

Christmas in the Home of Abraham?

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Every great truth of the Scripture that is given to us in full-blown flower in the New Testament is given to us in germ and in bud back in the Old Testament. And practically everything is given to us in the Book of Genesis. The remarkable thing about Genesis is this budding teaching concerning Bethlehem, the virgin birth of Christ, and His coming in the flesh.

As we consider the coming of Christ into the world, I would like to give you a new pattern of thinking relative to it.

His birth at Bethlehem was not the first time that He came and will not be the last time He will come. I want to try to show that the virgin birth of Christ was not something brand new that God suddenly flashed on the world.

Now how did God prepare mankind for the virgin birth of Christ? Well, in the Old Testament we read that the birth of Isaac was miraculous as was the birth of Samson and the birth of Samuel. Then in the New Testament we see that the birth of John the Baptist was also miraculous. Although each is significant, we will focus our attention at this time on the home of Abraham to see how God prepared the way, even there, for the coming of Christ at Bethlehem.

God prepared Abraham. That man knew a great deal more about the first coming of Christ than you and I give him credit for. The Lord Jesus Himself said,

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. (John 8:56)

And Paul, in writing to the Galatians, made this remarkable statement:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. (Galatians 3:8)

It says that God preached the gospel to Abraham! And we want to go back and trace that, if you please.

Who Was Abraham?

Abraham was the greatest man who ever lived – and that is according to the yardstick of the world, not only of the Word of God. First he is the most *famous*. More people have heard of Abraham than of any other man who ever lived. Three great religions stem from him today: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. There are multitudes, millions today, who have heard of Abraham but have not heard of the men who are familiar to us in this country.

The second thing we know about Abraham is that he was a very *rich* man – that, of course, is another yard-stick of the world today to indicate significance. Familiar names to us like Rockefeller, Ford, Getty, Kennedy would never have been heard of if they had not been millionaires. Abraham was all of these wrapped in one man in his day and generation.

The third yardstick with which the world measures a man is by his *generosity*. The generosity of Abraham is phenomenal. I wonder how many men you could find in this day as generous as he was. He was able to capture a confederate of kings in the East. He freed the king of Sodom and his allies, and the king of Sodom offered him all the booty of war. I suppose it would amount to millions of dollars. Abraham refused it:

And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich. (Genesis 14:22, 23).

Abraham says, “If I become rich, God will do it so He can get the glory.” He is a remarkable man. Earlier, when he had returned out of the land of Egypt with his nephew Lot, he permitted Lot to choose any section of the land that he wanted.

And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD....Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan... (Genesis 13:10, 11)

That was a beautiful spot in those days, but Abraham took what was left. Would you have been willing to settle for that? I don’t think I would have been. But, Abraham was willing to settle for that (see Genesis 13)).

Then there’s something else about this man that makes him one of the great men of the earth, but the yardstick of the world will not fit here. He was a man of *faith* – immediately you detect this in his life. Some of the small things that are said about him are the most remarkable. Listen to this:

And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. (Genesis 12:8)

Did you notice two things that he did? He pitched his tent and he built an altar. That’s the life of Abraham.

He pitched his *tent*. This man, Abraham, recognized that he was a pilgrim and a stranger down here. It is said of him in Hebrews 11:10 that he was looking for a city whose builder and maker was God.

Abraham never got so involved with this world that it ruined his testimony. Many Christians today are tied up with this world like a kitty in a ball of yarn so that their testimony, regardless of what they *say*, is not worth anything. It’s so obvious that what they say on Sunday does not jibe with the other six days of the week when they are out worshiping the almighty dollar. Abraham was not that kind of man. Oh, this business today of trying to build monuments and to make a name for oneself down here! The very man who pitched his tent is the man who is the best known of any man who ever lived, yet he never left a monument.

He built an *altar* – he worshiped – and the Canaanites saw that. What a testimony! That was a picture not only of worship but also of dedication to God. Abrahams life was a testimony of faith.

What Was Abraham’s Home Like?

Now let’s go to the home of Abraham, and I want to warn you immediately that it is not an ideal home. I was at a meeting some time ago when a man who is an outstanding Christian

businessman got up and gave a testimony which was really something! When he sat down, a man sitting next to me commented, “That’s too good to be true.” May I say that there are a lot of testimonies today which are too good to be true. In fact, they’re *not* true. Now Abraham would never have a testimony quite like that to give. To tell the truth, Abraham had a great deal of family trouble.

