

Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, February 25, 1973

Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (45:15)

The subject of the characters of Sarah and Isaac are wrapped up of course in the life of Abraham. We get the first reference, I believe, to Sarah in the 13th chapter of Genesis, but she must have been intimately acquainted with the subject of the 12th chapter, that is, of God's appearance to Abraham, when he appeared to him in glory, a glory that Abraham never forgot. And I'd just like to read the two references to Sarah, who we will speak of first, in the New Testament, for there are only two references to her.

In the 11th chapter of Hebrews we're told that, "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." [Hebrews] 11:11] That's the reference to the faith of Sarah.

In the Epistle of Peter, the first epistle, and the third chapter, in the fifth verse we read, "in this manner in the old time," that is in the Old Testament, "the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement." [I Peter 3:5-6]

The subject of Sarah, where she's mentioned in the Old Testament does not commend her to us, and is another example of how God never fails to balance things. If there is faith on the one hand, there are times of doubt on the other. And I believe we're all subject to that. And we remember that after God had given Abraham the wonderful unconditional promise that he would be a blessing, he would become great, he would be the father of a multitude, that nations would come of him, and that in his seed, although he was first told that it would be through him, all the nations of the earth would be blessed, which was an astounding thing to say, because when Abraham was tested, and offered up Isaac, as a result of that God gave him a reiteration of the promise that He had given him in the fourth chapter of Genesis, in which he told him that it would be in Abraham's seed that all the nations of the earth would be blessed. It's a remarkable thing, and that statement follows to Isaac and to Jacob, at a later time.

So that, from the Epistle of Galatians that comments on these promises, these unconditional promises, ??? that the person that the Lord had in mind, was in fact, when God appeared to Abraham and gave him these promises, he had his son in mind. This is the one, through whom all the nations of the earth would receive ultimate blessing. And of course that's not just ultimate, It's ultimate in one sense, and that is the ??? at the same time.

Now, we learn some interesting facts from the history in the early chapters of Genesis, that say that, that state, that when they left the land of Canaan, after having come the better part of a thousand miles from Ur of the Chaldees. I looked it up on the map this afternoon, and the one in the Scofield Bible seems give the best kind of map, shows that from Ur of the Chaldees, where Abraham traveled, a distance to Haran, where they stayed for an indefinite number of years, I don't think we can state how many years he was there. But he left Haran when his father Caleb died, and then proceeded down to the land of Canaan, ??? or approximately a thousand miles.

When you consider the state of the world at that time, and we know there was no great ??? in the earth at that time, men were more or less a law unto themselves, that Abraham and his family and the servants that he took with him made this trip, is just a marvel, that nothing happened to them. It shows that they were led of God, and Sarah must have had a part in this, although the rest of the Scriptures give it mostly to the faith of Abraham.

Sarah was Abraham's sister, in a way. She was the daughter of Abraham's father, but not of his mother. To save their lives, as they thought, although Abraham had this wonderful assurance of protection by God, for if he was to be the father of many nations and to be a blessing to mankind it certainly meant that he would live. He would not be able to do this, accomplish this, dead, so that there is a lack of faith. There is a famine in the land of Canaan and Abraham and his family, Sarah, and others, Lot too, and they went down to Egypt. And Abraham ??? as you can readily see, ??? matched by a period of doubt. They don't overrule this failure, and Sarah is taken into the household of Pharaoh, but not touched. And God praised the nation of Egypt so that Abraham was sent out, and the remarkable thing of it is that the Scriptures say that he went down into Egypt, which was correct geographically speaking, but the rest of the place it says he went up back to the land of Canaan and then he was reinstated in God's favor, because he offered sacrifice, it says that he went on.

And isn't that the way we are? When we fall we go down, when we're restored we go up. and then there's a chance for God to lead us along. And so the next incident that we're told about Sarah is that God had promised her a son. The time was long. When we consider what was told us about Sarah, a great deal of it can be read out of the life of Abraham, she was a part of Abraham's life, and therefore in fellowship with him, in communion with God, but when you think how little is actually stated of her life, there's 127 years, it's amazing how God does not satisfy our curiosity.

The Scriptures were not written for us personally. The Scriptures were written for the two purposes that are stated in Romans and Corinthians. Romans tells us that, "the things that were written aforetime were written for our learning" [Romans 15:4] That's what we ought to do. And in Corinthians we are told that the things of the Old Testament were written for our warning, for our admonition [I Corinthians 10:11]. ??? The positive and the negative: we can learn from both. And God has matched his word, given us the failures on the one hand, and the faith on the other hand, and we are to profit by this.

