did, he wasn't going to set his people free from slavery like Moses did. He didn't have any mission except to have a baby. That was his whole ministry.

He lived for 175 years and the only thing he did that changed the world was have a baby. And that baby had to come through his reproductive organ, obviously. Now, what's our mission? We produce spiritual fruit.

He had to produce physical fruit, fruit of the womb, fruit, you know, he had to be fruitful and have a child. We have to produce spiritual fruit from our heart. The heart's the organ.

The heart is the organ from which love, joy, peace, general self-control come. The spiritual fruit corresponds to, I mean, Abraham's ministry was to bear fruit of a child. Our ministry is spiritual, to bear spiritual fruit.

And that comes from the heart. Abraham's came from his physical organ. Ours comes from the hidden man of the heart.

Now, an uncircumcised sexual organ for a man was unclean. Circumcision was a way of making it clean. And therefore what was produced through it came through a clean instrument.

Ishmael was not born through a clean instrument because Abraham was not yet circumcised when Ishmael was born. But Isaac, who is to be God's chosen fruit of the womb, had to come through a clean instrument, a circumcised. Our hearts have to be clean too.

A circumcised heart doesn't refer to us actually cutting anything in our heart, obviously. It's just that circumcision determined whether you're clean or unclean physically in the Old Testament. Your heart has got to be clean as opposed to unclean.

It's not a matter of having a ritual done to your body that shows that you're God's man or woman. It's what comes from your heart that shows. And so the cleansing of the heart as the organ of fruitfulness corresponds to the cleansing of, I believe, the reproductive organ in the Old Testament, the one who's producing children for God's purpose, fruit.

So I think these correspondences exist. The male organ being the most unseen part of the body, just like the heart is the unseen part of a person. It is also the part of the body that's going to produce the fruit that God wanted him to produce, and our hearts are what produces the fruit that God wants to produce.

So the circumcision of the heart is what physical circumcision, I think, represented. And so we read that he carried out. I won't take as long on this chapter, but if we'll look at chapter 18, this is the setup for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but it's also the opportunity for Sarah, who Abraham apparently hadn't told her she's going to have a baby.

I don't know if it's because this happened immediately afterwards and he hadn't had a chance, or if he was afraid to tell her. You know, comes home to his 90-year-old wife and says, guess what God told me? You're getting pregnant. So I've gotten a point with you tonight, you know? Not many 90-year-old women would take that as well.

And so God has to announce it himself. Now here's an interesting story. In Genesis 18, God appears to Abraham.

Again, God appeared to Abraham numerous times, but he appears with two associates, and they are angels, and these two associates are the angels that go on ahead into Sodom and Gomorrah and pull Lot out of there and his life before the city is destroyed. But God shows up in a human form. This is how he appeared to Abraham.

This is what we call a theophany. This is where God, because he wants to interact face-to-face with a man, he temporarily assumes a human form. And it's really physical because he eats food and things like that.

And the angels can do this too. And so these three men, one of them is Yahweh, the Lord, and the other two are angels. They come to visit Abraham.

And I believe that Abraham doesn't know who they are initially. Now he shows tremendous hospitality. It's in the heat of the day.

It's siesta time. You get out of the sun. He's sitting in his tent in the heat of the day, waiting for the cooler time to come.

And he sees these three men in the distance. And he runs out. He's 99 years old, and he runs out to meet these distant guests and says, Please, please, come into my house.

Let me give you some food. You're out here in the hot sun. Come take some leisure.

Let me refresh you. This is typical Middle Eastern hospitality. You might think he's doing all this because he said, Oh, this is God.

I really have to show some respect. Eastern hospitality would show that to any guest. In fact, in the Arabic world, if you take a guest into your house, you're responsible for their safety at any cost, which is why when Lot took the two angels into his house, and the men of the city wanted to rape the angels, Lot offered his daughters.

They're very offensive to us. We don't understand the culture that he was under. You take someone into your house, there's the implicit promise you will give anything to keep them safe under your roof until they leave.

You'd die for them. In fact, Lot did go out to speak to them, but he offered his daughters, too. He was just trying to stave them off, trying to get them to not molest his guests.

That's Middle Eastern hospitality. I say it beats Southern hospitality pretty good. In fact, it's a little unreasonably hospitable.

