

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## GENESIS 15-18

Most people don't realize that many of the common expressions we use daily originate in the Bible. Phrases like "feet of clay" or "skin and bones" come from Scripture. In fact, I've got a Top Ten list. "The Top Ten Phrases You Didn't Know Come From The Bible."

- 10) "A fly in the ointment" that's Ecclesiastes 10:1.
- 9) "Sour grapes" is found in Ezekiel 18:2.
- 8) "A drop in the bucket" is from Isaiah 40:15.
- 7) "By the skin of your teeth" comes from Job 19:20.
- 6) "The apple of my eye" is in Deuteronomy 32:10.
- 5) "Bite the dust" is from Psalm 72:9.
- 4) "At your wits' end" is found in Psalm 107:27.
- 3) "Rise and shine" didn't start with your grandma. Try Isaiah 60:1... 2) "Put your house in order" that's 2 Kings 20:1... And the 1) phrase you didn't know originated from the Bible is our subject this morning, "Cut a deal." God and Abraham literally *cut a deal!* The expression comes to life in Genesis 15...

Verse 1, "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram..." At the time, Abram had just returned from battle. He'd rescued his nephew, Lot, and was worried about the enemy regrouping for a counterattack...

Yet God assures Abram, "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." Here's the sure foundation of our faith. God *Himself* is our shield and reward. It's our immaturity that looks for something *from* God. God Himself is all we need. He's *our most valuable reward, our most dependable protection, our richest blessing.*

"But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" In Genesis 12 God unfolded His plan of redemption. He initiated a covenant (*or an agreement*). We call it **The Abrahamic Covenant.**

It's a three-fold promise God made to Abram - *a chunk of land, a nation of descendants, and through his family the world would be blessed.* This is the foundation on which the rest of the Bible is based. **Land, nation, blessing**... Here's the best way to remember the covenant - 3 Ss - **sod, seed, salvation.**

Now Abram is thinking of this covenant, and he sees a problem... It all hinges on him having an heir - a son. Yet his wife, Sarai, is barren. So following cultural custom, he's named his servant, Eliezer, as his heir.

Verse 4, "And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall **not** be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir."

Keep in mind Abram was 85 years old at the time. He's been on social security 20 years. He's no spring chicken, yet God promises that his body will sire a son.

"Then He brought him outside..." Abram is in the countryside. There's no smog overhead - no ambient light from the Wal-Mart in town. When Abram looks up into the night sky he can see over a thousand stars...

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

Verse 6 is a key passage, "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

Genesis 15:6 is an often-quoted verse. It appears four times in the New Testament. In **Romans 4:3**, **Romans 4:22**, **Galatians 3:6**, and **James 2:23**. This is the verse Paul uses to prove we *obtain and maintain* a right standing with God - not because of what we do or don't do - but because of our faith in God's promise! All God's blessings are received by faith and faith alone.

As Mark Twain quipped, "Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out, and your dog would go in." God pours out blessings - not on folks who try to deserve them - but on people who rely on His grace.

"Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" Abram wants proof. He wants God to affirm or ratify the covenant. *Literally, sign a contract.*

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

Here's how ancient Canaanites **cut a deal**... They would slaughter a series of animals. Cut them in cross-sections from head to toe; then arrange the animal halves

into a corridor. The two parties entering the agreement would then walk side-by-side between the animal halves as a commitment to their part in the covenant... *And you think a house-closing today is a hassle. Imagine yourself signing this type of contract!*

Verse 11, “**And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.**” After slicing the beef, Abram spends all day shooing away the vultures. He’s waiting on God to literally walk with him through the animal halves. And as he waits he falls asleep...

“**Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.**” Our exhausted slumberer has a nightmare! “...(God) said to Abram: “**Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.**” In Abram’s dream God predicts the Hebrews will be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years.

“**And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.**” *Abram dreams what Moses will lead.* The Hebrews will exit Egypt and bring with them its spoils and treasures.

God continues, “**Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.**” Abram’s Canaanite neighbors will grow more and more corrupt. The Amorites will plunge headlong into sexual perversion and the occult. And God will synchronize the Hebrews return to the land with the judgment of the evil Amorites. He’ll use Israel to execute that judgment.

Now while Abram is dreaming, verse 17 tells us what happens next. “**And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.**” According to custom a covenant was sealed when both partners joined arms and walked together through the animal carcasses. In essence they were saying to each other if they didn’t fulfill their end of the deal they would be *dead meat*.

Abram was literally expecting God to join arms with him - and the two of them walk together - **but God walked the corridor all by Himself.** Abram was asleep. Thus, it was a unilateral or one-sided covenant. This was not *man’s part* and *God’s part*. It was all God. God completes the work of this promise all by Himself!