This is the grand purpose, I believe, of the Old Testament. I was speaking this afternoon about all the names, the names that the lady was speaking to me about she said how floored she was with them, and she would have to read them at least 20 times before she would even be able to pronounce them. But, I said that God has, especially in the names of the Israelites, there's a meaning to those names, unfortunately, I don't think we know very many of them, but each parent chose for their children appropriate names, I believe in proportion to the amount of faith they had at the time. So they'd be ??? names that had a divine meaning. And I suppose that in the day to come, when we're given full knowledge, we'll understand what those names mean, and how they fit in.

The time was long for Sarah, and the promise was not seeming to be fulfilled. In fact it was 25 years all told between the time that God gave Abraham the promise of the son, and the time that it was fulfilled. Now you know 25 years, when you speak of it like I'm speaking now, goes very fast. But if you're expecting something to happen for 25 years, the time goes very slowly. Sarah suggests to

Abraham, and it's surprising how Abraham took on the suggestion, suggests that in order to get this seed that God had promised, that he marry Sarah's handmaid, or as it says in other places, a bondwoman, meaning a slave. That's not a slave in the way we use it, ???, a person that has no rights; a slave I suppose, a bondwoman in that day had status and favored position.

Abraham acceded to this request and apparently did not ask God about it, for God would have told him that this was not the way. If he waited his time, it would come about. And isn't that the ??? our problem. We like to see things executed quickly. So God tests our faith. He doesn't expect that we're going to demand the fulfillment of a promise. He promises eternal life, and we all have it, we have the faith of it, we have the promise of it, but the eternal life that we have is in the incipient stage here; I believe that we will enjoy the fullness of it in eternity. I hope that no one will say now, or thinks that I am degrading, or saying that eternal life is not a present possession. It is, but we can enjoy it without any interruption in perfection in the day to come.

So Abraham marries this bondwoman, and the result is a son. And I suppose that Abraham thought this was the fulfillment of the promise. God had to assure him that this was not so. He must have had the assurance that it was wrong for him to have done this when Hagar despised Sarah, who was the means of her having this child, and Sarah it says dealt hardly with her and put her out of the house, and Hagar was rescued by the Lord as we read in one of the early chapters of Genesis. I'm sure all of us here know the incident, where God opens Hagar's eyes and she sees this well, and the boy's life is saved. And then she is told to go back and to submit herself to her mistress.

The years pass on, and God finally comes to Abraham and reveals himself then as the almighty God, and tells Abraham that he will have his name changed from Abram, I've not called Abraham anything else, by any other name because we're so used to it, but Abraham's first name was A-B-R-A-M, having a different meaning than Abraham, father of the multitudes. I think the Abram meant thy father. And also that Sarah's name would be changed from Sarai to Sarah; that's change of the last letter of the word from i to h. And Sarah means princess.

Then shortly after that we have the incident of the Lord appearing with two angels, all of them appearing as three men, visiting Abraham. This is one of the seven appearances that the Lord made to Abraham, and this time Sarah was not there. She was in the tent, apparently doing something, but could overhear the conversation. And the Lord assured Abraham that he would come at this time of life, and that Sarah would now have the son.

And Sarah, after so many years of doubting, so many years of wondering, laughed at it herself. And that was an incredulous thought, how could this be, I'm too old. She was almost ninety then, and Abraham was ten years older. The Lord said, "Why did Sarah laugh?" And she appeared and said that she did not laugh. The Lord contradicted her immediately and said she did. And that ended that incident. Abraham then went with the Lord and the two angels on the way to Sodom. And we have that wonderful ??? with Abraham interceding for Lot.

He was interceding for Sodom, but figuring that at least 50 people could be found there who were leading righteous lives and deserved not to be destroyed. And the Lord promised that. And then Abraham feared that it might not be 50 and he brought it down to 40, and so on down the line until he came to ten. And the Lord said he would spare the city if there were ten. A wonderful exhibition of the grace of God, acceding to Abraham's request in each instance, without any questions, without any ???.

