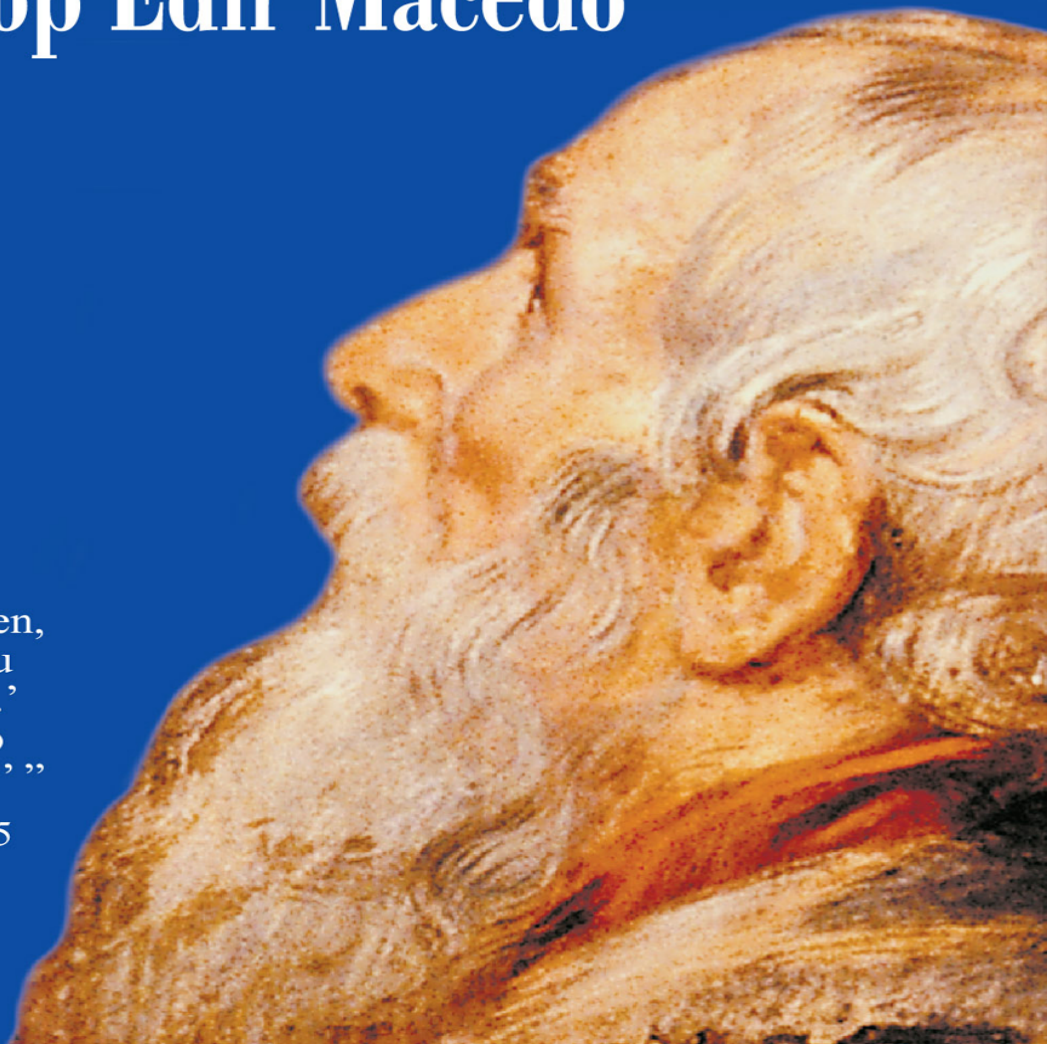


The Faith of Abraham

Bishop Edir Macedo

“ ‘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.’ ”

Genesis 15.5



The Faith of Abraham

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to lay the foundations to what we call “beneficial faith”, that is, a faith that brings benefits.

Most people have faith in God, but not everyone has achieved success in their faith simply because their faith lacks foundation. When faith is based upon the solid foundation of the Word of God, it has quality. And it is exactly this kind of faith that we can call “quality faith” – a faith that promotes or brings a life of quality.

The lack of quality in faith is exactly the reason why most religious people do not obtain practical results from their faith, even though they have faith in God. Life depends on faith. But if faith lacks quality, then life also will be a life that lacks quality.

Let’s take for example our father in faith, Abraham, for the following reason: the Lord teaches us, saying, “*Look to Abraham...*” (Isaiah 51:2). Therefore, we should imitate him in faith and in obedience.

It was through his courage and boldness that he materialised the faith of the heart, when he offered his son

Isaac⁽¹⁾. Besides having a courageous faith, he was patient to wait for the fulfilment of the promise⁽²⁾.

Abraham had the privilege of being the first to receive the promise of God with an oath⁽³⁾. Through him, all those who believe are blessed⁽⁴⁾, but only those who are of his faith are the true Abrahamic descendants and heirs⁽⁵⁾.

It is not according to the law that Abraham's descendants will inherit his blessings, but according to the same quality of faith in God that he manifested⁽⁶⁾.

Because of the nature of his faith, Abraham became God's friend and heir of all His promises⁽⁷⁾. He was elected by Him because of the sincerity of his heart and, ultimately, because of the covenant⁽⁸⁾.

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(1) "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?" (James 2.21)

(2) "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." (Hebrews 6.15)

(3) "And said: By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son - blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (Genesis 22.16-18)

(4) "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.'" (Galatians 3.8)

(5) "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons

of Abraham.” (Galatians 3.7)

(6) “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” (Romans 4.13)

(7) “Are You not our God, who drove out of the land the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?” (2 Chronicles 20.7)

(8) “Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He 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. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 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.’ 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. 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 to the great river, the River Euphrates.’” (Genesis 15.12-18)



ABRAHAM'S ELECTION



CHAPTER 1

The question is: Why did God choose Abraham? What moved God's heart in this choice? The answer is 'faithfulness'. Without a doubt, faithfulness was a remarkable characteristic in the life of this man.

Even though he lived in a pagan land, where promiscuity was an object of worship, Abraham remained faithful to his only wife. Sarah was loved and respected by him and she consequently responded to his faithfulness to the point of considering him as her lord.

Certainly, God saw that if Abraham could be faithful to his wife, even though she was barren, he would certainly be faithful to Him also as a servant! And here we see one reason for the difference between 'servants' and servants, 'Christians' and Christians.

Before a person is chosen, first he must offer himself up for election. The elect is the one who, having passed through

the process of election, is approved. The Lord Jesus Himself said, *"many are called, but few are chosen."* (Matthew 20.16; 22.14)

We could also understand this word as "many are the candidates, but few are the elect". The choice of candidates for election requires that a person be, above all, faithful. If a person cannot be faithful to the one he sees, how can he be faithful to the one he does not see?

God's promises are clearly directed to the elect, in other words, to those who have remained faithful until the end. Revelation 2.10 says: *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."*

For such who are faithful, it has been determined: *"They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands."* (Isaiah 65.22)

Would a rich father bestow an inheritance to the son who is faithful or to the son who is unfaithful? Likewise, God cannot entrust His blessings to the hands of the unfaithful. Therefore, before someone can demand God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises, he must first examine whether he has been faithful to God in his Christian conduct.



ABRAHAM'S CALL



CHAPTER 2

After God elected Abraham in His heart, He called him and told him clearly: *“Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.”* (Genesis 12.1)

This was the first test of Abraham. He had to leave his homeland, his properties, his customs, his friends, in short, he had to leave everything behind.

His surrender to God meant separation from his familiar world. God’s divine plan demanded his total departure from that place. The Lord could not shape and mould him according to His will, whilst he was subject to the influences of that society.

Getting him out of there and teaching him to depend on his faith in the promises of God was fundamental for the creation of a strong, invincible and unshakable nation.

On the other hand, to go out into the desert without a map and without a clue where he was going, was a true challenge to his faith. At first God gave him no direction where he should start, let alone direction to the north, south, east or west.

First, he had to leave the place where he was, and only then the Lord would guide him. Abraham had to learn to depend on God to provide the daily bread, day after day, through the desert.

Similarly the Lord Jesus teaches us: *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”* (Matthew 16.24)

But follow Him where? It doesn't matter! Whoever wants to follow Him doesn't need to know where. It is enough only to trust in His leadership. Christians live by faith, in other words, in the certainty that God will do exactly what He promises to do.

Ur was a city in Mesopotamia, the land of the Chaldeans, situated between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. It was a prosperous, important and well-developed city.

Abraham needed courage and boldness to give no ear to his relatives and friends, but only to God. The Lord Himself would guide him through the desert and show him the Promised Land. The absolute certainty that God would fulfil what He had promised was the only evidence that would beat in his heart.

Truly, if anyone wants to reap the same fruits of Abraham's faith, they must pay the price that he paid. It is extremely important to note that in his call, the first words God used were: “Get out”.

We may admire the greatness of faith and its results in the life of Abraham during his one hundred years of communion with God, but we cannot forget that his first attitude in relation to the Lord was one of unconditional obedience, when he left his land, his household and the house of his father.

Through this, we learn that before God turns us into a blessing, we must leave our land, symbolising our sinful habits; leave our household and our relatives, symbolising our old customs and religious traditions; and, finally, leave the house of our father, in other words, leave behind the leadership in the voice of our parents in our hearts and replace it with the voice of God.

Many people have strongly resisted leaving behind their sinful life for an encounter with God, but they fight with all their strength that God may leave His throne and come to bless them whilst they are living in sin.

In Abraham's time, only people who were extremely poor or fugitives would abandon their relatives and their homeland. He wasn't a "John Doe" who had nothing to lose leaving his land, his household and the house of his father. No! The fact that the name Sarai meant "princess" and Abram meant "exalted father" brings the idea that Abraham belonged to an important family in his generation.