It’s while Abram is snoozing, that God appears in the form of a burning torch and smoking censor. *Later God will appear to Abram’s descendants as a cloud by day and a fire by night...* Perhaps Abram woke up just in time to see God walk down the *carcass corridor* all by Himself... *Abram woke up, looked on, and believed.*

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

In verse 18 God clarifies the boundaries of the land given to Abram. **"On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt (the Nile) to the great river, the River Euphrates - the Kenites, the Kenezites, and the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."**

The debate today is whether Israel owns the West Bank of the Jordan River. God says Israel owns the land on the West Bank of the Euphrates River in Iraq. God gave the Hebrews not only today's disputed territories: *the West Bank, Gaza, and Golan Heights*, but also the lion's share of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Sinai, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait.

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

**"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar."** Recall Abram's earlier lapse of faith. When famine struck in Canaan, rather than trust God and stay put, he ventured to Egypt. There he picked up two items that caused him problems later - *herds and Hagar*. The herds caused a conflict between he and Lot. *Hagar is still causing tension even today...*

By this time Sarai is at least 75 years old, and even mega-doses of fertility drugs are doing no good, so Sarai comes up with a plan, *she will bear a child via a surrogate*. **"So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her."** This was customary in the day. A barren wife would have a child through a maidservant. This was the first example of surrogate motherhood.

But though this was an *accepted method*, it was not *God's method*. Not every *good idea* is *God's idea!* What's customary, may not be godly... Every time God told Abram he needed patience, Sarai said he needed Hagar. She *haggard* him with *Hagar*... Finally, Abram gave in. Rather than trust and wait on God, he stepped out on his own - took matters into his own hands. The NT calls this **"walking in the flesh."** It's relying on your own ingenuity - trusting in human means - not God.

Genesis 16:2, **"And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took**

Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived." On that fateful night, Hagar went into Abram's tent a *maid* and came out a *mom* - and it ignited a *bomb* that's still going off even until today.

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

"Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you!" It was her idea, but she blames it on him. "I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me." Before the baby is born a battle erupts... Hagar gets haughty. Sarai is jealous. Abram is caught between *two feuding females*.

"So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence." Sarai got so mean Hagar ran away. Remember, "*Sarai*" means *contentious*. Sarai hated Hagar, and tried to run her off.

But verse 7, "Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur..." Or the road back to Egypt. Hagar is headed home, when God intercepts her. It's the "Angel of the LORD" that appears to her by the desert spring.

"And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." Now realize who this angel might be. Often in the OT the "Angel of the LORD," or "Angel of Yahweh," is actually a pre-Bethlehem, pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus.

The word "angel" simply means "*messenger*" - either a human or a divine messenger... So if this angel is Jesus, He is communicating a powerful message.

This is the first appearance in the Bible of the "Angel of the Lord." There's no record of Him appearing to Noah, or Enoch, or Abram - the heroes of faith. His first appearance is to a Gentile woman who's been used, abused, discarded. *A person like some of us*. And this shouldn't be a surprise. Jesus was called a friend of sinners. He came to heal the brokenhearted, and set free the oppressed. In John 4 Jesus had compassion and forgave a woman at a well in Samaria - but Genesis 16 records the first woman at the well, Hagar.

So "The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." In other words, "go and sin no more." *Stop Hagar, with your haughtiness. Your place is in Abram's tent*. She's still Sarai's maid. She'll need to trust

God to work out the conflict with Ole Contentious, but it's better to be a little uncomfortable in God's will, than to seek comfort outside of it. God will bless her if she remains humble.

"Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude. And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has heard your affliction." The name "Ishmael" means "God hears." And "He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." The description here fits perfectly the descendants of Ishmael, or the Arabs.

Through the centuries God has multiplied the Arab nations. But they have proved to be "*a wild man.*" They have rebelled against the one, true God and embraced a false religion, Islam - which encourages a violent and hostile struggle - or *Jihad* - by Arabs upon non-Arabs.

As the Angel predicted, "His hand shall be against every man." And Arab history is one bloody conflict after another. True to the Angel's words, even today Arabs live among the Jews in Israel – they "dwell in the presence of his brothers," but as a thorn in his side.

Verse 13, "Then she (Hagar) called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered." The name "Beer Lahai Roi" or "Well of the Living One who sees."

Please realize that you have a God who sees... *your hurts and pain... your struggle at work or with your kids... your crumbling marriage.* God hasn't overlooked your situation. God has you in His crosshairs. He sees!

Verse 15, "So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram."

It's sad, but when Hagar returns to Abram's tent the hostility with Sarai doesn't end. The conflict ultimately spills over to their sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Even today Ishmael and Isaac are at each other's throats. Middle East unrest is still the direct result of Abram's mistake.