And so I believe that is a picture of the grace of God. We don't have too many exhibitions of it in the Old Testament, but here is one: Sodom, the most wicked city on the face of the earth, and Lot a part of it. What a sad character he was. He knew what his uncle stood for, he had faith in God, he was a righteous man himself. Peter tells us he was a just man. And yet his righteous soul was vexed from day to day with their hearts of evil, [II Peter 2:7] and yet he went on with that city as a good, a respected man, that when it came to the time of his witness to them about the judgment to come, on the morrow, he was disbelieved, and they would have executed him.

Well the promise of the Lord finally came about when Sarah conceived, and I believe that is the time when this verse in Hebrews takes place. "Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and she considered him able to do what he had promised." All her doubtings now were gone, and she looked forward to the time when she would have this son. And her statement when the child was born was to give him the name that would be most connected with her. She had laughed at God, she had laughed at the Lord of glory, and now she was to be reminded of that. She called her son Isaac, which means laughter, a constant reminder to her of her unfaithfulness, of her doubting. of her fears, and of the ultimate plan to solve them.

Well the picture of Sarah that we get from the little that is told about her is that she was a ??? person, as I suppose all of us are on occasion. Given enough rope, we'll do just that. We'll exercise that which is a part of our nature, a part of our fallen nature. Instead of committing the case to God, asking for wisdom, Sarah threw her out, and would have let her die. God rescued her, and brought them back to life.

And she didn't seem to mind being dishonest on occasion, in fact it was on three occasions. Abraham got her to say that she was his sister; this was only partly true. And the Lord rescued him on both occasions. It's remarkable isn't it, that we can fail in the same way time and again, and yet the Lord continues with us. It's a part, I believe, of the educational process that we are in the midst of. Fear of God: we need to recognize that. God deals with us patiently, but there are times when he has to judge us. You know the apostle Peter says that "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it begin at us, what shall the end be of those that obey not the gospel of God?" [I Peter 4:17]

So God deals with us not only in grace but in government, and that's sometimes what we, I'm sure, all times we don't like. We do not recognize it, too, in that the government of God is established in the grace of God because it has an end to its end, it has an eternal purpose, and God is working in us that which the apostle Paul says in the first of Philipians "that he who has begun a good work in us will continue it, until the day of Jesus Christ" [Philipians 1:6]. So that all of the Lord's people are in the ??? of God, we are not distressed, we are not to worry, we know that we are in the ??? hand, and that all will ultimately come out for our infinite blessing.

So the types that the apostle Paul speaks of in Galatians, in chapter 4, although Sarah is not mentioned there, in place of her is mentioned Jerusalem. But if you take the fact that Hagar, in Paul's account in the letter to the Galatians, is that Hagar stands for the old covenant. Hagar was the one who brought forth the son that represented Israel under the old covenant, that is under the Law. Whereas Sarah is spoken of there as Jerusalem, is the mother of us all, the mother of those who have faith. Abraham being the father of the faithful, the father of those who have faith, because he is always listed in the

New Testament as the one who believed God without question, no questions asked, just believed him, impossible as it seems.

Just think if any one of us were to be told by God, that “You count the stars.” Can you count them? No, of course not. “So shall thy seed be.” And this was when Abraham had no sign of a son. This was even before Ishmael. Abraham believed God, and God counted that for righteousness. And that is the same way with us. That is a pattern, he is a pattern son, he is a pattern believer. We believe that Christ died on the cross for our sins, and we commit ourselves, our lives, and our souls, and everything about us, to that person who hung upon the cross was buried, raised the third day, and is now at the right hand of God, but is foolishness to the natural man. But it’s the power of God to every one that believes. This is the gospel—the simplicity of it, and the wonder of it— being possible that a person who was condemned to die, dies the most horrible death, and dies under the judgment of God, that he should be the way that God has ordained that I should be saved, and that I should be considered righteous in his sight.

That was the wonderful message that the apostle Paul gave to the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, in the 13th of Acts. Said by this man, the man that he had been telling about on the cross, was now at the right hand of God in the glory, by him, everyone that received forgiveness of sins that he had applied for, but more than that, he would be justified, he would be considered righteous, from every sin, from every law that is against him. That was a marvelous thing. It was the reiteration of Genesis 15:6, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.”

Well we see that God had some great thoughts in mind, didn’t he, when he ordered the lives so far in the distant past. God had great things in mind for them, and he was carrying out his purposes. And this was the blessing of being in the seed, in the line of Isaac. “In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” Genesis 21:12 not through Ishmael. Although when God told Abraham, Abraham also laughed when God said that he would have a son. Ishmael had already been born then, Abraham laughed, and said it might be so with Ishmael, but it was not so to be.

