



Genesis 17-18

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God;..." (El Shaddai) "...walk before me, and be thou perfect." (blameless) (Gen.17:1). The last time God spoke to Abraham, he was eighty-six years old. There has been an intervening time of thirteen years. When he was eighty-six years old, he was complaining to God that, even though He had blessed him with great wealth, he had no heir to leave the wealth to. His chief servant, Eliezer, was the one who would be in line to inherit all the wealth that God had given to him. God had said to Abraham, "I'm your exceeding great reward," and Abraham had said, "Yes, but, I don't have anybody to leave it to except my servant, born in my house." The LORD had said that Eliezer would not be his heir, but one from his own body would be the heir. Then God took Abraham outside and showed him the stars and said, "So shall thy seed be." Abraham believed God and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Immediately after this, there was a lapse of faith in Abraham's life. He took Hagar, the Egyptian handmaiden of Sarah, to be his wife and she conceived and bore Ishmael. When she became pregnant, she began to despise her mistress, Sarah. Then Sarah tried to put the blame on Abraham, although she was the one who suggested it. Abraham told Sarah to do with Hagar what she pleased and she was driven out. Hagar started back to Egypt and met the LORD at the well called "Beer-lahai-roi." He sent her back to Sarah and told her to submit herself to her mistress. The LORD said that she would bare a son and his name would be called "Ishmael" and that he would multiply her seed exceedingly.

God is silent during a thirteen year period and then when Abraham is ninety-nine years old, the LORD speaks to him. God is speaking to Abraham again to inform him that Ishmael is not the child that He had promised to give him. God said He would give him a son through Sarah. In Romans 4:19, it declares: "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb." The indication was that Abraham had become impotent. The deadness of Sarah's womb is a statement of the fact that she had gone beyond the age of a woman bearing children. God waited until Abraham couldn't do anything about the promise himself. God didn't want Abraham trying to fulfill the promises in his own strength or capacity. He allowed Abraham to get to the place, where it was impossible for him to do anything concerning the fulfillment of the promise; it would take an absolute miracle of God for the promise to be fulfilled. God allowed him to get to the place of human impossibility.

Many times as God works with us, He does this very same thing to us. He allows us to come to the end of our resources or to that place of hopelessness, before He works. When God works, He wants the glory for what He has done. When He works in your life, He doesn't want you boasting that you have done this marvelous work.

Paul said to the Corinthians, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1Cor.4:7). We're so prone to take credit for God's work. We cry out to God for help and when He helps us, we take the credit for it. We're like Saul, the first King of Israel. When Jonathan, his son, smote the Philistine garrison in Geba, Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land and all Israel heard that Saul had smitten the Philistines. When we relate stories of the victories and goodness of God, we often put ourselves in it. It's because of "my" trust and "my" faith that it worked out. God honored "my" consecration. So, God lets us get into those situations where we are completely desperate, then He works and there is no way we can boast that we did it. The glory all belongs to God and He won't share it with man.

And so the Lord appeared to Abraham and told him that He was the Almighty God or El Shaddai. The word "shad" is breast in Hebrew and is the place of life and nourishment for the babe. So, God is telling Abraham that He is the place of his life and nourishment and that Abraham is dependent upon Him.

God told Abraham to walk "before" Him. We read earlier that Enoch walked "with" God. In Deuteronomy, God told Israel to walk "after" Him. In Colossians 2:6, Paul says, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye "in" him." There are four different prepositions used for the walk of God. Walking "before" God is walking in His presence, conscious that God is watching me, looking out for me, and caring for me. Walking "after" God is the position of the servant. When God tells Israel to walk after Him, He is actually telling them to serve Him. Walking "with" God, as Enoch and Noah, indicates that beautiful communion and fellowship as we walk with God. Walking "in" Him signifies that complete union and oneness that is ours with God. Christ in me, the hope of glory!

Walk before "Me," How? "...Be thou perfect," or blameless. God's ideal requirement for man is perfection and you wouldn't really expect anything less from God. I'm not surprised that God would require me to be perfect, but I would be shocked if He said to be slipshod or cruddy. That would not be in the keeping with the nature of God. God would not require anything less than perfection and you should always know that this is God's ideal for you, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect."

When Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, He again required the same thing, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt.5:48). When you tell me that God requires me to be perfect, I would say, "Thank you, but I can't." "I would love to, I have tried to, but I am far from perfect." "I would love to fulfill God's divine ideal, but I can't."

Sin has as its root meaning "missing the mark" and the Bible says all have sinned. A lot of people get upset when you say, "Well, you're a sinner, man," and they will say, "Just a minute!" "I'm not too bad." "I do what I can." "I help little ladies across the street." But, wait! What is the mark? It's perfection. Have you missed that mark? Is there anyone who can say, "I'm perfect?" Because man could not fulfill God's divine requirement, He sent His only begotten Son; who took our sins (our missing of the mark) and died in our place so that God's actual requirement for me now; because, I'm not perfect and could not be perfect, is that I believe in His Son whom He sent.

In the Gospel of John, when the people came to Capernaum seeking for Jesus, they asked Him this question. "Then said they unto him, What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." (John 6:28-29). So, God's actual requirement of me today is that I believe in Jesus Christ. By my believing in Him, God accounts me righteous.

Paul the Apostle said, as he talked about his past life and how he attempted to keep the law of God and his accomplishments as a legalistic Jew, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Phil.3:7-9). That "believing faith," in Christ, is the faith by which God accounts me righteous. Does that mean that God's giving up on you and that you'll never be perfect? No, the whole idea of walking "in" Christ is that now I might receive that power of the indwelling Spirit of God to conform me into the image of Christ and to bring me into that ideal requirement. as Paul the Apostle said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." (Phil.3:12).

Now, there are some people who believe in, what they call, "Sinless Perfection" and there are those who claim they have attained it. Maybe you come from that school and would say that you have attained "Sinless Perfection." I have talked to a few of these people and as I challenged them, they got angry with me. There went their "Sinless Perfection."

Paul said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil.3:13-14). Paul was pressing toward

perfection. So the LORD appeared to Abraham and told him that He was God Almighty, and to walk before Him blameless. The power, of walking before Him blameless, comes to us through walking "in" Jesus Christ.

Note that God told Abraham what He was going to do for him, before Abraham went out and did it in the flesh. God said He would give Abraham an heir and Abraham tried to produce it, by Hagar, in the flesh. God said the work of the flesh would not be the heir of the promise, but Sarah would have a child. So, you find that the flesh and the spirit were fighting against each other. The descendants after the flesh and the descendants after Abraham continue to strive with each other unto the present day.

Now, God is going to talk about what He is going to do. "And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly, And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee." (Gen.17:2-5). God inserted the Hebrew Letter "H" into the name of Abram and the letter "H" is made with the sound of breath. The word "ruach" means breath or spirit and so God inserted the spirit into the name of Abram.

As He changed the name of Abram to Abraham, He made a new covenant with him. The Covenant of Circumcision; whereby, the cutting off of the flesh signifying that Abraham should no longer walk after the flesh but that he might be a spiritual man and walk after the Spirit. So, the change of Abraham's name was very significant. In Changing Sarai's name to Sarah, God did the same thing. He added the "H" or the Spirit and thus God brought them into this new dimension of life.

"And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Gen.17:6-8). God is telling them all He is going to do for them. In Genesis 35, when God is dealing with Jacob, He tells him to go to Bethel and build an altar. There God appeared to Jacob and changed his name to Israel, which means "governed by God." The name Jacob means "heelcatcher" or "supplanter" or you might put it in the modern vernacular, "dirty, rotten thief." God reveals Himself to Jacob as God almighty (El Shaddai) as He did to Abraham in Chapter 17, verse one. Notice that God makes many of the same promises to Israel that He did to Abraham when He revealed Himself as El Shaddai and in both cases there was the change of name. The new name, in both cases, signifying a man of God or a man after the Spirit.