To the eyes of reason, leaving one's land behind meant denying the inheritance of his parents' assets. Leaving the household or relatives behind meant denying one's tribe. And leaving the father's house meant denying responsibility for the leadership of the family. Certainly, Abraham would be his father's substitute in the establishment of the next generation.

And on top of all that, Abraham left his land, his household and his father's house with a barren woman! If he remained among his relatives, he could even have children from among his relatives and thus, obtain offspring; but to leave everything in obedience to the Word of Someone who was still unknown was, humanly speaking, foolishness; it was madness. That's just like faith! Faith is madness; it is foolishness to those who are lost (1Corinthians 1.18).

Today we have an abundance of examples of God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises. But Abraham did not enjoy the same privilege. Whose example could he look at in order to believe? What guarantee did the Lord give him for leaving everything behind? God ordered him to leave his land, leave his household and the house of his father right on the first time that He appeared to him.

Therefore, Abraham's obedience to God wasn't something so simple as many would have thought. He left all his responsibilities behind, his dreams, his future, in order to go to a land still unknown at the time of his call.

No one should aspire to be a vessel in God's hand without leaving behind the state of life where he finds himself in and denying his plans for a supposedly promising future.

One cannot wish to serve God and himself at the same time. If he wants to serve God, he must abandon the life of sin; he must crucify his own will, his personal lusts; he must sacrifice his future; in short, he must die to himself, to his relatives and, above all, to the world. In fact, this is exactly the price that the Lord Jesus demands from His followers⁽¹⁾.

The Lord's promises to Abraham were indeed very great, far beyond what he could ever imagine. He had no idea of the greatness and the extent of His promises, but certainly

having one son with Sarah was an idea he had fixed in his mind. Let's now look at each of God's promises to Abraham:

“I will make you a great nation” – But how could a great nation come forth from someone who was faithful to only one infertile woman?

Similar questions are asked day after day when people face an impossible problem or an incurable disease, or when the medical reports show that there is no hope. From a human point of view, the solution may seem apparently impossible, but in the eyes of God, nothing is impossible! Abraham believed in the Word of God and he acted his faith in a practical way, not in theory, as many who call themselves Christians have done.

Here lies the conflict between faith and reason, between faith in the Word of God and faith in the word of Science. If on one hand we have Science strongly defending that there is no hope, on the other hand we have God's Word, which guarantees a solution, saying: *“I am the Lord who heals you.”* (Exodus 15.26)

What to do then? The solution for a person who finds himself between one word and the other will depend on the attitude of faith that he will take on.

If the person throws himself upon the Word of God but allows a doubt into his heart, however small it may be, then nothing will happen. If, however, this person simply throws himself, body, soul and spirit, upon the promise of God, then the healing will happen. It must happen!

The first great promise made to Abraham wasn't that God would give him a great nation, but that He would make a great nation come out of him. God wants to do exactly the same thing with each one of us.

Those who think that the great nation that came out of Abraham is Israel are mistaken. The nation that came out of him has no borders. It is just as the Lord Himself said: *"I will make you a great nation..."* (Genesis 12.2)

Could Israel be this great nation? Of course not! In fact, the great nation born out of Abraham is the Kingdom of God! Through him, God built the nation of Israel; from Israel came His beloved Son, who established the Kingdom of God in this world.

We must not forget that Adam had dominion over everything on earth. He was the authority of God here in the world. The devil already existed, but he had no power in this earth. The planet enjoyed absolute peace.

Even the wild animals fed on herbs because death did not exist. And, as death did not exist, the weaker animals were not used as food for the stronger ones.

But when Adam submitted to the word of the devil, he despised the Word of God. With this, his dominion and authority were passed on to the devil. From that moment, the kingdom of darkness was born on earth.

Nature revolted against man, and he had to sweat his brow in order to bring out fruit from the earth. Animals no longer fed on herbs only, but became meat eaters.

Death came into existence and, with it, diseases of all kinds appeared on the face of the earth.

Through Abraham, then, the Lord would come to establish a people who would be separate from all the others on earth. And from this people, He would bring His Son to the earth. His Son would then take back dominion and authority for

those who decided to submit to God's Word. That is when the Kingdom of God was born.

“I will bless you” – The verb ‘to bless’ here suggests much more than a simple promise to give material things. The Lord had already promised to give Abraham a great nation; in other words, to bless him. This second great promise talks about something much more significant.

How is the life of a blessed person?⁽²⁾ Just like the life of Abraham! His first blessing was his family, and then the material victories. When he separated from Lot, for example, Abraham didn't care which side he would go, because he was sure that wherever he went he would be successful.

Many times, Christians who lack character forget what God Himself said: *“Indeed before the day was, I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?”* (Isaiah 43.13)

It is no use trying to block, impede or even use malice to try and harm someone who has been elected and blessed by God. However much injustice people may try to do to him, God is with him and that is it.

Those who are wise will never separate themselves from God's elect. Abimelech, who was the king of Gerar, recognised that God was with Abraham and quickly wanted to make a covenant with him. Was there any use trying to fight him? Trying to destroy him? Of course not!

And when God chooses someone to bless, woe unto those who raise accusations against him, because they shall stand as God's adversaries.

“I will make your name great” – To keep a good name in those days was something extremely valuable to a family. If someone committed a grave mistake, and brought the name of the family to shame, this person would be excluded from the clan.

Just as it was very important for a couple to have a male child to maintain the name of the family, it was also very important that this person would keep his name clean.

In the case of Isaac for example, Abraham, fearing that his son would marry a foreign woman and interrupt the purity of his descendants, sent his most faithful servant to find him a wife among his own people.

Abraham typified the Lord Jesus. And just as by His name we are saved, the name of Abraham was used, and still is used, as a reference to the Only True God: the God of Abraham. When we pray in the Name of Jesus to the God of Abraham, we are not praying to an unknown god.

Thousands of gods were worshipped in the old times, and until today things remain as in those days of intense idol worshipping! Faith has always been an important part of life in every culture, but which god was the true one so people could worship him? Because of Abraham, the Only True God has been identified! The God of Abraham!

However valuable a person's properties may be, they will eventually vanish like smoke. Sooner or later, time will blow them away. But a good name will never be forgotten. Even if that name does not appear in books, it shall remain forever, because it will be written in the Book of Life – and there it will stay, and no one will blot it out! Abraham's name is such an example.

No country, city or town has got even a square that bears the name or any memorial to Abraham. However, his name not only exemplifies but also brings to life the meaning of supernatural faith, which gave birth to many nations, especially the one through which the Lord Jesus Christ came.

His name is one of the most honoured names in all the history of mankind. The Bible says, *"A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches..."* (Proverbs 22.1) This reflects very well the greater meaning of having a good name in those days.

A person's clan depended on his good name. If this name was tarnished, it would be wiped out from the face of the earth. But if it was carefully kept, his descendants would be respected and even benefit from it.

Now we can understand better why the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father (John 17)⁽³⁾. So, in fulfilment of His promise, God has lifted the name of Abraham through the centuries. There is no shadow of doubt about his greatness and the facts that concern him. When we talk about Abraham, his name quickly brings to mind the works of his God in his life and in the life of his descendants.

"You shall be a blessing" – Many people have thought that the blessing mentioned here refers to Abraham's material success. Truly, his victories were many but they were only consequences of the new condition God awarded him: being a blessing himself!

To be a blessing meant to be God's authority in person and to carry this authority within him wherever he went! This is not surprising, since it was exactly through this special

anointing that he would take possession of all the other blessings.

Throughout his life with God, we see that Abraham was feared by all, because they saw a superior authority in him. In Egypt, Pharaoh bowed down to him because of his Lord, his Ally. With only three hundred and eighteen men, Abraham overcame four powerful nations, which had overcome five. Therefore, he was stronger than the nine nations altogether.

Melchizedek recognised God in him and blessed him. Also Abimelech saw that God was with him and that's why he was determined to become his ally.

This determination to make Abraham a blessing dated back to the days of Adam. In the Holy Text the Lord says, *"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness, let them have dominion (...) over all the earth..."* (Genesis 1.26)

In other words, when the Lord created man, He gave him authority and dominion over all the earth. All the animals and all the earth were subject to his exclusive authority.

God had given him His authority to rule over everything. But because of his rebellion to God's Word and submission to the word of Satan, man automatically surrendered that authority to Satan on a plate, thus losing his dominion. From that moment on, the kingdom of darkness was established in this world.

With the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Kingdom of God was then re-established. But this Kingdom can only be established individually in the hearts of those who really submit to the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, those who hear and practise His words.

Thus, through the Lord Jesus, His disciples have His authority and dominion over all. That is the reason why demons submit to them. Everyone who is born of God automatically becomes a blessing himself, in the same way it happened to Adam and Abraham. In other words, he has the same authority, dominion and anointing of the Lord Jesus Christ to perform His will in this world. And His will is very clear, as the Lord Himself explains it⁽⁴⁾.

So we see that being a blessing is much more than having a blessing. It is not just about affording material things, but above all, about having authority and dominion over all the power of the devil.

Those who are a blessing have the authority of the Lord Jesus over all diseases, no matter what they are; over death; over misery; in short, over all evil at work in this world.

Obviously, when a person assumes his Christian faith and exercises his authority, the devil loses his authority over this person. From that moment on, he no longer has power to block the divine promises in the person's life. Life more abundantly, as promised by the Lord Jesus, then becomes a reality.

“I will bless those who bless you” – This means to say that the Lord would do good to all those who did good to Abraham.