And looking back over the history, and thinking of the history now, the nations that are surrounding Israel were their enemies that had vowed to annihilate them, to kill every last one of them. But think how God is preserving his seed. These people that are now on the earth, on a small part of the world, very small, ending on one side by the Mediterranean Sea, and ringed about on the other by enemies, who are sworn to annihilate them. What a wonderful proof this is of the power of God to preserve, and to carry out his word.

Well we’ve now come to Isaac. And what Isaac has to say is practically nil. I think that if you took everything that is recorded of what Isaac said, it wouldn’t fill a few paragraphs. It’s remarkable, isn’t it. Sarah, of course, is linked with Abraham. Whatever Abraham was told, I’m sure he gave it to Sarah, and she evidently acquiesced in it. So she was a part of his life, and endured the rigors of that thousand mile trip, and a new kind of life, for I understand that Abraham was a prince in Ur of the Chaldees, and that he was a rich man, and had great prospects. But God gave him also riches and great prospects and an army, to rescue Lot. These were all the men and women and children that had been born and brought up in his household.

But Isaac is the son of his old age; Isaac was born when Abraham was 100. And the first thing we’re told about Isaac is that when he was weaned, then Sarah saw Ishmael mocking. And she said

something then that is quoted in the New Testament with aprobaton, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for this bondwoman and her son shall not be heir with my son Isaac.” So this is what happened in the case of the Law. The Law that was represented by Ishmael and Hagar is not in effect any more as far as the Christian is concerned. He is under a far higher law, that is the law of the life of Christ, the law of life in Christ Jesus.

Not that there is anything wrong with the Law. The Law is pure righteous, holy, and just and good, as Paul writes in Romans. But we are not under it as a condition of righteousness before God. For Paul tells us in Galatians, second chapter, that if righteousness came by the law,” could come by the Law, “then Christ has died for nothing” [Galatians 2:21].

So the first incident we have about Isaac, is one in which he plays, according to the Scriptures, he plays a very submissive part. You remember when the last test of Abraham, that he can offer up his son, on a mountain the Lord would tell him of, and that he would depart on the morrow, and that it would be a few days journey. Isaac goes along with his father, and with the fire and the wood and the servants. The servants are told to wait behind, and they will come back again, which is a remarkable statement, isn't it, because if Abraham was to kill his son, how would that son come back again? But they were assured that he would.

We're told in Hebrews that Abraham considered that God was able to raise up Isaac, and it was in this faith that he went ahead with the offering. Well, you know the story. Abraham, about to slay his son, was called out of the Heavens by God, “slay not your son” and Abraham saw a lamb caught up in the thicket and offered him instead. But here is what I see in this wonderful story, a story unlike any other in the Scriptures, but a picture of course of God the Father not sparing his own son, but delivering him up for us all. It was that Isaac was bound up with the wood, but before that I should have mentioned that Isaac knew that this was to be a sacrifice to God, and there was the fire and the wood, but where was the lamb for the burnt offering? Abraham had evidently told Isaac that, but not said that he was to be the offering. His classic answer was that God will himself provide an offering. A marvelous statement, God himself will provide an offering. So Abraham did this in perfect obedience and perfect faith.

So the part that Isaac played in this I see was that there was no resistance. Just imagine, judges say that when a person is accused of a crime, or is in danger of death, that is the time that they will fight the hardest, they will resist the most, to be inflamed. But we do not find anything like that in Isaac. He allows himself to be bound, and put on the altar, and allows the father to take the knife to slay him, not a word of resistance.

Now we don't know whether there was or not, whether Isaac would say why are you doing this? That would be natural, wouldn't it. But I believe that the story as it is given us, the incident as it is given us, shows that this is a type of the eternal sacrifice that the Lord himself was to make. He would be slain himself; the father judged him for our sins. and he would go through death, and resurrection.

The rest of the life of Isaac was again met by this wonderful submissiveness, and faith in his father, and in God, by failure in the next chapter. Not the next chapter, the next chapter tells us Sarah's death and burial, and it's interesting that that was the only part of Canaan, though Canaan was promised to Abraham and his seed, that was the only thing that Abraham ever had that he could call his own, it was the grave, it was the burial cave in which Sarah was buried. He bought that from the people of the

land. And the Lord too: that's the only thing he had here in this scene, was a grave. Men appointed his grave with the wicked, you remember as the prophet Isaiah says in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. But God managed it. God saw that he was with the rich in his death.

