**The Promises and Places of Abraham—II**

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, March 22, 2017

Our first session with Abraham brought a couple of new ideas to light. First was the extent to which Abraham came from a very intensely pagan place called Haran. Haran was the center of the moon god Sin and the temple to him. For at least two thousand years right up until the time of Christianity the crescent moon symbolized the religion of Haran. Many famous people including Roman Emperors went there to ask for blessing on their efforts.

When the Roman Emperor known as Julian the Apostate tried to take the Roman Empire away from Christianity and back to paganism in the late 4th century Haran was apparently the only city in the entire Roman Empire that officially mourned his death when he was killed. This provides another measure of the extent to which Haran was a deeply pagan city.

We noted that ISIS which is also connected to the “moon god” of Islam is centered within a hundred miles of Haran and operates under the same demonic influence. The devil comes to rob, kill, and destroy which also seems to be the mission of ISIS. Demons prefer certain places over other places. Babylon is nearby and is called a “haunt of demons” in Scripture. Haran would certainly have had a lot of demonic activity.

In spite of the paganism, Abraham served the Lord and was sensitive to his voice. His example is what gives us hope for ourselves in the spiritually dark and demonic place that the Northwest has become. With that brief summary of last week let us continue with Abraham in his promise and places.

It is worth noting from Genesis 11:31-32 that God apparently called Terah, Abraham’s father, to go to Canaan. “*31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.”*  I am not sure what happened to Terah. He might have gotten old and just couldn’t go any further but the text says that Terah and the family settled.Somehow or another the vision of the Promised Land gave way to settling for Haran. They had worshipped other gods before and Haran just seemed like a comfortable place. The great tragedy of too many lives is they settle for Haran when the Land of Promise lies beyond.

When Terah died, Abraham continued on in following God to the new land. We noted last week that Abraham built altars in all the key places of his life. To me that indicates that Abraham didn’t just have a spiritual beginning to his journey but he continued to nourish his relationship with God at all the key junctures of his life. As a result God blessed him.

Although Abram was blessed and called on the Lord, he was not immune to family difficulties and feuds. God did give him the grace to offer Lot the best choice of land.

*5 Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. 7 And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. 8 So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." 10 Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: 12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.*

As soon as Lot claimed his land and moved out God came to Abram yet again. In verse 7 of chapter 12 God promised to give Abram the land. Now in Gen 13:14-18 that promise is renewed just after Lot left Abram’s company to occupy the Jordan valley. God told Abram to look in all four directions. From the highlands of Israel about 12 miles north of Jerusalem he could see all the way to the Mediterranean to the west and into the hills of the East Bank of the Jordan in what is modern Jordan. Notably, he could also see into the Jordan valley from that place because he and Lot had just done so. The first five book of the Bible each affirm the promise of God to Israel regarding the land.

This statement by God to give Israel the land of Canaan is repeated multiple times. In Exodus 6:2-8 it figures prominently in the Exodus from Egypt. “*God also said to Moses, "I am the Lord. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. 4 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. 5 Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. 6 "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7 I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.'"*

One should note verse 4 of Exodus 6 where God promised the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “*I also established my covenant with THEM*.” That would exclude other children of Abraham such as Ishmael and Esau since they were not “children of promise.” Arab claims to the land based on Ishmael and Esau as sons of Abraham are thus not biblical.

The promises that God made to Abraham were consequential beyond the life of Abraham. 2 Kings 13:22-23 “*Hazael king of Aram oppressed Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz. 23 But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.* ***To this day he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence.****”* Notice that the promise of protection extended well beyond the lives of the principal recipients of the promise.

*14 The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." 18 So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord.*

Hebron would be Abram’s home base in the land but it was only a small portion of what God gave to him and his descendants. When his wife died, he bought a cave in Hebron for her burial place. That cave would serve as his own burial place as well as that of Isaac and Jacob and their wives with the exception of Rachael who is buried between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Being buried in a particular place is a sign that you have put down roots.

Today you can still visit Hebron. It is about 19 miles south of Jerusalem. So if Abram went from Bethel, 12 miles north to Hebron 19 miles south, he traveled 31 miles altogether. Today you see above the Cave of the Patriarchs a building built by Herod the Great. It remains in use today as both a mosque and a synagogue. The cave is closed. However, I interviewed for television a man who had been in the cave. There is a small Jewish community living in Hebron today surrounding by 215,000 Palestinians which makes it the largest city in the so-called “West Bank.”

In 1929 there was a massacre of the Jews living in Hebron at the time. Some years ago we visited the museum in Hebron that recalls that event. There I made a brief speech acknowledging the bad things that had been done to the Jews in that place and elsewhere and offered our apologies for their treatment. I made a presentation of about $2500 to the Jewish settlers there as a gesture of kindness and support from the members of Cedar Park. The Jewish spokesmen for Hebron was completely taken aback and was at a loss for words in how to respond. It was quite memorable.

There is presently a separation of the structure over the cave of the Patriarchs. One part is a mosque while the other part is a synagogue. This division of what is holy to the Jews reminds me of what will happen to the Third Temple in the time of the coming of the Lord. Revelation 11:1-4 “*I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. 2 But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. 3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."*

Back to our story of Abram, life continued on until Lot was taken captive. There was a battle with five kings of cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah aligned against four other city kings who defeated them and robbed their cities. “*11 The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. 12 They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom*. *13 One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. 14 When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.*

The first mention of the city of Dan in the Bible is Gen 14:8-21 during the time of Abraham. Dan is an iconic Israeli city. In fact, in describing the full length of Israel one says “from Dan to Beersheba.”

*17 After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20 And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. 21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”*

*Gen 14:22-15:6 “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 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.' 24 I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me — to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."*

*15 After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." 2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4 Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”*

Paul returned to this idea in Romans 4:1-3 “*What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about — but not before God. 3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*." Believing God is central and essential and a righteous act.

In our story of Abraham both Bethel and Dan figure prominently. They are also the two places where Jeroboam built the golden calves and set up shines of worship in opposition to the true worship God had ordained at Jerusalem. Jeroboam I, King from 922 to 901 B.C., had his capital at Shechem and religious centers at Dan and Bethel. In the Southern Kingdom, known as Judah, Rehoboam, a son of Solomon, was King from 922 to 915 B.C. 2 Kings 10:28-29 “*So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel. 29 However, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit — the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.* When Abraham went to rescue Lot he went well beyond Dan.

The promise of a son to Abraham and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are linked together in the Genesis narrative. Genesis 18:1-15 “*The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. 2 Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. 3 He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. 5 Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way — now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." 6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread." 7 Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 8 He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. 9 "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. 10 Then the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11 Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" 13 Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." 15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."*

In the account, Abraham then negotiates for the rescue of Sodom and Gomorrah but their sin was too great. It was not a lack of hospitality or violence that some mistakenly assume based on Ezekiel 16. Ezekiel 16:49-50 “*Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty and did detestable things before me*.” Leviticus 18:22 defines homosexual activity in this way “*Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable*.” Jude 5-7 makes very clear the men of Sodom did “detestable” things which were of a sexual nature. This is the classic definition of homosexual behavior in the Bible. “*Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home — these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. 7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.”*

Gen 19:23-29 “*By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 24 Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah — from the Lord out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities — and also the vegetation in the land. 26 But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. 27 Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. 28 He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. 29 So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.”*