In the same way people treated him, they would also be treated by God. And those who fear the Lord always want good for those who belong to Him, because they know that they will also be blessed for it.

But when there is no fear of God in the heart, people are not afraid of bearing false witness against those who are of God. And there are many in the Church who are sick and defeated just because they are unjust to the just.

“I will curse him who curses you” – The previous promise is repeated here in the opposite sense. Abraham didn’t have to worry about his enemies, or enemies-to-be, because they were automatically cursed. Those who are of God don’t worry about the injustices they suffer in the hands of those who are not of God. They are sure that their Lord is just and will not allow injustice against His chosen ones to go unpunished.

It is easy to understand these last two points when we look at the life of those who are chosen by God. Who has ever prevailed against those whose lives were completely surrendered in God’s hands?

“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” – From Abraham, a separate nation was born through which the Son of God came to the world. Through him all the families of the earth will be blessed, which means that all the families of the Kingdom of God will be blessed.

The Lord never said, “all nations of the earth will be blessed”, but “all the families of the earth”. And why did He refer to the families and not to the nations? It is simple: The Kingdom of God is not divided by nations or territories. It has no borders.

The “earth” in question here refers to the Kingdom of God, which means that whoever is Abraham’s descendant in the faith is blessed, just as their father was blessed.

If we considered “all the families of the earth” in the literal sense, it would mean that those who are not converted to

the Lord Jesus would also be saved, just as the converted ones.

These seven promises made to Abraham represent the plenitude of God's blessings to those who believe according to the Abrahamic faith. The number seven represents God's totality. That is why there is a reference to the Seven Spirits of God (Revelation 3.1; 4.5; 5.6).

This does not mean that the Holy Spirit is divided in seven parts, but it represents the plenitude of His greatness. In the same way, the general meaning of these seven promises represents the greatness of God inside the small Abraham, which extended to all his descendants by faith.



ABRAHAM'S RICHES



CHAPTER 3

When Abraham left Egypt, his riches in cattle, silver and gold were exceedingly great. God Himself, who cannot lie, told Moses to record the fact that Abraham was exceedingly rich: *“Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.”* (Genesis 13.2)

The land where he lived together with Lot could not support them because their flocks were too many and the pasture was not sufficient.

Our attention is drawn to the fact that Lot's shepherds came into conflict with Abraham's shepherds. Besides the lack of pastures for their flocks, there was still one aggravating reason that led Abraham to separate from Lot: the presence of the Canaanites and the Perizzites who dwelt in that land.

Certainly, these two peoples must have influenced both Abraham's and Lot's shepherds and led them to conflict. Up

until then, they had never had any problem between their shepherds, but certainly because of the presence of those strangers among them the problems started.

This has been one of the greatest barriers among the people of God. When there are intruders, or strangers, we immediately start having difference of opinions and then divisions, dissensions and factions. The objective of those who have different opinions is not to unite, but to divide. The Canaanites and the Perizzites were strangers to the faith of Abraham. Consequently, they were demonic tools that caused conflict between the servants of Abraham and Lot, and thus separated them.

Many so-called Christians, moved by their envy of other people's faith, seek to sow doubt and discord amongst them because they have no pleasure in seeing the success of the true servants of God. The Lord Jesus called them "the weed among the wheat" and warned us against them.⁽⁵⁾

Whilst the weed is developing, it looks like wheat, but later it can be easily identified because wheat produces good fruit, whilst the weed remains weed, just feeding off the nutrients of the land without producing anything fruitful.

If it is not uprooted, it can cause great damage to the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it is necessary to watch constantly, so we won't be caught unawares and have a great disappointment. How often have we had a vision of faith for a certain objective, and when we try to share it with others who don't have the same vision, they immediately, meaning to help, end up sowing doubt in our heart?

By faith Abraham left everything behind and kept on obeying the Word of God. Lot followed him under his leadership, and the problem between their shepherds only

happened after the Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelt among them. This means that when there is a belief based upon the will of God, we must not allow anyone to interfere, giving their opinion or saying what they think.

Many people have lost the vision of their promised land exactly because they have listened to third parties. When God gives us a vision of faith, we must never let it escape our hearts because of other people's opinions. The vision of faith is something personal.

On Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah, where he would offer his son as a burnt sacrifice, he went alone with his sacrifice. Not even Sarah knew what he had in his heart! Not even his own son knew that he was the sacrifice! Only God and Abraham himself had knowledge of what would happen in that place.

His faith was extremely personal and determined. It could not, in any way, be shared with anyone, whoever they were, lest it be influenced and diverted. This was, in fact, Abraham's greatest wealth. Even though his personal properties were great and many, his greatest asset was inside his heart. No one could touch his determination, belief and readiness to follow the certainty of faith that beat in his heart, because he depended on this faith for his victory.

That's how faith is. Life depends on it, as God Himself has said. If faith is contaminated with doubt, it will obviously be neutralised. Once it is neutralised, it will never bear fruit. And that's exactly what the devil wants the most!

He knows that the faith that comes from God, or the supernatural faith, is God's power at work within us. With it, we can overcome the whole of hell. We can get in there and

set free the people who are bound in it. On the other hand, the devil cannot touch or impede the action of faith, unless he manages to render it powerless at the source. So, he tries to render the power of faith useless by casting doubts in people's hearts.

For this reason, many so-called brothers infiltrate among the people of God to sow discord, doubt, fear, uncertainty – in short, a series of doctrines well cooked up in hell in order to confuse the mind of those who are beginning in the faith.

Abraham's fullness of conviction was so magnificent that even though he was in leadership position over Lot, which gave him the right to choose the best for himself, he simply ignored his privilege and allowed his nephew to choose first. And there, one more time, Abraham proved his trust in God.

He knew he would be blessed wherever he set the sole of his foot, even if the worst piece of land fell to him. That's because he knew that the blessing wasn't in what his eyes could see but in what his heart determined wherever he went.

His priceless treasure was invisible to the eyes of the world. Even if he were in the middle of the desert, with this treasure, he could make an oasis appear. In the next chapters of his life, we can verify that this is exactly what happened.



LOT'S VISION



CHAPTER 4

And Abraham said to his nephew: *“Is not the whole land before you?”* (Genesis 13.9) Lot was very rich materially but very poor spiritually.

A person's spiritual condition can be measured by his eyes. The physical eyes are always lustful, as we can see in the case of Lot. Consequently, if a person is led by his eyes, his choices will probably be wrong.

If a person looks with spiritual eyes and ignores the physical, then his choice will be right. The spiritual eyes are the eyes of faith and understanding, whilst the physical eyes are the eyes of emotion and feelings. The decisions made by the eyes of faith go right. The decisions made by the eyes of emotion go wrong.

Abraham always walked with the eyes of faith. That's why he gave Lot the right to choose where he wanted to go,

whilst he preferred to keep walking with the eyes of faith. And so it was, that he told Lot: *"If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go the left."* (Genesis 13.9)

In others words, "don't worry in leaving the worst part for me, because I will make it be the best".

"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar." (Genesis 13.10) So, what kind of eyes led Lot in his decision? Physical or spiritual?

Zoar was an extremely beautiful city, but too small to support Lot and his properties. At first, his choice was absolutely right, because as the physical eyes always provide a quick answer to the heart, he chose what he thought to be the best.

But later he saw that his choice was disastrous, because he ended up losing his wife, his riches, and worst of all, the company of the man of faith and God's friend: Abraham.

Lot's family was reduced to two daughters. And forced by the circumstances, he ended up in a cave with them. He committed incest sleeping with his two daughters and gave birth to two peoples, the Moabites and the Ammonites, who later became enemies of God's people.

Lot's spiritual eyes no longer worked and he was led by his lustful eyes, in other words, by his greed, and he went on pitching his tents even as far as Sodom (Genesis 13.12). In other words, when we lose our spiritual vision, our physical eyes start directing our lives.

But the physical eyes cannot see God, let alone His will. Therefore, they always lead us to evil. That's what happened with Lot! His physical eyes led him to Sodom, and the Bible says that the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord (Genesis 13.13).

The importance of walking with our spiritual eyes, or the eyes of faith, is because with them we can see God in everything we do. And as we live our lives that way, we are able to flee from evil. But when we allow our physical eyes to guide us, we automatically ignore the Lord, who is next to us, and seek to satisfy only the instincts of our flesh.

That's why the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, teaches us saying: *"...we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."* (2 Corinthians 4.18)

Everything started to go wrong for Lot when he separated from Abraham. Until then he had a family, he was rich, he was safe and happy, because he walked in the light of his uncle. When he separated from Abraham, he lost his spiritual vision and remained only with his physical vision.

The same happens to those who abandon the faith: they lose their spiritual vision and start walking with the eyes of lust, greed and envy. Conclusion: they go on falling, falling, until they get to Sodom, just as happened with Lot. And once there, they start losing everything: family, health, money, in short, every little they had. And then they end up living in a cave, unhappy with life, discouraged, without faith, without hope and without perspective.

Lot could have refused his uncle's suggestion and tried to convince him to let him stay and re-establish the

relationship with him. But certainly, Lot was tired of being led around and saw the great opportunity to become free from someone who apparently did not have a definite destiny.



THE TWO NATURES



CHAPTER 5

Whilst Abraham symbolises those who are born of the Holy Spirit, Lot symbolises those who are born of the flesh. The born of the Spirit have a divine nature and that's the reason why they live in total dependence of their faith in God. Those who are born of the flesh, however, live on the dependence of their five senses, especially the eyes and the ears.

Even though Lot lived with Abraham for many years and was blessed because of him, he did not learn the lessons of faith in having a spiritual vision.