Then we have the wonderful story of the finding of a wife for Isaac. He was not to marry any of the daughters of the land of Canaan, which from the history which is given us in Leviticus 20 and 22, I believe it's those two chapters, or might be 18 and 20, give us an idea of the character of the people of that land, hardly believable, such wickedness, no wonder that the Israelites were told to exterminate these people. They would have been not only defiled themselves, but the land was filled with blood.

Well the servant of Abraham, and we take it that it is Eleazar who is mentioned in the previous chapter, the servant of Abraham's house, and one who has charge of all his goods, he is a picture of the Holy Spirit, who is now down in this scene, gathering a bride for Christ. All the believers in this dispensation, these past 1900 years, are going to one day become a bride for Christ. They will be his, what are now his body will be his bride, and in that there is no fault to be found with Isaac. He meets his bride, of course the 24th chapter of Genesis is one of the longest in the Scriptures but one of the most interesting. It gives an idea of how God was to see to it that it was Abraham's seed that ??? his family out of which this wonderful nation was to be formed.

I don't remember whether we're told why Isaac left Canaan after he was married to Rebekah, but the thing occurred. He left her, or she agreed to the lie that she was his sister, and God rescues them out of that dilemma. Another showing how fear possessed these people in those early days. I can imagine that the character of the people of the land was such that you couldn't trust a word, or a deed, that they did. They were satanic, led by Satan.

And the last incident in the life of Isaac that we're told about is that which is referred to in Hebrews, and I should read that verse in Hebrews 11, Hebrews 11, verse 20, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." That's one of the shortest Scriptures in the eleventh of Hebrews, and for a person who had such a wonderful start, it's rather an inglorious end, I would say. For the reason is that the faith that is spoken of here was just at the very end of the incident where Isaac allowed himself to be deceived by Jacob. Jacob had previously gained the birthright from Esau, and I guess I should have begun a little more orderly about Isaac and Rebekah.

They waited 20 years for the son that was promised them, and when the time came instead of one son it was two. And you'll remember the incident, you'll remember the story that Esau was born first, and then Jacob. But before that, when Rebekah asked God for the reason why she was having her troubles, God said, that among other things, the end of the statement was, "the elder shall serve the younger."

Now these two boys grew up, and apparently they became the favorites of father and mother. Esau became the favorite of his father, and Jacob the favorite of his mother. This is a warning to us, isn't it. No person, no one child should have the preeminence, no one should be favored over the other. All should be loved alike, but it was not so in this case. Esau turned out to be the hunter, and Jacob the plain man, living in tents, which is probably what he turned out to be later, a cattle raiser; he was very good at that, as the later chapters of Genesis show us.

Well the incident that Hebrews 11:20 refers to is when Jacob, by conniving with his mother, managed to deceive Isaac, although you can hardly understand how a voice could be so disguised, and the

father, partly blind, or partly dim-eyed, allowed himself to give Jacob the blessing that he intended to have Esau. Because Esau was the firstborn, but apparently didn't care for it, but Jacob by deceit gained both the birthright and the blessing.

And the blessing was the great thing in those days, because the elder got everything, the oldest son. And I was told that the same thing still applies in the land of China; the eldest son gets everything, but he is supposed to watch out for the rest of the family.

Well, Isaac realized, at the very end, after Esau came in and pled with his father for the blessing that Jacob had deprived him of, Isaac said that he would be blessed, not Esau but Jacob. "I have blessed him and he shall be blessed." That was the realization, and there's where the faith of Isaac came in, at the very end. I don't know how many years after that he lived, whether he lived at all, but he blessed his son, and passes into history, and I believe he's only mentioned a very few times in the Old Testament outside of the arrangement when God speaks of himself as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

Isaac is not mentioned by himself. I think that, it appears, a possible reason is in the type. Isaac would be a picture of the Lord now on high, and he is not seen. If we deal with him, it must be by faith. We were hearing this morning a very interesting collection of passages where the thing was for the person that was listening, was to see Christ in these passages, to see who that person was. And I think it was an interesting study.

But our time is past, and I wish I had more to say about Isaac and Sarah, but they were undoubtedly people of faith. Isaac, by the way, lived 180 years, five years longer than his father. And for a person to live that long, and to have so little said about them, it raises the question in one's mind, was it because he was a person of little character? I doubt that.

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