

Abraham – desiring HaShem above all else

Good ideas and consequences...

We all feel that we have enough common sense to live fairly successfully. We are quite proficient at negotiating our way through the various complications of our society. We ensure that we have the correct training for our chosen professions; we investigate the skills we need for any new undertaking like parenting or retirement. We protect ourselves, and our property; against the threat of crime and most of the time we are quite good at succeeding. Abraham was not unlike us. He too had certain skills and natural talents that helped him negotiate his way around the society in which he lived. It was these talents and skills that came to the fore in Abraham's interpretation of God's call.

Abraham had been called and given two promises

1. That his descendents would be so numerous that they would impossible to number...
2. That the Lord would give his descendents the land of Canaan.

Both promises were dependent upon one thing – Abraham having a son before he died. The only problem was that Abraham took it upon himself to solve the problem for God.

Gen 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar;

Gen 16:2 so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

On one hand, one cannot help but feel the desperation in Sarai. She sees her husband so caught up with this call of God. She sees him investing so much of himself in a promise that is dependent upon an heir and so she makes a suggestion. Abram, himself, is fairly desperate. In the past he had been willing to trust God but nothing had happened. You can almost hear him saying, "Let's not get over spiritual about this – let's use some common sense." And so he makes a decision that will have consequences for himself and for his descendents for thousands of years.

Good ideas are never a substitute for hearing from God.

Ask yourself how much of your life is governed by good ideas instead of hearing from God. The outcome of Abraham's good idea was that he had an heir, but he was an heir human effort and not faith.

Heb 11:6 And 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 seek Him.

This is why God rejected Ishmael as the heir of the promise – because he was conceived without faith.

Gal 4:28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

By the way, Abraham learnt the lesson. When the kings wanted to share the spoil of battle with him he refused because he did not want to fall into substituting the blessing of God for human effort once again.

Gen 14:21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."

Gen 14:22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath

Gen 14:23 that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'

As a church that is seeking to do God's will we must constantly ask ourselves whether our decisions are based on mere common sense or on the leading of God.

Strong enough to follow – weak enough to lead

In God's kingdom most things are upside down. It takes strength to live by faith and to follow God. Our leadership must be done in weakness.

The greatest leader of the Old Testament is described like this;

Num 12:3 (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

The kingdom principles do not change in the New Testament...

1 Cor 1:26 Friends, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

1 Cor 1:27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

1 Cor 1:28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are,

1 Cor 1:29 so that no one may boast before him.

2 Cor 13:4 For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.

In the kingdom of God only those who are weak have power that is manifestly of God. Paul describes this way of living as walking by faith – not by sight. (2 Cor 5:7) Not having the whole picture we are forced to depend on God and to return to Him for His leading.

Walking in the Kingdom

The principle of weakness is not limited to our own abilities and the way we understand our identity in Christ. We hold on to God Himself not the signs of His calling.

Once Abraham had been given the heir upon which all the promises related to his calling depended God came and tested him.

Heb 11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,

Heb 11:18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

Heb 11:19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

Heb 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

The writer to the Hebrews describes Abraham as trusting God to raise the dead when he was told to sacrifice Isaac. What are the Isaacs in your life? What are the things that are so sacred to you that you would not lay them down?

If we are going to seek God we must desire Him for Himself above all things. Not the buildings nor the furniture, not the project nor the practice, not the worship nor the sermon – nothing but God Himself.