When he chose for himself the whole plain of Jordan, it seemed to him that the long-awaited opportunity to become independent from Abraham had finally come. According to his carnal vision, he no longer needed his uncle.

They had gathered a lot of property, so much so that they could no longer live in each other's company. Well, they might not have been able to live together but they could surely be neighbours, living next to each other. If Lot had a vision of faith, he would have never severed his dealings with Abraham, as was in the case of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1.1-22).

Ruth was a Moabite woman, whose religious principles were pagan. When she lived with her mother-in-law, Naomi, she saw in her a woman of God, in other words, she saw God in her. That's why she clung on to Naomi.

When both of them became widows, it was only natural that each of them return to their own people. And that was Naomi's suggestion to Ruth, but Ruth's answer was remarkably surprising⁽⁶⁾. Lot should have dealt in the same way with Abraham!

When a person has the nature of God, he understands that his life depends on the supernatural faith. In other words, he does not make decisions based on a physical vision, emotion or feeling that are natural to the human will. Rather, he makes his decisions based on a spiritual vision; in other words, according to the will of God.

That is how Abraham lived his life from the moment he was called. He did not give in to his own will, otherwise he would have never accepted the challenge of sacrificing his only son, the son of his old age. He proved his belief materialising his faith in obedience to the voice of God. His faith was not based upon physical visions, like Lot's. That's where we see the existence of two distinct natures: the nature of God and the human nature.

The Lord Jesus had both natures: divine and human. By His divine nature, He had a father but no mother; by His human nature, He had a mother but no father. Besides being the Son of God, He also was the Son of Man.

As the Son of God, He walked by faith; as the Son of Man, He lived subject to human circumstances, but He subjected His flesh to the fulfilment of the Jewish law.

The Bible writers record His human side when they talk about His tiredness, His hunger, His thirst, His crying, His revolt, His compassion, in short, everything that any human being feels. On the other hand, His resurrection characterises the greatest sign of His divinity.

Abraham naturally had a human nature, but with one particular detail: he lived by the supernatural faith, which identified his divine nature. Though he was not born of the Spirit, he believed in God. And that was enough to justify him before the Lord. And that's exactly what makes the difference between 'Christians' and Christians! It's no use just believing in the Lord Jesus in theory as Lot did. He certainly believed in the God of Abraham. But when that belief was put to the test, he reacted like an unbeliever. He preferred to follow the vision of his physical eyes, and head towards the plains of Jordan, instead of believing in the God of his uncle and remaining under his leadership. The result: he ended up alone, without a family, poor and confined to a cave.

Those who are born of God have God's nature and manifest it naturally in their daily lives. Some decisions they make may even be wrong, but as long as their intention is right, the Lord will use them and make them right. That's what the apostle Paul teaches us when he says: *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to*

those who are the called according to His purpose.” (Roman 8.28)



GOD MAKES A COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM



CHAPTER 6

Whilst Lot proceeded towards the plains of Jordan, Abraham went to live in the land of Canaan. The Lord appeared to him there and said:

“Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever (...) Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.” (Genesis 13.14-17)

Under the Lord’s instruction, Abraham now had to look northward and southward and eastward and westward. But his physical vision was based upon the vision of his faith, that is, the spiritual one.

In obedience to the Word of God, Abraham moved his tents and went to live by the terebinth trees of Mamre, next to Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord (Genesis

13.18). The word *mamre* means riches and the word *hebron* means fellowship.

The terebinth trees of Mamre, next to Hebron, represent the Garden of Eden, or the Garden of God, because it is the garden of wealth and fellowship with God. This place was so important that Abraham built an altar to the Lord there and offered sacrifices. And besides that, he prepared his and Sarah's tomb in the very same place.

Upon hearing the news that his nephew Lot had been taken captive with his family and possessions, Abraham immediately gathered his three hundred and eighteen men, who were fully able, born in his house, and pursued and overtook the four allied kings (Genesis 14.14). He rescued Lot and all his family, recovered the goods and still freed the five kings who had also been taken captive.

It's good to note that the men Abraham counted on to help him in that battle symbolise those who are born of the water and of the Spirit. Only they have the power and authority to conquer and overcome. One who is born of the water and of the Spirit is worth more than a thousand who are born of the flesh.

After such a great victory, Abraham feared some kind of retaliation from the other peoples in that region, probably because they might have thought he wanted to start an empire of his own. But in a vision, the Word of the Lord came to him, saying: *"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."* (Genesis 15.1)

Whoever is born of the Spirit and believes, can replace Abraham's name in this verse with his own. I can hear God speaking to me in my most difficult moments: "Do not be

afraid, Macedo, I am your shield, and your exceedingly great reward”.

This divine comfort was extraordinary for Abraham in those moments. But even then, he was still worried about not having an heir. And, for the first time since the day of his call, Abraham dared direct a complaint to the Lord. Up until then he had only listened to God, but when he saw his soul under affliction, he cried out: *“Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”* (Genesis 15.2)

Ten years had passed since his departure from Ur with the divine promise in his heart, in the faith that one day he would embrace his own son born from Sarah. But that had not yet happened. However, once more the Lord reaffirmed His promise saying: *“This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir. Then He brought him outside and 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.’ (...) 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.’”* (Genesis 15.4-7) And again Abraham dared speak to the Lord, asking Him: *“Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”* (Genesis 15.8)

Until this moment, Abraham had heard many promises from God, but had not yet received a concrete sign of them; and God knew that. God also knew that Abraham wanted more than words. Yes, what he really wanted was a sign that he would take possession of that land!

No doubt Abraham expected fire or a lightening bolt coming from heaven in order to confirm God’s promise. Many people are deceived by demonic signs, thinking that they

come from God, as in the case of Job's servant, who thought that the fire that came from heaven and consumed Job's servants and flocks had come from God.

But the sign that God would fulfil all His promises to Abraham was the covenant He made by means of sacrifice, because this is how faith is materialised. Abraham had materialised his faith in God by sacrificing his land, his family, his household, the house of his father, and by obeying God's Word and departing to an unknown land.

He left his land, his relatives and the house of his father, materialising his belief. Now it was the Lord's turn to materialise the promise He made, consuming the sacrifice.

A few years later, God tested Abraham's faith once again asking him to materialise his faith in Him through the sacrifice of Isaac.

Many centuries later, God Himself materialised His love and His promise by sending His only Son to save mankind, and once again He used sacrifice as an instrument to do it.

Therefore we see that sacrifice is indeed painful but it is the shortest way to conquer an objective. If God Himself had to sacrifice His Only Son to prove His belief in the salvation of many, how much more must we do the same for Him! A living faith demands sacrifice. Without it, faith does not work.

The first apostles, as well as most of the first disciples, had to sacrifice their lives on behalf of their Christian faith.

Therefore, we see that the Abrahamic faith, developed through the course of history, was marked by sacrifice. Sacrifice is the sign of faith, and God Himself gave a clear sign through sacrifice.

When Abraham asked for a sign that he would indeed take possession of Canaan, the Lord answered him and said: *"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 (...) there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying: 'To your descendants I have given this land...'"* (Genesis 15.9-18)

This passage reveals two points of the highest importance to our faith today:

1. The traditional form of a covenant in those days:

In biblical times, a pact between two people was sealed this way: they would sacrifice a certain animal, dividing it in two parts. They would lay down the parts facing each other, leaving a passageway between them. Each of the two parts of the animal represented one of the parties in the covenant.

Next, the two people would walk in between the two halves of the animal. In doing so, they would affirm before each other that if they did not keep their part in that covenant, the other person would have the right to do to them the same that had been done to the animal. Abraham prepared the sacrifice for God to walk through. Could God have made a covenant with Abraham if Abraham had not prepared the sacrifice? No. Whoever wants to enter into a covenant with God must fulfil His demands, that is, to make their sacrifice.

And isn't that how it is in a secular covenant, when both parties must sign an agreement describing their duties and

responsibilities? And isn't it a sacrifice to fulfil all those obligations?

But some may say: the Lord Jesus has already made a sacrifice! Of course! But this does not mean that we are exempt of making our own! Jesus Himself said: *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."* (Matthew 16.24; Mark 8.34; Luke 9.23)

What is to deny yourself if not a sacrifice? And what is the cross? Isn't it a symbol of sacrifice? Well, we must face this truth and not try to follow in the footsteps of Jesus according to our own ideas.

No one is obligated to sacrifice! But sacrifice is the price of conquering salvation day after day. Those who are against sacrifice are surely living in sin, because they try to live a Christianity that is easy and uncommitted with all that is pure and true.

God is Spirit, but He had to materialise Himself in order to give Abraham a sign. Only after Abraham presented his sacrifice, did God come down in the form of a burning torch and a smoking oven.

We must remember that the same happened to the prophet Elijah: only after he prepared the bull and prayed, did the fire from the Lord fall to consume the sacrifice.

In the consecration of the first temple, built by Solomon, again a similar thing happened: after Solomon offered one thousand burnt sacrifices and prayed, fire came from God and consumed them.

Whenever a person presents his sacrifice to God, there is a direct answer from Him in the form of a spiritual fire. This

spiritual fire is when the person is covered with such an absolute assurance, that not even all the hosts of hell can remove it from his heart.

The fact is that only those whose faith is on fire make sacrifices. And this is not something that comes from the outside in, but rather something that comes from within the heart of an individual.

2. God passed alone between the halves of the sacrifice:

Apparently, the covenant of the Lord with Abraham was one-sided, because the biblical text does not talk about Abraham passing between the parts of the animal.

Indeed, on that day a covenant was made *by* God with Abraham, and not *between* God and Abraham. Later on, after Abraham's beloved son had been born, then it was his turn to pass between the halves of the sacrifice and fulfil the ceremonial ritual of making a covenant with God. That was so because what did Abraham have to lose at that point when God passed by Himself between the halves?