And the lesson is obvious, try to do *God's will your own way* and you'll make a mess of your situation. *Faith trusts God to do His work, in His way, in His time.*

Chapter 17, "When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My

covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.” Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.” In Hebrew “Abram,” and its root “Abba,” means “Daddy.” “Ram” is “exalted.” Thus, “Abraham” means “exalted daddy,” or “big daddy”. Abram goes from *daddy* to *Big Daddy*.

And the *mechanics* of this is more interesting than the *linguistics*. You say this new name by taking a breath at the end of Abram, “**Abra...am.**” What turns *fruitless Abram* into *fruitful Abraham*? **A breath**... And it’s the breath of God’s Spirit that turns barrenness to fruitfulness. Not more effort on our part, but the Spirit. Don’t walk in the flesh - trust in the power of the Spirit.

Verse 6, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.” If God had not walked through the animal parts all by Himself - if He’d left the slightest obligation to Abraham and his heirs, we would’ve eventually blown it. God is able to offer us an everlasting covenant because it’s dependent on Him, not us. *This is how God’s forgiveness is forever!*

“Also I give to you and your descendants after you **the land** in which you are a stranger, **all the land of Canaan**, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” God’s *everlasting covenant* included an *everlasting lease*. The land of Canaan, what is today Israel and its territories, belongs to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It’s never been revoked.

Despite Palestinian Arab claims the land is Israel’s “**everlasting possession.**” God is no Indian giver.

Verse 9, “And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.” I’m sure Abram never forgot his ordeal among the animal parts, but God wanted all his heirs to have the same memory of the terms of their covenant - that’s why God makes *cutting this deal very personal* for all Abram’s family.

God tells them in verse 10, “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.” It’s possible Abraham knew in advance he’d be getting a covenantal sign. In some way, God was going to distinguish him from

other men so everyone would know he and God had a special relationship. And I'm sure he got excited!...

Imagine Big Daddy and Sarai discussing this at breakfast. *"Maybe God will give me a crown to wear, or a ring (like a Super Bowl ring), or maybe a medal to pin to my lapel..."* What a surprise, when Abraham puffs out his chest to receive his medal, and God says, *"nope."* Then sticks out his hand for his ring, and God tells him, *"nope."* Then he bows his head for the crown, and again God says, *"nope."* God finally says to him, *"Abe, you're going to have to pull down your pants."*

Imagine, Abraham coming home that night, and his wife asking, *"Honey, what sign did God give you for the covenant?"* He replies, *"Sarai, are you in for a surprise!"* He's 99, yet God schedules him for surgery.

God continues his instructions, *"He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations..."* Research says a newborn experiences a surge of Vitamin K on their eight day of life. Vitamin K is a blood clotting factor. God knew that since He made us; thus told Abraham not to circumcise until the eighth day. *"He who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant."* God wanted His covenant so indelibly etched in their memory, He carves it into their flesh!

*"And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."* All God's children are to go under the knife, either at 8 days or 99 years. *Wow, that means Abram will be a circumcised centenarian and before the days of anesthesia, brutal!* I had a prostatectomy and I'm 66, in my physical prime. But flip 66 over... 99?... *Yet what better sign for the terms of God's covenant with us!*

No one earns His favor by what we do or don't do. All God asks is for us to trust Him. Admit your weakness, your impotence, your barrenness. Circumcision is the cutting off of the flesh - *or faith in human effort.* The key to spiritual victory is to rely on the work of God in us.

Verse 15, *"Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name."* As with Abraham, God also gives his wife a new name. From *"Sarai"* or *"contentious"* to *"Sarah"* or *"princess."* *"And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her. Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old?"*



And shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "**Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!**" Read it again, "*Abraham fell on his face and laughed.*" And I wonder how many of us would have done the same?

This is long before the days of Viagra. And God is telling Sarah she'll be the only woman in history to have Medicare pay for a labor and deliver! Abraham knows Sarah is long past menopause. In fact, he's just now gotten her to turn up the thermostat. No way can she birth a child. There's got to be a misunderstanding.

That's why he reminds God, "**Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!**" *God, you must mean the son who lives in Hagar's tent...* "Then God said: "**No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac...**" God is not confused. He is speaking of Sarah's soon-to-be-son, Isaac. And the name means, "*he laughed.*" Thus, every time Abraham mentions the boy's name, it'll force him to remember his lack of faith.

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

*But that doesn't mean God lacks a plan for Ishmael.* "**And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.**" God is setting the matter straight. *I'll bless Ishmael, but the covenant is Isaac's.* And this is what the modern Arabs refuse to concede. It's the source of the ongoing strife in Israel today.