Abraham, though a man of faith, had in his life periods of omission, lapses in his faith. There were breaches in this man’s life, and most of the time it was in the area of the family. So we’re not looking at a perfect man. I don’t know about you, but I’m glad as I look at Abraham that I’m not looking at a perfect human being. If I were, he would have no message for *me* today, and I dare say that he’d have no message for you. But I believe this man has a message for both of us.

He left Ur of the Chaldees, a young man at the time, and he came to the land of Haran. God had called him to leave his relatives behind because we find in the Book of Joshua that they were idolatrous, and God wanted to get him away from idolatry.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee. (Genesis 12:1)

But Abraham at that time was not the outstanding man of faith that we customarily think of. He had to take Papa with him, and he took his nephew Lot with him also.

Then we find that immediately he is presented with a conflict and a contradiction right in his own home, his own family. There was a fact and a promise. The promise was God’s: “I will make of thee a great nation.” The fact concerned Abraham’s wife: “Sarah was barren.” You can see immediately that it posed a problem for this man.

Next we see him moving into the land of Canaan. He pitches his tent; he builds the altar – these are always his testimony. But then a famine comes to the land. God gives him no instructions to leave, but every morning Abraham would get up, push aside the flap of the tent, look out, and here come the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites, all of them going down into the land of Egypt. Finally one morning he says to Sarah, “Everybody’s leaving and I think we ought to go to Egypt, too. The Joneses have gone down and the Smiths have gone down. Let’s us go down.”

So Abraham and Sarah start out for Egypt, and immediately they get into trouble. Sarah is a beautiful woman, and Abraham starts thinking about it.

And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife; and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive: Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. (Genesis 12:11-13)

That was, by the way, the truth. She was his half-sister, really. It’s interesting about a lie. Do you know that sometimes you can tell the truth for the purpose of deceiving, and the truth is a lie? I know folk who will tell the truth in order to give a wrong impression. It’s generally a half-truth. “I saw Mr. So-and-So in a particular place.” Yes, you did, but you didn’t tell all the truth. There are some details connected with it that should have been mentioned. So, though really Abraham

told the truth, it was a lie and was told for the purpose of deception. It's the motive of the heart that God sees.

In Egypt Abraham acquired two possessions that produced severe testing for him later on. First was wealth. We are told that he became *rich* in the land of Egypt. When he returned to Canaan, his gain in livestock caused difficulty with his nephew Lot because their herdsmen began to fight over the water holes. There was so much controversy that finally Abraham said to Lot, "We'll have to separate."

Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. (Genesis 13:9)

So this fellow Lot beat it off to Sodom because that was the rich section and the place where the city slickers were. Lot wanted to be with them. Abraham took to the hills, the country that was not very rich. The point is that wealth produced a problem, you see.

The second problem possession concerns the Egyptian girl by the name of Hagar. She was Sarah's maid, and because Sarah was barren, she resorted to the custom of the day. Now that the Code of Hammurabi has been discovered, we know that anyone who was born of a servant in the home of Abraham would be his heir. It was Sarah's idea that Hagar would mother a child for Abraham, but God never approved of it. Out of that relationship, Ishmael was born. That is the sin of Abraham. Oh, my friend, if Abraham could be back in Palestine at this hour, I think he would weep because of that sin. The little nation of Israel has no right to exist in the minds of those Arabs who are also the sons of Abraham – as much sons of Abraham as the Jew – because they are Ishmaelites, sons through Hagar. The sin of Abraham, you see, didn't stop with Abraham.

When you and I commit a sin, it is like throwing a pebble into the water – the waves keep breaking on every shore. A young man said to me, "I'm going to live my own life and do as I please." I said, "I think that would be all right if you weren't going to hurt other people. But you are going to hurt your mother, you're going to hurt your father, you're going to hurt your wife, and you will ruin the lives of your children." We can do as we please, that's true, but we can't commit a sin that does not affect other folk. The tragedy is that Abraham's sin has been snowballing down through the ages. Don't say that God approved the sin of Abraham, my friend, God did not approve it. God recorded it so you and I could learn a lesson from it.