Therefore, we can say that the covenant between God and Abraham happened in two stages: the first when God passed alone between the halves of the animals that had been sacrificed, and the second when Abraham offered Isaac on Mount Moriah.

On that same day, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham. In other words, on the same day, therefore, Abraham took possession of that land in his heart.

We could say it is as if he had become "pregnant" of the promise, not only of the land, but also of his much-desired son, for when the Lord said to him "*To your descendants I have given this land...*" (Genesis 15.18), He was making it

clear that children would be born of Abraham and would take possession of that land.

His descendants came initially from Isaac and Ishmael; and then came other children from his other marriage (Genesis 25.1), following the death of Sarah.

From Ishmael and the children of other marriages came the Arab nations; from Isaac came the nation of Israel. And both are indeed the owners of the entire Middle East, thus, fulfilling the promise of God to Abraham: *"for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendents forever."* (Genesis 13.15)



ABRAHAM MAKES A COVENANT WITH GOD



CHAPTER 7

We have already looked at the event of God's covenant with Abraham. On that occasion, only the Lord passed in between the halves of the animals since Abraham was not yet prepared, in other words, he still did not have his best to sacrifice. Isaac had not yet been born.

We must also mention that a covenant not only required the ceremony of walking in between the halves of the animals, but also that there should be an exchange between the parties. When both parties entered into a covenant, it was common, for example, to exchange belts between them.

There were two things on the belt: a sword and a bag of gold or money. The sword represented protection, and the bag of gold represented a person's possessions. The exchange of belts meant that one party was responsible for the protection of the other, and vice-versa. It also symbolised that both parties received rights to each other's

properties. In other words, covenants in the past worked just like a marriage under a joint-property system. In fact, the institution of marriage was originally based on such biblical covenants.

The birth of Isaac happened because the Lord visited Sarah and renewed her physical condition. The divine intervention to bear a child happened only in Sarah. Abraham, in spite of his 99 years of age, was still strong and healthy and capable of making his wife, who was ten years younger than him, pregnant.

It's important to note that God only fulfilled His promise to Abraham after 25 years. And at no time did Abraham disbelieve or become discouraged from waiting on the Lord for the fulfilment of His Word, even though Sarah had long passed her natural time to conceive.

I believe that God never does anything too soon or too late. Certainly, He had a plan that would be realised at the right time. Abraham would be a father of many nations, so he should serve as an example to all his sons in the faith. This could have been the reason why the Lord apparently took so long in the fulfilment of His promise. He wanted to teach him and his descendants the secrets of a victorious faith.

Abraham should be remembered as a symbol of perseverance and patience, which naturally characterised his genuine faith. He believed against the natural circumstances, since Sarah was barren, and besides, her time to become a mother had already passed. In other words, he believed when everything seemed lost.

The apostle Paul says that Abraham, *contrary to hope, in hope believed* (Romans 4.18), and it was exactly this quality of faith that made him a just man before God. This kind of

faith is what really glorifies God! To believe when everything seems to be lost.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews, directed by the Holy Spirit, says: *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*(Hebrews 11.6)

Often, we think and act as if faith were an instrument of immediate solutions, some kind of “magical lamp” that can be rubbed by the hand and produce a genie to satisfy all our wishes. But no! We cannot be so childish to the point of thinking of faith as a tool for immediate answers. Sometimes it happens, but not every time!

God shows this clearly through the example of Abraham. The son God promised him came only 25 years later. But there are Christians who demand immediate answers, as if God were their servant and they were lords.

The Bible gives us examples of faith bringing an immediate answer, as seen in the ministry of the Lord Jesus and the apostles. However, this was not always the case, because there are also other biblical examples when faith only brought the answer when everything seemed lost. And Abraham was one of them!

Ten years had gone by since he moved to live in the land of Canaan. And whilst Abraham kept his spiritual vision, the vision of faith, expecting the answer from God, Sarah remained restless in her physical vision. Because of this physical vision, she kept seeing other women, whose husbands did not have the same anointing as her husband, giving birth to children as if they were women of God. These women were, in fact, wives to unbelieving husbands,

perhaps even wicked, who had nothing to do with God. This situation made Sarah very unhappy, anxious and insecure.

The great danger in the marriage between a person who has a spiritual vision and another who has a physical vision lies exactly in the influence that the second usually has upon the first. The one who has the vision of faith wants to move ahead and go forward because he believes, but the second one always has ulterior motives, which tend to tie up the first one.

Abraham and Sarah were already living in Canaan, the land God promised to them; their riches kept multiplying, but her natural time to become a mother had already expired and still the son of the promise had not been born. How could she keep believing in the promise, when all the circumstances were contrary to her faith?

Many people today have also been like Sarah: they have been in the church (Canaan) for a long time and they haven't yet seen the fulfilment of God's promises in their lives.

Naturally, in the unbelief of their hearts, they try to take a shortcut like Sarah, trying to force a situation provoked by the desires of their physical eyes. Sarah was fuelled by the ambition of wanting to become a mother at any price, even if that meant that she would have to share her husband with another woman. She chose her own way instead of remaining firm in the vision of faith given by the Word of God.

Such people become burdened with their personal whims, their doubts, fears, anxiety, insecurity, in short, a series of evil feelings that are contrary to the supernatural faith of God.

Sarah walked according to the physical vision; she gave ear to the emotions of her deceitful heart and submitted to the whims of her ambitions. Influenced by Sarah's words, Abraham slept with Hagar and Ishmael was born.

That child was not born by the will of God, but by the natural action of human will. There was no divine intervention whatsoever in the birth of that child, or even God's approval on the matter.

On the other hand, God did not impede Abraham from having intercourse with Hagar, but respected his will, even though it was contrary to His! But even then, God did not curse him, or void His promise to him. Because of Abraham, the Lord blessed Ishmael, who also became the father of a great nation.

Fourteen years after the birth of Ishmael, Sarah would give birth to Isaac. But later on, the seed of Abraham with Hagar would bring much sadness and misfortune not only to Sarah but also to the nation of Israel, born out of her son Isaac.

I am sure that if Sarah were alive today to see all the tragic events that have happened in the Middle East, she would curse the day in which she influenced her husband to lie down with Hagar.

When Abraham turned 99, the Lord appeared to him again, saying: *"I am Almighty God; walk before me and be blameless."* (Genesis 17.1)

God had already appeared to Abraham many times, but this was the first time He revealed His majesty and greatness through the expression "I am Almighty God". The Lord also revealed Himself to Moses saying: *"I am who I am."* (Exodus 3.14)

Even though Abraham and Moses were extremely special people, God did not reveal His name to them, but told them only what He was: the Almighty.

The privilege of knowing God's name came only to Joseph, when the angel of the Lord appeared to him⁽⁷⁾. Joseph, Mary's husband, was the first to know the name of God.

In the priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus confirmed that His name is exactly the name of His Father⁽⁸⁾.

Why only after a long time had passed did the Lord identify Himself to Abraham as "God the Almighty"? Let's put ourselves in Abraham's shoes and try to understand why God appeared to Him and identified Himself in this way.

Twenty-four years had gone by, and up until that moment, the ownership of the land of Canaan remained only a promise - its fulfilment had not yet happened. The same was true of the birth of his son, Isaac. His wife, who remained barren, was already 89 years old and therefore physically unable to bear children.

To the natural eyes, Abraham had every reason to give up his belief that one day he would have children with his beloved wife. He had every reason to doubt the divine promises.

Certainly, the Lord must have seen some kind of natural apprehension in Abraham's heart, for the devil must have brought a mountain of doubts to his mind at that time.

I can even imagine the devil telling him: "See how long it's been and until now you've received nothing. Your wife is still barren, she is old, and how could she give you a son? Impossible! It's against nature!"

In this interim, the Lord appeared to him and said, “My dear Abraham, I am the Almighty! Nothing is impossible to me!”

This means that Abraham had to make a choice: he could either receive the word of doubt, brought to him by the devil, or embrace the word of faith, which had already been determined by the Lord! Obviously, he was persistent in keeping to the word of assurance until the end. For this reason the apostle Paul said: *“Abraham, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’”* (Romans 4.18)

And this is exactly what has happened to many believers. They face many unfavourable circumstances: the adverse medical diagnosis, unemployment, bankruptcy, debts, their creditors, time running out – in short, everything their natural eyes see, their natural ears hear, and their heart feels, comes as a demonic avalanche to strengthen their doubts against faith in the promises of God!

But perseverance in the divine promises overcomes every demonic obstacle and surpasses every barrier. The Lord Jesus demonstrated this kind of faith when He raised up Lazarus from the dead. Not even the four days that had passed since he died could shake His conscience that God would do exactly what He, Jesus, believed in His heart. Not even death can neutralise the power of living faith in the Living God!

In those days, Abraham had no one to give him a word of comfort. There was no man of God preaching on the radio or TV, or even something to read, to motivate his faith. But, on the other hand, we must also say that there were no hard-headed Christians to cast doubt in his personal belief. It was

only a matter of believing or not believing! It was only up to him.

All Abraham had to sustain his faith in those days was the vision of the stars, which the Lord showed him. No doubt every time he looked at a star God's voice would echo in his heart, saying: "Do not fear, Abraham, I am with you!"

It was under these circumstances that the Lord appeared to him and said: "*I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.*"(Genesis 17.1)

In other words: "Abraham, don't pay attention to what your eyes can see and do not mind the circumstances, the difficulties or the impossibilities presented by the devil! Look to Me! There is nothing impossible for Me! Walk in My presence and be like Me! Be blameless!"