"And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant." (Gen.17:9-14). God established this covenant with Abraham. It was to be marked by circumcision, which signified not to live or walk after the flesh. The cutting off of the life of the flesh in order that you might live the life of the Spirit. God said if they would not have the rite of circumcision then they were to be cut off from being the people of God. You can not be a man of God and walk after the flesh. It is only as you walk after the Spirit that you are truly a man of God. In time to come, the child that was born was not considered a Jew until he was circumcised. You weren't a Jew by natural birth, but became a Jew the day you were circumcised. That was the rite by which you entered into national life. It indicates that you are to walk after the Spirit.

When we get to the New Testament, Paul begins to show the folly of trusting in a ritual. He says in Romans, Chapter 2, "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Rom.2:25-29). God is interested that your heart is after the Spirit and not after the flesh. Circumcision doesn't avail a man anything if he is not walking and living after the Spirit. If God accounts the walk after the Spirit as true circumcision, then it isn't the fleshly rite that does anything; therefore, the gentiles, who are not circumcised, are considered the people of God because in their heart there is that circumcision and walking after the things of the Spirit. It is a rite of the Jews by which they entered into the national life and became a Jew.

The sequel of circumcision in the New Testament is water baptism and the significance is the exact same thing. Water baptism signifies the death of the life after the flesh and a life governed by the flesh. There is the burying of everything that was done in that life of the flesh and the beginning of the new life in the Spirit. The resurrection and the newness of life in Christ Jesus to walk now after the Spirit as you come up out of the waters or out of the grave. And so God established the covenant of circumcision with Abraham. Later on, in the Book of Exodus, God almost kills Moses. We find Moses, on his way to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel, and with him are his two sons who had not been circumcised. There was an indication that his wife was opposed to it, but for the sake of the life of Moses she circumcised them and was angry about it. When the children of Israel came into the Promised Land, they had not all been circumcised and so, Joshua circumcised them before they came into the land.

"And God said unto Abraham, as for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." (Gen.17:15-16). Sarah became the mother of Isaac who had Jacob and Esau. Esau became the nation of the Edomites and Jacob became the nation of Israel.

"Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? (Gen.17:17). Abraham's laugh was not a laugh of doubt or unbelief. He was just overwhelmed with what God was saying to him. If it had been a laugh of unbelief, then God would have rebuked him as He did Sarah a little further on.

"And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen.17:18). Ishmael is about thirteen years old and Abraham is attached to him. God is promising another heir through Sarah. There is a possible intimation that Abraham is telling God that Ishmael is enough and to let him live before God. "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." (Gen.17:19). God told Abraham to call him Isaac or "laughter." Abraham was laughing because it seemed a funny thing that Sarah, at age ninety, should bear a child. God said He would establish an everlasting covenant with Isaac and his seed.

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee; Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." (Gen.17:20). In Genesis, chapter 25, we will read of Ishmael's descendants. There are twelve princes, even as there are twelve tribes of Israel.

"But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year, And He left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham." (Gen.17:21-22). God has finally given Abraham a time when his son would be born.

"And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought

with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him. And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him." (Gen.17:23-27). They established this covenant, with God, to be people that would walk and live after the Spirit, denying themselves to follow Him.

"And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre; and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground." (Gen.18:1-2). The three men suddenly appeared there, we don't know how. Abraham saw them and ran to meet them and he bowed himself to the ground or as the Hebrew text indicates he worshiped them.

"And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant; Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on; for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said." (Gen.18:3-5). It is the Eastern custom to show hospitality to their guests and so, Abraham is showing to these men the usual courtesy and hospitality.

"And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetch a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat." (Gen.18:6-8). These are angels and it is interesting to note that they are eating, in case you wonder if angels eat. They are able to take on the form of humans. They appeared to Abraham as three men, but it seems that they appeared suddenly. In the New Testament, it says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Heb.13:2). It could be a reference to this scripture, when Abraham is entertaining these three men.

"And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent." (Gen.18:9). Of course, in those tents, there was a compartment for the women and they had to stay on their side of the tent. There was also the living room where the man would entertain his guests. It is the same today in the Bedouin tents.

"And He said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life, and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind Him." (Gen.18:10). Sarah is eavesdropping on the conversation.

"Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women." Sarah had gone through the menopause. "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" Sarah didn't laugh out loud but laughed on the inside so they wouldn't hear her. But!!! The LORD heard.