Now this boy who was born of Hagar – God blessed him because it was not his sin. God *blessed* Ishmael, don't you forget that. But he could never be accepted in the line that led to Christ.

God's Promise to Abraham

When we get to chapter 17 of the Book of Genesis, we come to what many people regard as the high point in the life of Abraham. There are those who feel that chapter 17 is the high point in the Book of Genesis, and there are some well-known expositors who consider Genesis 17 the outstanding chapter of the entire Bible! Although we have been calling him Abraham all along in this narrative, God changes his name from Abram to Abraham. We miss a great deal here if we do not pay attention to the meaning of the names. Abram means "high father," and Abraham means "father of a multitude." At this point, God appears to him and reminds him that when He called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, He promised him three things: a land, a nation,

and to be a blessing to all nations. Now God makes His covenant with Abraham, and this man believes God. Although He had believed Him before, there had been lapses in his faith.

I can imagine that during this time, some Hittite traders came by on their way to Egypt. One morning Abraham looked out and saw at his oasis some strangers who had camped there for the night; so he went out and introduced himself. Since the name Abram means “High Father,” he said, “My name is High Father.”

They looked at each other and said, “What is it, a girl or a boy?”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t have any children.”

“You mean to tell me your name is High Father, and you don’t have any children at all?”

“No.”

“How come?”

“Well, it’s this way. God has *promised* that He’s going to give me a son.”

“And at your age you really believe it?”

“Yes.”

And these traders rode off laughing.

Let’s suppose that several months pass and the traders come back. Abraham comes out, and when they see him coming they start laughing again, “High Father!”

He says, “That’s not my name anymore.”

“Oh? What is your name?”

“Abraham – Father of a Multitude.”

“You mean...” They look at one another and look at him and ask, “What! Twins?”

“No, I’m sorry. I still don’t have any children.”

They say, “You mean to tell me you changed your name from High Father which was bad enough, and now you call yourself Father of a Multitude?”

“I sure do.”

“On what basis?”

“God made a covenant with me. God promised that He’d give me a son.”

Now these folks would really laugh as they rode off. But do you want to know somebody else who laughed when his name was changed from High Father to Father of a Multitude? Abraham laughed also:

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? (Genesis 17:17)

What kind of laugh was that? That was the laugh of faith. Abraham said in effect, “God promised it, and though I don’t see how in the world it can come to pass, since God said it, I believe it.” Abraham laughed.

And in today’s world where there is so much pessimism we need that laughter of faith. I received a Christmas card from a dear friend. A lovely note was penciled but it concluded with such pessimism – “The world’s getting so bad...things are getting so terrible...nothing left now to do.” May I say to you, friend, we need the laughter of faith today in this world in which we live. Abraham, in the midst of circumstances that were all against him, *laughed* the laugh of faith.

Somebody else laughed too. Sarah laughed when three visitors came to see Abraham. May I say that one visitor was none other than the Lord Jesus, the preincarnate Christ.

And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. 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. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? (Genesis 18:9-12)

In other words, “What in the world are they talking about? Even when I was a young woman I couldn’t have a child. Now Abraham and I are old!” She laughed.

And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the LORD? 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. (Genesis 18:13-15)

Now what kind of laughter is this? I think it is the laughter that says, “This is just too good to be true!” Can you imagine what bitterness she had gone through in a day when it was a disgrace for a woman not to have a child? She had been ridiculed by Hagar, and I suppose Abraham had been somewhat disappointed with her. She had felt these things all through the years, and now that she is old she’s told that she will have a baby! It is a laugh of incongruity – it’s too good to be true! This just can’t happen to me.

May I say to you, my friend, that Mary the mother of Jesus had the same experience when the angel came to her the first time. Notice the similarity between Mary and Sarah.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? (Luke 1:34)

Do you know who was the first person who ever doubted the virgin birth? It was Mary. She was the first one who raised a question about it. Now listen,

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. (Luke 1:35-37)

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” was the message to Sarah, and the message now to Mary is, “With God nothing shall be impossible” – same message, if you please.

So we find that Sarah is promised a son. I turn to the fulfillment of it, and may I say that we are now coming to “Christmas Day” in the home of Abraham.

And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of

his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. (Genesis 21:1-3)

And do you know what the name Isaac means? It means laughter. There is joy in the home of Abraham because now he and Sarah can say, “Unto us a child is born.” The birth of Isaac was a miracle.