And the Lord said, "*And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.*" (Genesis 17.2) God had already made a covenant with Abraham when only He Himself had committed to fulfilling His part, since Abraham had not yet walked between the parts of the animals in order to finalise and establish the covenant. This probably explains the repetition of the promise: "*I will make a covenant between Me and you.*"

We must remember that in those days, when a covenant was made, the spoken agreement between the parties was sealed only when both walked between the parts of the sacrificed animal. And in the covenant with Abraham, God alone passed between the halves.

Thus, the Lord gave Abraham His Word, promising to give him everything that He had. And, if he failed to fulfil His Word to him, then Abraham would have the right to do to God the same that had been done to the animals.

“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. 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. 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.”(Genesis 17.4-8)

In this series of commitments made by God, three things draw our attention:

1. God mentions the word covenant three times.
2. God promised the seed.
3. God promised the land.

The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the people of Israel. And even though all of them failed, the Lord remained faithful to His promise. And, if the Lord was faithful to the patriarchs, under a covenant made through the blood of animals, imagine when this covenant is made through the sacrifice of His own Son! This understanding is at the very heart of the Christian faith! When a person is really born of the Holy Spirit, he has the most absolute assurance that nothing can keep him out of what was promised to Abraham, his father in faith!

The Holy Spirit says through Paul: *“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”* (Romans 8.32)

The apostle is affirming here God's willingness to give us all things. When there is a true and sincere covenant with God, everything that belongs to Him starts belonging to the person with whom He has the covenant, and vice-versa. But the price involves making and keeping this covenant with Him through the sacrifice made on Calvary.

Now, the words of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Mark 14.24 become clearer. When He was eating the Lord's Supper with His disciples, He said: *"This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many."* Covenant is a marriage under the system of joint-property, where everything belongs to both of them equally. The same is with God! If we are partners with Him, then everything we have belongs to us both! Truly, God has more pleasure in blessing us than our needs really require.

Everything, everything, every little thing that was promised to Abraham is also a right and promise to those who have made a covenant with God. And that's the reason why the Holy Spirit said to the Christians in Galatia: *"Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham."* (Galatians 3.7) In other words, children of Abraham are all those who have the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God sacrificed, as a witness of the covenant with the Father.

Of course this understanding of faith should not be limited to a simple theory. Many think that the simple fact that they accepted the Lord Jesus as Saviour is already enough. No! A thousand times no! Accepting Jesus includes abandoning sin, sacrificing our own will, turning away from evil, in short, practising the Word of the Lord Jesus. It's necessary to take up the cross and follow Him day after day. This is indeed very difficult to practise, especially by those who resist and don't want to live in the truth!

In chapter 17 of Genesis, we have at least three main points that are extremely important:

1. The covenant – the covenant is the basic principle of a relationship with God. People may even receive benefits from their faith in God, but they will never enter into His Kingdom if they don't make a covenant with Him.

Many people have thought that accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour is already enough. Abraham also accepted the promises of God, but He had to pay his price to take possession of them.

We notice, therefore, that there is an exchange of actions when one enters into a covenant with God. The Lord gave the promises, but in exchange, Abraham had to believe and show that he really believed, when he obeyed the Word of God.

It's interesting that God's promises only become real in our lives when our faith is also real, in other words, they only materialise in our lives when we respond with a faith that is materialised as well.

Therefore, it's no use believing just in theory because, if faith is theoretical, then the promises of God will also be theoretical in our lives.

The circumcision of the foreskin was a painful sign, imposed not only upon Abraham, but also upon every male child among his descendants.

The foreskin is one of the most sensitive parts of the male body. It is located on the external part of the male organ. This means that God established the cutting of the most sensitive and intimate part of Abraham and his male descendants.

God knew very well that this procedure would be extremely painful, especially for Abraham, a 99-year-old man. There was no anaesthesia in those days, much less suitable surgical instruments, as we have today. Even so, this was the physical sign demanded by God to mark His covenant upon the bodies of men at that time.

This meant Abraham would feel a huge amount of pain for a few days, but he would never forget that day. The day when his faith in God was materialised through a really painful sacrifice.

Nowadays, the circumcision is done, under the New Covenant, in our hearts, through the baptism in water. There is no pain involved, that is, there is no physical pain involved. But there is the pain of denying oneself day after day.

What used to be enjoyed as pleasure before, such as adultery, prostitution and other impurities, now must be denied because of the faith.

Of course, many have resisted the idea of making any sacrifice because of their faith. They try to justify themselves saying that Jesus already made the sacrifice. He did indeed! The Lord has done His part – now each one of us must do his. That's how the covenant between God and Abraham was, and that's how the covenant between our Lord Jesus and us is!

2. The seed - the main purpose of a seed is to multiply. And its multiplication depends only on the seed itself and on the land on which it falls. If it falls along the way, it will be eaten by the birds; if it falls on rocky soil, where the soil is scarce, it will not bear fruit, because it will quickly sprout and die; if it falls among thorns, they will choke it. But if it

falls on good soil, then it will multiply. This last case refers to those who hear and practise the Word of God.

It's an interesting fact that both seed and soil are God's creation. But it's the seed that has the choice; it must decide either to die or to remain alive. The good soil of God remains in expectation of that decision.

When God said to Abraham "I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly", certainly God was considering Abraham as the seed itself. In other words, the Lord Himself would be the Sower; He would use Abraham as a fruitful seed, in order to multiply him into many nations, many kings, in short, into offspring so numerous, that it would be impossible to count them. They would be as the stars in the sky, and as the sand on the seashore.

But, for a seed to multiply, it has to die, to become dry and empty of itself. Otherwise, it is impossible to become fruitful. The Lord Jesus taught us this when He said: *"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain."* (John 12.24)

In order for God to multiply Abraham, He needed him to be a seed dead to itself, in other words, he had to become a servant, clay or sheep. In short, he had to be humble enough to allow himself to be led like a child by the hand of God.

We must not be mistaken: whoever wants to be a vessel in the hands of God needs to become soft clay, dead to their own will. Whoever wants to be a servant of the Lord Jesus must make himself a hearer and doer of the word of the Lord, without any desire to please himself.

Whoever wants to be a sheep of the Loving Shepherd needs to walk along with the flock. Finally, whoever wants to be a modern day Abraham must have the same character, same disposition, perseverance, faithfulness and obedience, just as Abraham did in the past! To do that, they must sacrifice their own selves, deny their will and, above all, consider themselves dead to their own lives and to the world.

The Lord concludes this teaching by saying exactly the same thing: *“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”* (John 12.25)

This means that the seed can only remain for eternity when it dies and falls on the soil of God. If a man makes himself a seed in the hand of God, he has no reason to fear: he shall always be fruitful.

The character of Abraham’s wife wasn’t that great, because she instigated him to have a child with her servant, and later on instigated him again to send her servant away with the child. She also lied to the Lord when she said that she had not laughed when she heard Him say she would have a child within one year. Even so, the Lord’s faithfulness and mercy accompanied the ‘seed’ of Abraham. And because of him, his wife Sarah was blessed in the end.

3. The land - Canaan was the land promised to Abraham. To the human eye, the physical space that the children of Israel occupy today is nothing compared to what was promised to Abraham!

Even though Abraham’s descendants, both Israelites and Arabs, occupy the whole of the Middle East, what God promised to do and has fulfilled is far beyond what our physical eyes can see. We can only see it with the eyes of

faith, that is, with our spiritual eyes. In fact, Abraham's Canaan is the Kingdom of God that belongs to His children, the much-awaited Kingdom that the Lord Jesus preached about.

I remember that the Jews claimed to have Abraham for their father because they knew that everything that was promised to him was promised to them also. But the Lord Jesus questioned them on this⁽⁹⁾.

The seeds born out of Abraham are his children in the faith, like Isaac, and not the children of the flesh, like Ishmael. The apostle Paul summarises it when he speaks to the Christians in the churches of Galatia, saying: *"Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham."* (Galatians 3.7)



THE BIRTH OF ISAAC



CHAPTER 8

“And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.” (Genesis 21.1,2)

The Lord’s visit to Sarah was not the same as the Holy Spirit’s visit to the Virgin Mary. Isaac’s conception happened through natural intercourse between Abraham and Sarah. The Lord’s visit to them was only to enable them physically to bear a child.

The Lord not only healed Sarah of her infertility, but He also transformed her organs, making them as fit as those of a young woman. The same happened to Abraham. On the other hand, in the case of Mary, the Holy Spirit directly intervened placing the divine Seed in her.

Another extremely important point we must note is God's faithfulness in fulfilling His Word, regardless of the circumstances. Those who want to learn how to live by faith must understand this one thing: we must never judge the facts by our physical eyes; instead, we must use our spiritual eyes, or the eyes of faith.

The apostle Paul teaches us this lesson, saying: *"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*(2 Corinthians 4.18)

The promise made to Abraham started to unfold after twenty-four years. It had been on the way all along, although to the human eye it took a very long time to arrive. But it did arrive!

God's Word is always fulfilled, sooner or later. But we need to be patient and persistent to await its fulfilment. The same thing applies to the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Those who don't keep watch as they await His return will be left behind.

Why doesn't faith always bring the expected results? Simply because the physical vision blinds the spiritual vision! When one focuses his attention on the visual facts, chances are that he will be overwhelmed with the information of this physical world we live in. And a person who is overwhelmed has no assurance of himself.

The laws that rule this world are contrary to the laws that rule God's world. The laws of the world are laws of reason, whilst the laws of the Kingdom of God are the laws of faith. So, those who live by faith must not subject their spiritual vision to the physical vision!