The Bible refers to "**the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,**" while the Koran speaks of "**the God of Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac.**" Islam teaches the covenant passed to Ishmael. But the Bible is adamant, it passed to Isaac! And in a nutshell, this is the cause of the Middle East conflict today. But if you believe the Bible you can't be neutral. You have to side with Israel.

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

Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was 13 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; and all the men

of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.” Abraham was obedient and circumcised every male of his family.

The Abrahamic Covenant promised physical property to physical people, so its sign was a physical surgery.

Christians are said to be *spiritually circumcised* in our hearts, but actual circumcision is the family crest of the family of Abraham. If a Gentile Christian is circumcised it's for health or hygiene reasons, but for a Jew it's a religious symbol. In Israel today two trees are named after circumcision. There's the eucalyptus (*you-clipped-us*), and the other is the Juniper (*Jew-nipper*).

Chapter 18, “Then the LORD appeared to (Abraham) by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground...” Abraham was a powerful man. He didn't just bow to anyone. Notice verse 1 says “the LORD appeared to Abraham.” Then verse 2, “three men were standing by him.” One of these visitors was Yahweh, or probably another pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. We learn later, the other two were angels incognito.

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

In verse 3 Abraham “said, “My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.” They said, “Do as you have said.” So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.” Here's the first case of a husband calling his wife at 5:00 and telling her he's bringing home guests for dinner. *This scene will be repeated countless other times throughout history.*

“And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it.” Have you ever been to a steakhouse and have to wait so long you said, “*What did they do, go out and kill a cow?*” That's exactly what Abraham does.

And husbands, notice something important. Abraham leaves the pre-incarnate Christ and two angels to go to the kitchen and help his wife prepare a meal, amazing!

*Apparently, there are two ways to really know Jesus...* In Luke 10 Mary leaves Martha in the kitchen and worships at Jesus' feet. Here, Abraham leaves Jesus to help Sarah in the kitchen. Mary got to know Jesus by spending time with Him. Abraham got to know Jesus by being like Him, and serving His wife. *Both work.* Verse 8, "So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate."

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

"Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh..." Note verse 12, she "*laughed within herself.*" It wasn't an audible laugh. She just chuckled within. But apparently, the Lord heard her heart!

So He asked, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' He reveals her mind to stir up her faith. He wants Sarah to think, "*If God has power to read minds; then He's got power to help a woman conceive.*" That's when the Angel asked the big question, "*Is anything too hard for the LORD?*"

Most of us have little problem with the doctrine of God's omnipotence theoretically and theologically. God can do anything! We believe in miracles, *until* God personalizes one - puts my name on it - says to me, "*This is the miracle I want to work in or through you.*"

That's when like Sarah we tend to laugh it off! God works miracles in somebody else, not me. *Oh, I can sing songs of faith, quote wonderful creeds, memorize strong verses, make declarative statements of faith,* but do I **really** believe? The Lord challenges us, *are we believing or just bluffing?* How real is our faith? Let me ask you, "*Is anything too hard for the LORD?*"

The Lord continues, verse 14, "At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!" Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command

his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." The Lord doesn't share His secrets with just anyone. Only folks He can trust to follow Him.

*And since Abraham is such a man,* "The LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD." The angels continued to Sodom, while Yahweh, *or possibly Jesus,* stay with Abraham.

"And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

Abraham knew God's heart, that it's not His nature to judge the righteous with the wicked. He always *brings out* the righteous, before He *brings down* the judgment.

Which is one reason I believe in a pre-trib rapture. In the last days God will judge this evil world with seven years of cataclysmic, earth-rattling tribulations, but before the judgments **come down** the Church will **go up**. God doesn't judge the righteous with the wicked!

God hears Abraham's request and answers his prayer, "Yes, for 50 righteous souls I'll spare Sodom!"

*But now the haggling begins...* A fun day in Jerusalem is shopping in the Old City. And Middle East shopkeepers love to haggle. It's an art-form among the locals... *They get it from their father, Abraham.*

*Look at him in verse 27,* "Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes (he humbles himself, before he speaks boldly). "And I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord..."

"Alright Lord, will you spare the city for 45 righteous souls? The Lord says, "Yes." "How about 40?" "Yes." "What about 30?" "Yes." "As few as 20?" "Yes." "Ok Lord, will you spare Sodom for 10 righteous souls?" And amazingly the Lord says, "Yes." You wonder how far God would've gone if Abraham had kept haggling?

Let me make two points here, **first** we think God will work for many, but not for few. *Not so!* It's not numbers that move the hand of God, but our sincerity...

**Second**, Abraham is interceding, a type of prayer, but here there's not a lot of difference between *praying* and *haggling*. We make prayer far more sophisticated than God does. When you pray cut to the chase, bare your soul, don't be afraid to do a little *holy haggling*...

We'll see what happens to Sodom next time.