God’s Message to Abraham

I want you to consider three Scriptures with me. First the words of John the Baptist:

Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. (Luke 3:8)

I wonder if you get the impact of the message of John the Baptist. He is talking to these who are boasting they are children of Abraham, and in other words he’s saying, “Don’t you know that the ancestral line you came from is a line which God had to perpetuate by miracle, and that God today could raise up from these stones children to Abraham?” If they only knew it, John was presenting the One in their midst whom God had raised up, *virgin born*. Oh, the impact of the message of John the Baptist!

Then notice another Scripture found in Romans,

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. (Romans 4:19)

My beloved, may I say to you that the birth of Isaac was not only a miracle, it was not only an adumbration and type of the virgin birth of Christ, it was not only a preparation and type of Christmas, but the birth of Isaac was a resurrection, for the womb of Sarah was dead, it was a tomb, and God raised up out of deadness *life*! That’s when God first preached the gospel to Abraham – life out of death, if you please.

May I say that there came a day when this had to be worked out.

Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. (Hebrews 11:12)

The miraculous birth of Isaac pictures the incarnation, the resurrection, and the gospel.

There came another “Christmas Day” in the life of Abraham. God called him to take this boy who had been born to him, his beloved son, to the top of Mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice!

And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. (Genesis 22:9)

Abraham took Isaac up there and he lifted the knife to plunge it into the heart of this boy, although he didn't quite understand. The heathen round about him were offering human sacrifices, but he never imagined that God would ever ask for it. And you say to me today, "But Abraham didn't intend to go through with it." My friend, Abraham intended to go through with it, and do you know why? Because of the way that boy had been born. He reasoned like this: *I know that this boy came out of death. I knew the deadness of my body and I knew the deadness of Sarah's body, and yet God gave us this boy. If God tells me to offer Isaac, I'll do it.* Why? The New Testament explains:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called. (Hebrews 11:17,18)

Now God had promised that through Isaac the seed [Christ] must come.
Why would Abraham do it?

Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. (Hebrews 11:19)

Abraham had received Isaac at birth as a resurrection. He now receives him on the top of Mount Moriah virtually back from the dead. Isaac was probably thirty-three years of age when Abraham offered him up yonder on the mountain.

Remember that the Lord Jesus said:

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad. (John 8:56)

May I say to you that Abraham saw "Christ's day" at the birth of Isaac. He saw again "Christ's day" on the top of Mount Moriah. Abraham was given the gospel – the death and resurrection of the Son of God – through this boy.

Isaac brought laughter into the home of Abraham and Sarah. That's what Isaac was – laughter to those who had believed God. May I say to you that the most appropriate song we sing at the Christmas season is "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come." He came to bring joy. When the Lord Jesus Christ was born into this world, they called His name Jesus for He is the *Savior*. My friend, may I say to you He is also "Isaac" for He brought joy into this world.

It was a dismal day back there when Jesus was born. Caesar Augustus was on the throne. He was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. Actually, his name was Octavianus and he took the name Caesar – he had a right to it. The name Augustus was not a name at all but a title. When the senate submitted to him certain titles like king, emperor, and dictator, he was not satisfied. Instead he chose the title Augustus. It had a religious significance, and it was an attempt to deify himself. He was to be worshiped, you see. It was he who sent out the decree that all the world should be taxed. For years the critics said that there was no such taxing, but several years ago that tax bill was found in the temple in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. I have a picture of that actual tax bill that moved Mary down yonder to Bethlehem that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Those were days of darkness, of paganism, that settled down like a dense fog over the world, yet in spite of all of that, out yonder on the hillside to a few shepherds,

Lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy...

I'm bringing you Isaac, if you please, I'm bringing you laughter, good tidings of great joy...

...which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:9-11)

God's Message to Us

God sent His Son into the world to bring joy. He came at a dark, dismal time, and He brought light and life to mankind. Friend, today He can bring joy into your heart, and He can bring life into your home. Listen to the apostle John. When he was an old man, he wrote:

And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. (1 John 1:4)

And Peter, who knew something about suffering and about testing, wrote:

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:7-9).

My friend, He came almost 2,000 years ago into a world that was as dark as it is today. He came to bring joy into our lives. Do you have that today? Christ, the eternal Isaac, came to bring laughter to you, the laughter of joy.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!