Think it's difficult to live by faith? Not for those who are born of the Spirit! The reason why many Christians live in failure is because they have never been born of God. And because they have never been born of God, they are always paying attention to the information brought to them by their physical eyes. The information gathered by a physical vision is always contrary to faith. Abraham believed against hope, in other words, he believed in the invisible, in the impossible. But he was married to someone who believed in the vision of her physical eyes...

God visited Sarah not by her spiritual merits, but by Abraham's. He kept his faith in the promises of God, even when everything, humanly speaking, seemed to be lost. Abraham was indeed a quality seed.

The Word of God is unfruitful to those who live by a physical vision. The physical eyes show the unfavourable facts to the eyes of faith, and thus a conflict starts within the person. Should he listen to the information given to him by his physical eyes, or should he listen to his spiritual eyes? Only he can decide for himself!

"And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him - whom Sarah bore to him - Isaac." (Genesis 21.3)

The Lord Himself named Abraham's son with Sarah (Genesis 17.19), just as He did with Abraham's son with Hagar. The difference was that Hagar was already pregnant with Ishmael and found herself in great affliction when she received instructions regarding the name of the child. Ishmael means "God hears". Obviously, the name Ishmael came out of the attention God gave to that servant who suffered so much injustice under her mistress.

Thus, God showed His great sense of justice and great hatred for injustice done to anyone. As for Isaac, his name had been chosen one year before he had been born, under much better circumstances. Isaac means “laughter, joy or pleasure of the soul”. The meaning of his name expressed very well what his birth would represent.

It’s interesting to note that throughout the Bible the Lord only named three people before they were born: Ishmael, Isaac and Jesus. The name of Jesus means, among other things, “the Lord saves”.

On the day that Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great banquet. And when Sarah saw that Ishmael mocked Isaac, she immediately made a decision to send him away with his mother. She firmly rejected the idea of her son sharing the inheritance with the son of the slave girl.

Certainly, Abraham did not agree with Sarah on that decision, because Ishmael was also his son. And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham’s sight. He had to make an extremely difficult decision but didn’t have the courage to do it. That was when the Lord appeared to Abraham once again⁽¹⁰⁾.

God not only comforted Abraham, but also assured him that He would take care of his despised son, just because of who he was! How great our God is! Just, full of compassion, merciful and Who promises to take care of the seeds that are born out of the true seed!

And such was Abraham’s trust in the Word of God that he got up in the middle of the night, took some bread and a skin of water and put them on Hagar’s back, he then gave her the boy and sent them away.

He probably did that immediately after God gave him that guidance. He did not give them gold, animals or any other property, but only bread and water.

The bread and water would, no doubt, sustain them only for a few days as they wandered in the desert. But Abraham kept the promise of God in his heart that He would meet all their needs, just as He had promised. God had given him His word!

Humanly speaking, Abraham could be considered a heartless man. He was sending his own son, Ishmael, and his mother, Hagar, to a desert that was extremely hostile and dangerous. The Bible says that they left and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba (Genesis 21.14); in other words, with no destination, no perspective, nothing. All they had was bread and water that would last a short time.

Who could do such a thing? Only someone who was “pregnant” of a faith, of an assurance; in short, someone who was possessed by the most absolute conviction that the Lord God Almighty is great and faithful enough to fulfil His Word! Halleluiah!

It’s the Holy Spirit Himself who puts this assurance in the hearts of those who are born of Him! On the other hand, imagine Hagar and Ishmael! Even though she was a servant, her son was her master’s son too! This fact gave her, in some way, a sense of security in relation to the future.

Ishmael mocked Isaac because he enjoyed the same liberties of a son. But suddenly, it seemed like the ground had opened under their feet. They lost everything: house, food, security, future, inheritance, respect – in short,

everything! They were reduced to absolutely nothing, except some bread and a skin of water!

Many people are living the same drama today. There are many questions in their hearts and, among them, is perhaps the most painful one: does God really exist? And if He does, why does He allow me to go through so much disgrace?

“And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, ‘Let me not see the death of the boy.’ So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, ‘What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.’” (Genesis 21.15-17)

Whilst there was water, she and the boy kept wandering in the desert; but when the water ran out, affliction and despair took over. This means that as long as we don't hit the bottom of the pit, we can usually bear the difficult situations. We try to get out of them with any strength we have left. It is only when we hit the bottom of the pit and realise we have no more recourses, that we start to depend on God.

That's exactly what Hagar did. To avoid seeing the death of her son, she put him under a shrub and went and sat down across from him. She lifted up her voice and wept bitterly; in the meantime, Ishmael cried and called for his mother. Certainly, God took notice that Abraham's seed called out from the earth and, because of him, the boy's voice reached the throne of God.

God heard the voice of the boy but answered his mother, saying: *“Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation. Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink.”* (Genesis 21.18,19)

One question quickly comes to my mind: was that well already there or did God open it in that moment? I am sure it was there from a long time ago. The problem was that Hagar’s distress was so great that she simply could not see it! And the same thing happens to most people! The solution to their problems is right in front of them, but they can’t see it. Their circumstances make them blind and cloud them with doubt. And doubt brings fear, worry, anxiety and, finally, depression and despair.

Maybe they had better ask God to open their eyes for them to see the well, instead of asking God to give them water. I don’t believe God wants to simply relieve our thirst or solve one problem. Rather, He wants to make us a fountain of solutions.

Open our eyes, oh Lord God Almighty! This should be our continuous prayer, because if we can have our spiritual eyes permanently open and attentive, we will see the solution to each and every one of our problems! Unfortunately, many prefer to count on their physical vision rather than on the vision of their faith. That’s when they run into the greatest difficulties in the deserts of life.

Yes, the well was right there, next to Ishmael and Hagar, but they only saw it when the Lord opened their eyes. Notice that God opened their eyes only, not a new well! And that’s how we’ve seen God working; He opens our eyes and gives

us direction. But it's up to us to get up and follow in that direction, or not.



GOD PUTS ABRAHAM TO TEST



CHAPTER 9

Throughout the history of the great heroes of faith, we see a common thread that links them: their faith was tested to the limit. The fact is, God will not use anyone unless their faith has been proved and approved first.

It's like in the medical profession. No one can be considered ready to practise Medicine without first having their technical knowledge proved and approved, otherwise, patients' lives will be at risk.

In the Work of God there is no difference. The person who offers himself to serve God must be absolutely sure of his faith, in order not to run the risk of failure and put the name of his Lord to shame. The greater the work the Lord has for a servant, the greater will be the test he will have to go through!

If the Lord Jesus Himself was led by the Holy Spirit to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, in order to be ready to accomplish the work of salvation, so how much more His servants!

And knowing how tough a test He would have to go through, the Lord deprived His body of bread for forty days and forty nights. He weakened His physical body to strengthen His spiritual body, in order to overcome.

Abraham, as the father of faith, had to be an example to all who wanted to depend on God through faith. He went through no less than three extremely difficult tests. The first was when he left his relatives and his country towards an unknown land.

In the second test, the Lord demanded perseverance from him in order to fulfil the promise of the covenant. And Abraham endured that test for twenty-five years. Finally, the last and most difficult test would come six years later, the one that went against every common sense and reason: the order to sacrifice the only seed he had with Sarah.

Isaac was Abraham's everything. From the time he got married, Abraham focused all his efforts into having a son and heir. When he left his relatives, his father's household and his country, he had received God's promise concerning the son. Therefore, for more than sixty years at least, Abraham kept waiting for the arrival of this son.

His arrival into the family represented a dream come true, his future generation, the only heir of all his estate... And now God was asking of him his most prized possession. Was God being fair?

God knows everything, and no doubt He was well acquainted with Abraham and his quality of faith. He knew

what his reaction to this challenge of faith would be. Then comes the question: If God knew how Abraham would respond, then why did He test his faith?

First of all, God had a plan for Abraham. To make him the father of faith, he had to become the example of faith and go through such experiences that could identify the true and living faith.

God knew the entire future of humankind; He knew that people would use their faith for good and for evil. He also knew that the devil would use faith as an instrument for moral and spiritual corruption. So, how could He distinguish the true and pure faith from the twisted faith committed to the kingdom of evil?

Everybody has faith! Evangelicals, Catholics, Spiritualists, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, in short, all peoples have their faith. Some believe in only one God and others believe in many gods. But which faith is the true one?

As a starting point, the true faith is the one that brings benefit to those who have it. But why is it that everybody has faith and yet they get no benefit from it?

Satan knows that the human being is born with faith; but if his faith lacks intelligence, then this faith is blind. And blind faith makes its victims fanatics. Therefore, faith can be used as an instrument of victory or of defeat. Victory for those who use it with intelligence, according to the Word of God; defeat for those who use it without any biblical foundation.

That's one of the reasons why God put Abraham's faith to the test: to leave a clear example of trust, determination and, above all, of perseverance.

Abraham showed with actions of obedience to the Word of God that his faith was not theoretical. On the contrary, he materialised his faith through actions, apparently foolish to the human mind, but not to the God in whom he trusted.

The second reason was that Abraham needed to put his own faith to the test. The Holy Spirit once brought this word to the church in Corinth, saying: *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves."* (2 Corinthians 13.5)

It is a fact that many people have been disappointed or frustrated in their faith because they confuse emotion, enthusiasm or natural feelings with the true faith. Faith is first and foremost an assurance of what we hope for; the highest conviction of things not yet seen.

The assurance that the Lord Jesus exists, for example, is a conviction of faith. But this assurance is based upon the Word of God only, and not upon a physical vision! Even so, there are many who still insist on saying: seeing is believing. But for those to whom the "arm of the Lord" has been revealed, faith has a completely different meaning. It means: believing is seeing!