It goes extreme. So Abram sees these guys traveling in the heat of the day, it says, and he goes out, he runs out in the hot sun, brings them into his house. He tells Sarah, Go prepare a meal.

I'm sure they had the servants. He gave her orders. She gave them to the servants, and then he ate with this person.

Now, after the person eats with them, we know it's the Lord because we're told that in verse 1, but I don't think Abram does. I think he just has three guests. He doesn't know who they are, but at the end of the meal, when a guest might traditionally, you know, offer a blessing on the house, that's his host, he says, Your wife, she's going to have a new baby this time next year.

Now, apparently Sarah has been working back in the kitchen and the guests have not seen the wife and Abram assumes, and Sarah assumes, she's listening in, they assume these men have not seen Abram's wife. She's 90 years old. And Sarah, when she hears it, she laughs.

Like, come on. That was the wrong blessing to choose for this household. You know, nice try.

But then when she laughed, the Lord says, Why did Sarah laugh? And she said, I didn't realize, but he said, Why did she laugh? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Now, at that

point, the word Lord is Yahweh. The word Lord is being used through the whole narrative where Abram says, My Lord, come in, my Lord, this, my Lord, this. It's always out of nine.

It's the common word for Sir. It's the polite word for addressing a man, my Lord. And so, when you see the word Lord and it's not all capital letters.

Now, it is in verse one when we're told Yahweh. That's Yahweh. It's all capital letters.

Then Yahweh appeared to him. But then when we read of the interaction between Abram and Yahweh, he's always saying, My Lord, my Lord, meaning Adonai, just like, good sir. But it changes.

When Sarah laughs and the Lord says, Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for Yahweh? And I think at that moment Sarah and Abram realize, Whoa, this is not an ordinary guest. Remember it says in Hebrews, Be careful to entertain strangers because many have, or some have entertained angels unawares. Inadvertently had guests they didn't know who they were.

This is no doubt one of the cases that the writer of Hebrews is referring to. Abram didn't know who his guests were until the guest says, What is something, you think something is too hard for Yahweh? And suddenly the guest says, Abram and Sarah, Whoa. That's who this, and Sarah says, Oh, I didn't laugh.

I didn't laugh, God. And the last week of that conversation he says, No, you did. And then the rest of the chapter is God telling Abram about, he's going to go to Sodom and Gomorrah.

I'm going to read through this pretty quick. It says, Then Yahweh appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, three men were standing by him.

By him just means opposite him out some distance. He had to run to get to where they were. Three men were standing by him.

And when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the ground and said, My Lord, Adonai, if I have now found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree and I will bring a morsel of bread and you may refresh your hearts that you may pass by in as much as you have come to your servant. And they said, Do as you have said.

So Abram hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes. Now if I brought guests home unexpectedly and told them, Quick, make three loaves of bread from scratch. You know, that would be, I probably should give more notice than that.

But of course, they had a household of servants. I don't think Sarah had to cook a thing. She just had to give instructions to the kitchen staff.

But, you know, three measures of meal and he went and he, what do we have here, verse seven, and Abram ran to the herd and took a tender and good calf. Notice he's still running. This guy's 99 years old.

He's enthusiastic. And he doesn't even know this is God. You know, these people really wanted to impress their guests.

He ran to the herd, took a calf, gave it to a young man and said, Prepare that. So they actually had to slaughter it on the spot and then cut it up and cook it. These guys had to wait a long time for the food.

It's not fast food. So he took butter and milk and the calf, which he had prepared and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree as they ate like a servant.

Abram here is like their servant. He stands while the guests sit. A servant would always stand while the more honorable people were seated, eating and standing by ready to do their bidding.

You know, and here Abram's the master of the household, the one who has the promises of God, the one to whom all the world's going to be blessed. He's treating these strangers, I believe they were strangers to him, like they're his superiors. But that's just the way, that's hospitality on steroids, you know.

And he stood there by the tree as they ate and they said to him, where's Sarah, your wife? And he said, well, here in the tent. And God said, I will certainly return to you according to the time of life and behold, Sarah, your wife shall have a son. Now, I will return to you according to the time of life is an obscure phrase, but what it means is I'm going to come back by here in about nine months, the time it takes for a baby to gestate.