"And the LORD said unto Abraham, wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Gen.18:13-14a). This is a tremendous question. Our problems usually stem from our limited concept of God. We often think of God as having human characteristics such as we have. This is called "anthropomorphic" concepts of God. Because I'm prone to think of God in terms of myself, my concept of God is limited and it is not a right concept. Thus it is reflected in my attitude of prayer and how I pray for certain things. There are somethings I have no problem praying for. "Do you have a headache? Fine I'll pray for you. If prayer doesn't work take an aspirin. Headaches aren't that much of a problem anymore. You've got Leukemia. You want me to pray that God will heal you. Wait a minute! The doctor said you've got two weeks! That's terrible. I feel sorry for you." Well now, Is it hard for God to heal Leukemia? Is that a tough one for God? "I've really got a tough one for you

this time God. All of the doctors have given up and I really don't know if You can come through." What am I doing? I am carrying man's limitations over to God. Here He's saying, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" As you really ponder on this question, you will have to come to the conclusion that there is nothing too hard for God. We need to remember that and pray with that consciousness.

When Paul prayed for the Ephesians, he ended his prayer by saying, "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." (Eph.3:20). So, there is nothing hard for God. He is able to do all things. That is the kind of God we worship and serve. That's the kind of God who reaches out to you for fellowship; so, that you, through that fellowship, might be enhanced and blessed.

"...At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh. And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way." (Gen.18:14b-16).

"And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." (Gen.18:17-21). There is an outcry to God in unrighteousness and here the LORD is going down to Sodom to investigate if the outcry which has come to Him is so. In Genesis the fourth chapter, God says to Cain, "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." (Gen.4:10). The outcry against Cain's horrible deed of killing Abel, his brother. Now the horrible deeds of unrighteousness in Sodom crying out to God. God knows exactly what is happening in Sodom, but he is dealing with Abraham so that Abraham knows that God is just and righteous; so He is going down to check things out.

"And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom..." (Gen.18:22a). There were three men but two were angels and the one was none other than Jesus Christ. Abraham is talking to the LORD face to face and we read in the New Testament that no man has seen God at any time. The word "Yahweh" is used in this passage and so the only conclusion you can come to here is that Jesus Christ is the "Yahweh" of the Old Testament.

"...But Abraham stood yet before the LORD. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee; Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen.18:22b-25). Abraham is interceding and it is an interesting position that he comes from. "You're the Judge of all the earth, LORD. Would it be fair for you to destroy all the righteous of the city along with the wicked?" This is an extremely interesting proposition that Abraham is making to the LORD and it has a lot to do with us today. God is soon going to come and destroy the earth. We are fast approaching, what is known in the Scriptures, as the Great Tribulation Period when God is going to judge the wicked. There are many Christians, today, who are taking the position that the "church" is going to be in the Great Tribulation; but, this is denying the justice of God. This very premise that Abraham is pressing with the LORD that it wouldn't be fair to judge the righteous with the wicked. The same is true of God's judgment that is coming. As He removed righteous Lot out of Sodom, so will He remove the righteous ones in His "church" out of the earth before His judgment falls. That's just in keeping with the principles and righteousness of a just God.

"And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." (Gen.18:26). You know, the sinners around you are having a free ride. It's because of you

that God's judgment has not already come. Sinners are blessed because Christians are there. For fifty righteous, God would have spared Sodom. That was probably a small percentage of the population. How many times God's judgment would have fallen if it had not been for His people being there.

"And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes;" (Gen.18:27). Abraham's humble opinion of himself. "Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous; wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And He said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it." (Gen.18:28). Abraham begins a form of dickering with the LORD until he brings God down to ten.

"And he spake unto Him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And He said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto Him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak; Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And He said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord; Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once; Peradventure ten shall be found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the LORD went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham; and Abraham returned unto his place." (Gen.18:29-33). In the next chapter we will see the conditions that existed in Sodom which called God's judgment upon it. What was happening in Sodom was the same thing that happened in New York today, San Francisco last week and West Los Angeles the week before. The same conditions which are happening around us today brought God's judgment upon Sodom.