Abraham not only believed in the promises, but he applied his belief in them in order to see the greatness of God. Truly, he needed to prove to himself that he believed, and thus leave a living testimony of what to do in order to get benefit out of faith.

The Bible leaves no doubt about God's intention to put Abraham to test: *"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'"* (Genesis 22.1)

Notice that God's true servants always answer humbly: Here I am!

"Then He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.'" (Genesis 22.2)

Quite a few points in this conversation between God and Abraham draw our attention:

1. God did not ask Abraham to give his son Isaac. God gave him an order. As a true servant, Abraham obeyed without questioning. He understood that his son Isaac, as well as everything else he had, was not his property.

A servant knows that not only his life, but everything, everything that supposedly belongs to him, is in fact only a loan from God to him. And the Lord's order was that Abraham should give Him the child back as burnt sacrifice.

2. God knew that Abraham had two sons: one from his wife and another one from her servant. However, God regarded only the son born of his wife. Ishmael was no good for the sacrifice because he was not the son of faith, but the son of doubt.

Sarah did not persevere in the faith of her husband and, above all, she doubted that one day she could become a mother. And in order *"to obtain children"*, to use her own words as in Genesis 16.2, she insisted with Abraham to lie down with her maidservant. Therefore, Ishmael could never be a perfect sacrifice.

We must not forget that the animal offered in sacrifice could not be defective. When Aaron offered sacrifices for himself

and for the people, God ordered him to take perfect animals only, that is, without blemishes or defects.

In fact, the animals themselves symbolised the Person of the Lord Jesus. That's why He is called the Lamb of God that takes the sin out of the world. But in order to take sin away, He had to be without sin, in other words, without defect.

3. God knew Abraham's heart inside out, and so He knew how much he loved Isaac. In other words, the Lord ordered him to offer exactly what he loved the most in life.

4. Just as when God first called him, again the Lord did not tell him exactly where to go for the sacrifice, except that it would be in the region of Moriah.

There were many mountains and hills in the land of Moriah, and the sacrifice could not take place on just any of them, but only on the one that the Lord would show him. The great detail here is that the mountain of sacrifice was shown only when Abraham arrived there with his offering.

"So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."
(Genesis 22.3)

Certainly, Abraham never mentioned anything to Sarah about God's order. He knew that if he had told her about it, she would certainly create problems. If he had done it, probably the story would have been different.

Through this, Abraham teaches us that faith is strictly personal and it must be considered and exercised with a lot of wisdom. God had spoken to him alone; therefore, he, and only he, had the obligation to obey.

If God wanted Sarah to share in that sacrifice, He would certainly have spoken to her, but it was up to the main seed to prove once again that it was dead indeed! It wasn't for Sarah or the servants or even the "the little seed" to know about it.

Abraham was so sure of his faith that even though he was three days' journey away from the place of the sacrifice, he still got up early in the morning and prepared everything in his house. He himself cut the wood instead of telling the servants to do it!

Couldn't he use the wood that he could find there in the land of Moriah? Or even pick up the wood he found along the way? Of course, not! The sacrifice had to be perfect, carefully prepared in advance by Abraham himself.

It wasn't an adventure! It had to be carefully planned and be ready in such a way that when he arrived at the appointed place the sacrifice would be made.

The Lord Jesus also taught us about being prudent in our faith when He said,

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it - lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began and was not able to finish.'" (Luke 14.28-30)

Having provided himself with the wood, the oil for keeping the fire burning for three days, and the knife, Abraham took Isaac and two servants and went to the appointed place.

"Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay

here with the donkey; the lad and will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.'" (Genesis 22.4,5)

He was so sure that the boy would be raised back from the dead after being sacrificed, that he promised his servants they would come back after having worshipped. And besides, the servants would not even understand what was about to happen between God and him.

"So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife and, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' Then he said, 'Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.' So the two of them went together." (Genesis 22.6-8)

The Bible text shows clearly that Abraham kept his faith secret all the time. Not even Isaac knew that he was the sacrifice! And this dialogue between the two, instead of provoking in Abraham emotion or pain, or even making him give up his duty, it was cancelled by the word of faith: God will provide, my son!

Many people have kept going for long periods on the journey of faith, but when they are caught by surprise with words of emotion coming from the human heart, they end up failing in their faith. The devil knows how to deceive people with the feelings of their heart.

The greatest industry in the world is the industry of illusion, the industry of lies! Movie producers are not really worried about the costs of making a movie! They invest fortunes in

emotion because they know the more they invest, the greater the financial returns will be.

Unfortunately, it's not only in the industry of emotion that the devil is busy! How many marriages have been made based only on emotion? How many people have ruined their lives simply because they listen to the deceitful feelings of their heart?

It seems that the devil tried to use this appeal when he inspired Isaac to ask his father about the lamb. But as Abraham was absolutely sure in his faith, he was not shaken. He resisted that attack against his faith with another word, saying, "God will provide for Himself, my son!" This is the quality of faith that pleases God! And this is exactly what we need to learn from Abraham! We need to learn to resist the feelings of emotion, enthusiasm, in short, all the deceptions of the human heart, and listen only to the voice of faith. The voice of the heart is the voice of human feelings, but the voice of faith is the voice of God. It was this voice that guided Abraham to victory! Now we can understand better when the Lord says, "*Now the just shall live by faith.*" (Hebrews 10.38)

In other words, "Whoever wants to be just before Me and find the fullness of life, must obey My voice, and My voice is the voice of faith in My Word!"

Abraham resisted the voice of his fatherly feelings in order not to expose and put all God's promises at risk. He had already resisted the familiar sentiment in relation to Sarah, since she had no idea what he was about to do with Isaac.

We can now understand better the meaning of our Lord Jesus' teaching when He said, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children,*

brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14.26)

If a woman wants to be a disciple, then she must replace the word “wife” in the text above for the word “husband”. The entrance into the Kingdom of God requires total denial⁽¹¹⁾.

I can imagine God summoning all the heavenly beings to follow, step by step, the actions of Abraham’s faith – from the moment he got up in the middle of the night and prepared for the sacrifice until the moment that he arrived at the appointed place. Before offering his sacrifice, he built an altar.

Abraham had no idea that the whole ceremony of that sacrifice had a much greater meaning than the pain for the loss of his son. The chosen mountain was Calvary itself; the altar symbolised the Only God; the wood symbolised the cross and Isaac tied to the altar symbolised the Lord Jesus crucified.

When Abraham raised the knife to slay his son, the tip of the knife certainly pierced God’s heart⁽¹²⁾.

Abraham’s determination to obey God’s voice was beyond doubt. When he was about to let down the knife into the body of his son, God was quicker and called out his name twice, in order to stop the sacrifice.

Of course God could raise up Isaac back from the dead, but He preferred to spare him from being killed. The important thing was to see to what point Abraham would obey His voice! His obedience characterised his fear of God. Solomon said, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”* (Proverbs 1.7)

Many believers have despised the fear of God and remained in sin. They think that, since God is love, in the end He will let them all in through the door, even though they are unclean.

Yes, God is love, but we must not forget that He is also justice. It's not enough to be faithful only in tithes and offerings. We must also sacrifice the desires of our flesh and keep our hearts clean from every feeling of grudge and other similar things.

Through Abraham's example, God could prove to the world that it is possible to live in the world and yet remain in the fear of God.

"Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided.'"(Genesis 22.13,14)

The answer Abraham gave Isaac when they were going up the mount was prophetic. Abraham had told him, *"The Lord will provide for Himself, my son, the ram for the sacrifice"*. And as he said, so it was. God provided the lamb for Himself to replace Isaac.

That mountain became known as "The Lord Will Provide" – not only to Abraham, but also to everyone who accepts the Lord Jesus as their substitute lamb. That mountain came to be the mountain where God provided the substitute for all humankind: Mount Calvary.

Because of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, God hears every cry and meets every need through Him.

That mountain became a natural altar. No one can go to God without passing through it, in other words, without sacrificing their Isaac. Hence why it is said, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided".

On this mount, the Lord Jesus gave His life to rescue those who accept Him as Lord and Saviour. Through Him, the blind can see, the cripple can walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, the hungry are filled - in short, a new Kingdom came to be established in the hearts of those who are humble in spirit. In it, there is provision for all human needs, including eternal salvation.

"Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, 'By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son - blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.'" (Genesis 22.15-18)

Text References

(1) "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14.26,27)

(2) "Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you eat the labour of your hands, you shall

be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.” (Psalms 128.1-4)

(3) “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (...) Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (...) And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17.6,11,12,26)

(4) “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16.15-18)
Let’s see also Matthew 10.8; 28.19,20.

(5) “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has

done this.’ The servants said to him. ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’” (Matthew 13.24-30)

(6) “But Ruth said: ‘Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.’” (Ruth 1.16)

(7) “But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’” (Matthew 1.20,21)

(8) “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” (John 17.6,11,12)

(9) “They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from

God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father.' Then they said to Him, 'We were not born of fornication; we have one Father - God.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.'" (John 8.39-44)

(10) " But God said to Abraham, 'Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed.'" (Genesis 21.12,13)

(11) "Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son." (Genesis 22.9,10)

(12) "But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' So he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.'" (Genesis 22.11,12)



Bishop Edir Macedo was born in a small city in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, called Rio das Flores, in 1945. At a very young age, he missed something that would fill his heart's emptiness: a real encounter with God.

That great encounter happened in 1963, which changed his life completely.

After being filled with the Holy Spirit, he felt a strong desire to share this experience with everybody.

He does not write based on theories he learned. His communion and experiences with God as well as a happy and solid marriage are the main important aspects that make his writings lead many people to a better life.

His books are strongly recommended to all those who are seeking a direction for their lives.



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