The reason I know it means that, it's not clear here, but it means that because he says it a different way at the end of the chapter. Well, not the end of the chapter, but later in verse 14, he says, is anything hard for Yahweh? At the appointed time, I will return to you according to the time of life and Sarah shall have a son. So I'm going to come back around and by then she's going to have a baby.

Now, that's what he says first, and again, I'm pretty sure that Abram and Sarah do not have any idea that this is God or that he knows how old Abram's wife is. And you know, just give me kind of a traditional blessing on the household. You've shown me hospitality, let me leave you with a blessing.

Let your wife be fruitful, she'll have another baby next year. And it just sounds like this is

the wrong house to be given that blessing to. But God had already told Abram that Sarah would have a baby.

Apparently, Sarah didn't know it yet. And so it says, Sarah was listening in the tent door, which was behind him. Now, Abram and Sarah were old, well advanced in age, and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.

Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my Lord being old also? Now, she's not talking about sexual pleasure, she's talking about the pleasure of finally having a baby. A woman who was childless was considered to be very much lower rank than a woman who had a child. And so she's had the pleasure of being a mom, is what she's referring to.

And she says, My Lord being old also, meaning Abram. Now, that's Adonai also. Remember, in 1 Peter 3, it talks about wives honoring their husbands and so forth.

It says, even as Sarah submitted to Abram, calling him Lord. It refers to 1 Peter 3, that Sarah called him, this is what it's referring to, when she referred to her husband as my Lord. Just a term of respect of a wife to her husband.

I want all of you wives to learn a lesson here. How to speak to your husbands. My Lord.

Okay, and so the Lord's Yahweh said to Abram, Why did Sarah laugh? Saying, Shall I bear a child since I'm old? Now, she apparently hadn't said that loud enough to be heard, obviously. She said in her breath, and she probably thought she was laughing quietly enough too, but the guest heard. He said, Why did she laugh? Is anything too hard for Yahweh? This is the first time he identifies himself as Yahweh.

He says, At the appointed time, I will return to you according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. But Sarah denied, saying, I didn't laugh, for she was afraid. He said, No.

Sorry, you did. Which is kind of an embarrassing little episode to have recorded about you for all eternity, for all history. Now here, she's the mother of the godly covenant community, and the last thing we really read about her activities is she lied about laughing, and God said, No.

You're lying. You didn't laugh. End of her story here for that part.

Now, then the men rose up, that is God and the two others, and they looked towards Sodom, and Abram went with them to send them on their way, and the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm doing? Since Abram shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham

what he has spoken in. Now, I've always been told that the promise God made to Abraham is unconditional.

It doesn't sound like it here. God says, Abraham, I'm revealing myself to him so that he'll teach his children to do justice and righteousness and be good kids, so that I can fulfill the promise I made to him. Sounds like it's like, you know, if his kids grow bad, I can't do anything about it.

You know, this promise depends on faithfulness, not only of Abraham, but of his offspring. I'm revealing myself to him so he can teach his children to do the right thing, so that I can keep my promises I made to him. And so, but of course, Abraham did.

So the promises have in fact been fulfilled. And he says, verse 20, And the Lord said, Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very great, I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to me, and if not, I will know. Now, this is a strange way for God to talk.

He's just talking about a city just down the block a ways. And he says, I've heard bad things about that city. There's been outcry.

People have complained to me about it. And I'm going to go down there and see if it's as bad as I've heard. If so, I'll know it.

Now, he doesn't say he's going to do anything about it, but Abraham puts two and two together. He knows how bad Sodom is. And he says, What, are you going to destroy the righteous for the wicked? Yeah, immediately, Abraham assumes God's going to know what's going on down there, and he's going to destroy it.

But the strange thing is, why would God have to move down the road a piece to know what's going on a mile away or two? I mean, what? Doesn't God know everything? Isn't he everywhere? Why do you say, Yeah, I've heard bad things. I'm going to check out the report, see if it's as bad as I've heard. God does know everything.

He is everywhere. But when he comes into theophany in a human form, he takes on the whole persona of a human being. Like when Abraham offered Isaac and God stopped him and the angel of the Lord said, For now I know that you fear me.

Don't do it. What? Didn't God know that Abraham feared him before that? It's a manner of speaking. It's what we call anthropomorphic language.

It's like when God came into the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned. He said, Where are you guys? Where are you? And Adam said, I'm here in the bushes. And he said, Why are you in the bushes? Well, I was naked.

How did you know you were naked? You didn't eat that fruit, did you? It's like God's talking like he doesn't know. He comes later to Cain. Where's your brother? Oh, I don't know.

Well, I do. Your brother's blood has cried out to me from the ground. Were you slewing? It's like God talks like he doesn't know things.

He talks like he's a person. I think that in becoming human-like, taking on a human persona, the whole idea is not to overwhelm, not to intimidate, to actually be able to relate with somebody without them freaking out. And he actually takes on the whole human persona.

You know, I've got reports about this town out here. I'm going to go down and check it out. But of course God knew what he was going to find.

God knew everything that's going on on the whole planet and the universe. He didn't have to walk down the road of peace to find out what's going on in Sodom. He'd been aware as long as Sodom had existed.

But it's interesting. It's just an instructive thing as we read these theophanies that God talks like he doesn't know. He talks like he's a real or actual human, but he's not.

He's just taking on a human persona for the sake of relating with a mere human being. And so he says, I'll know when I get there. And notice Abram immediately assumes, oh, that's not going to be good for Sodom.

And Abram has a nephew living there. The only reason I think Abram cared about Sodom is because his nephew was there. He and his nephew had parted not on very good terms, but Abram was family, you know, and Lot was family.

And so he didn't want to see Lot get wiped out. He knew the town deserved it. It says, the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abram still stood before the Lord.

So the two angels went on down the road and God stayed there to talk to Abram in that theophany. And Abram came near to God and said, would you also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Notice God hadn't said anything about destroying anyone. He just said, it's bad.

I think it's better to go check it out. Abram said, I know what you're going to do. When you see the place, you're not going to let them live.

You're going to destroy that place. And I know some righteous people there. Are you going to destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there's 50 righteous within the city.

Now there weren't. There weren't even five righteous in the city. But Abram is afraid to ask too much from God.

You see it through this whole bargaining. This whole bargaining way is the way his descendants have sometimes been characterized too. Bargaining for a lower price or whatever.

He doesn't want to come right out and say, God, would you spare this whole town of thousands of people if there's like three righteous people in it? Abram feels like that's too much to ask. It's just asking God to be too generous. How about 50? 50 sounds like a respectable number.

What if there's 50 righteous so you spare the town? And God without batting an eye says, okay, I'll spare it for 50. Abram says, hmm, what if there's five less than that? Would you destroy the whole place for the lack of those five? God says, no, I'll spare it for 45. Abram says, well, I'm kind of on a roll here.

I think I'll keep going down. See how far I can bargain down here. He'll spare the whole city for 45.

He says in verse 25 is when he said, far be it from you to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked so that the righteous should be as the wicked. Far be it from you shall not the judge of all the earth do right? So he recognized God here as the judge of all the earth and he doesn't do anything wrong. So the Lord said, if I find in Sodom 50, that's where he said yes.

Abram answered, how about for lack of five? God said, I'll do it for 45. Then in verse 29, Abram spoke to him again and said, suppose there should be 40 there. Let's go down another five.

And God said, I will not do it for the sake of 40. Now he's not just saying I'll spare the 40. I'll save the whole city if there's 40 righteous there.

I won't even kill the bad guys. I'll spare everyone if there's 40 righteous there. Of course, God knew how many there were and weren't.

But the point is Abram has not yet found the limit of God's generosity. He started with 50 because he wasn't sure that would go over. God said, okay.

He said, how about 45? Okay. How about 40? Okay. It's like God's not reluctant to be bargained with by one who's making intercession for the lost here.

And it says in verse 30, then Abram said, let not the Lord be angry. Now I got the impression God wasn't showing any signs of anger. But like most of us, Abram probably assumed God isn't as generous as he really is.

Am I bugging you, God? I've prayed for this 400 times and it hasn't happened yet. Is it okay if I pray for it again because I still want you to do this? Don't get angry, God. And God doesn't show any signs of being angry.

Abram's like a normal man who thinks, who am I to impose on God? He must be getting irritated. Though it's very clear that God is not getting irritated. He said, let not the Lord be angry, but I will speak.

Suppose there's 30 that'll be found there. And he said, I'll not do it for 30. 30 is good.

Verse 31, then he said, indeed, now I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord like, who am I to ask you for anything, but I'm going to do it again. Suppose 20 should be. Notice he's increased the increments.

Started with five increments of five, then to 10. And God says, I'll not destroy it for the sake of 20. And we started at 50.

We're down to 20 and God's still not reluctant to forgive the whole city if he finds 20. Then Abram really thinks he's asking too much. He says, let not the Lord be angry, but I'll speak just one more time.

Just one more. Suppose 10 should be found there. And God says, I will not destroy it for the sake of 10.

So the Lord went away as soon as he had finished speaking with Abram and Abram returned to his place. Now by the next chapter, the angels arrive in Sodom and Sodom is doomed because there aren't 10 righteous. Now what if Abram had kept going? What if he hadn't thought that God was reluctant to show mercy? People underestimate the mercy of God.

God is love. So it's not like he's putting out something against his wishes to show love and compassion and patience. And that's who he is.

But Abraham and most people like ourselves, we underestimate that about God. And so we think, I'm asking too much. I've asked this too many times.

God must be getting tired of me to ask for this. Remember what Jesus said about the woman who came to the judge, kept pestering him and he didn't even care about her case, but he said, she keeps pestering me so I'm going to give her what she wants. Jesus is encouraging us to keep asking, keep asking, keep knocking, keep seeking, and you'll find the door will be open to you.

And so we might tend to think, yeah, you know, but God hasn't answered this prayer yet. Maybe he's angry at me for keeping asking. Now only word of faith people get angry when you keep asking.

Word of faith people say you shouldn't ask twice. You ask once and then just believe you got it and that's all. But the Bible doesn't say that.

Abram keeps asking. But he's got this, Abram has gotten to his own limit. 10.

Now he knew probably if he said one, then at least Lot would be spared, maybe the whole city would be spared, because Lot was there. But he didn't dare go that low apparently. You could tell he was getting nervous when he said 30.

How about 30? Don't get angry. But what is 30? Oh, who am I to speak to the Lord like this? But will you do it for 20? Don't get angry, would you do it for 10? It's like Abraham ran out of faith in the generosity of God. I'm not going to go further than that.

That's really asking a lot for 10. But I get the impression God hasn't reached his limit yet. Everything Abram suggested, okay, yeah I'll do it for that.

Why not? You never know what God is willing to do if people are willing to keep asking and trusting. And here it comes down to 10. And the conversation ends.

Abram said this is going to be my last request. 10. God said okay.

And then God departs. The angels are going down to Sodom. They destroy the city.

Now, Abraham must have been wondering when he walked away from that conversation. I wonder if there's going to be 10. You know? See, he's got Lot, his wife, he's got two daughters that are married.

That's like four more, so that's like six. And then there's two virgin daughters, eight. Oh, there's two more there, you know? Can we get it up to 10? Unfortunately, they couldn't get it up to 10.

But even though God didn't spare the whole city, he spared the righteous. That is, he spared the ones that didn't deserve to die. The judge of all the earth does do right.

And so Lot and his wife were very reluctant to leave the family behind, so the angels had to grab him. Good thing there were two angels. They had four hands.

They had to have one hand on Lot, one on his wife, and one on each of the daughters. They hauled him out of the city because they were lingering, it says. And that was a dangerous place to linger.

And I think the reason that Lot's wife looked back is because she had some kids in the city. She looked back, what's happened to them? I told you not to look back. But this is a this last part of chapter eight is really great, very instructive about intercessory prayer.

Because we underestimate how much God cares about us, about the world, about the

lost, how much mercy he's willing to show if there's sufficient intercessory prayer for it. There was a time when God was going to wipe out all the children of Israel because they made the golden calf. And Moses just interceded for them.

And God said, okay, for your sake, I won't wipe them out. It's like a single intercessor praying for a whole nation can sometimes spare the nation. And so I guess we could learn from Abraham's lack of faith here.

I mean, Abraham's known for his great faith, but he was a man who grew in faith over time. And at this point, he didn't have enough faith to say, God, how about if there's only one righteous sin? I know I can dig up one for you down there. But I don't know about the others.

And don't be mad because I'm asking. God isn't mad when we ask. He's not mad when we ask for others.

He knows that without him we can do nothing. He's probably more likely to be impatient with us if we try to do things without asking. You know, God, I won't bother you with this.

I'll do this myself. Yeah, that won't work out well. So why don't you just ask me and I can do this.

And that's how it went. The next chapter, of course, is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.