

Following the Biblical Stream:

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Part LXXXIII

In our last segment, we talked about the meaning of Isaac's name and how it relates to all those who have and will follow The Lord in their lives no matter how foolish it might seem to others. We also talked about the fact Ishmael as well as Isaac would both have twelve princes or heads of tribes born of them, and this led into a discussion of the number twelve being a doubling of man's number of six. We ended by talking about how we can all work to divide what we have, but it really is only God Who can bring true increase or value to our lives. All this is seen in the conversation Abraham is having with God, as God explains to Abraham how much He wants to use his life in this world as well as the lives of his family!

All this brought us through Genesis chapter 17 verse 20, which brings us to verse 21. In verse 21 God leaves off explaining to Abraham how much He had not lost sight of blessing Ishmael's life, but that, again, it was important Abraham be clear on the fact Sarah would bear him the son who would be the son of promise through whom God would continue the covenant, which was God's real reason for bringing Abraham out of his father's house. We also have in this verse the very specific fact that the birth of Isaac would take place at a set time in the next year. While Abraham did not doubt God, he also would not have to wait much longer to see the promise of God come to be. If Isaac's birth was going to be in the next year, it was only going to be a matter of months before the process would begin.

Verse 22 of chapter 17 gives us another one of those items I believe we so often miss, and that is the fact it talks about God's presence as being very physically apparent. As we go into chapter 18, we come into a story I reflect on often in my teaching as being a time when God actually appeared to Abraham as a human. To be clear, I always have to make sure we are all on the same page when it comes to understanding, I'm not suggesting God was in any way walking in the same form Jesus came in, because Jesus was born as a newly created Adam. (I Cor. 15:42-49) This is to say, Jesus was as human as you or I when it came to His physical form, and this is proven by the fact He was able to be killed. However, this by no means, means that God was incapable of walking in human form before this time. The difference was/is that much in the

same way angels can appear in human form there is nothing - shall we say - locked in, about it. This is to say, they can appear and disappear at any moment. Jesus was literally physical and limited to living in His human form from conception until His death!

What I find fascinating and important about our understanding of this is that it shows us a lot about why God did what He did in order to lay out His plan for salvation in the way He has. Adam and Eve sinned, and for that they were punished by no longer having access to the source of their physical immortality, which was the Tree of Life. However, God did not end the world at that point. Later, the world got so bad God told Noah the end of all flesh had come before Him, but again, God did not end the world at that point. (Gen. 6:13) After the flood God came down to see the city and tower man was building, and due to the purpose they were building it, God had to confound man's language to keep him from corrupting all of humanity so swiftly after God had taken action such as He did in sending the worldwide flood. (Gen. 11:1-9) However, God did not end the world at that point. God goes on to call Abraham from his father's house to the promised land, and took several generations to build a nation from him, then allowed that nation to go through centuries of events before we even see the first coming of The Messiah, but even then God did not end the world at that point!

We are now almost two thousand years removed from the ascension of Christ back to The Father, and we still wait for His return. However, what we are told is that when Jesus returns, God will not end the world at that point. Instead, as He returns, Jesus will gather all those both living and dead who have served God through all these millennia and set His feet on the Mount of Olives. Then, in spite of all who will resist Him, Jesus will set up an earthly kingdom that Revelation tells us will last for at least another thousand years; for the devil will be locked away for a thousand years before he is allowed to return and make his final attempt to overcome God. We do not know how long it will take for the devil to work with men and build his resistance that will come against Jesus' throne in Jerusalem, but only when that event finally takes place will God bring the world to an end! (Rev. 20)

My point is that in the Garden of Eden God

walked with man on a daily basis. Adam and Eve expected Him to show up after they had taken of the fruit He had told them not to take of, and that is exactly what happened. After the flood, we are told God decided to go down and see the city and tower man was building. While this does not indicate God came down in a physical way, we should consider the fact God knows everything. He did not have to come down to see anything! This indicates there was still a desire on God's part to come directly into the midst of what man was doing at the Tower of Babel. When we couple this with the story we are told at the beginning of the book of Job where God asks Satan where he had been and Satan says he had been walking the entire earth, basically implying there was no point in what he found, God asks if Satan had considered His servant Job! (Job 1:6-8) All these stories indicate to us there is value in coming to this place and time that God made for us and walking among the events taking place.

There was/is value even to God and/or the opportunity He has always given man to access Him for God to come, not just know what it was/is man was/is doing. In doing this at the Tower of Babel, God would make the determination confounding man's language was the justified action to be taken at that point. This takes us back to the Garden of Eden, where God clearly already knew what Adam and Eve had done; for as they tried to hide from God, He points out to them the reason they, for the first time, desired to hide! In that story, there was obvious relevance to God giving Adam and Eve a chance to respond, as they desired to respond to a direct interaction with God following actions they had already done and could not undo. One has to believe the same was true in some form at the Tower of Babel, as God came down to give man a chance to explain himself or at least pay attention to the presence of God in whatever form God had manifest Himself. In many ways, this is the simple story of Jesus coming to walk among us in actual human flesh. (John 1:14)

Here too in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis as God speaks to Abraham, there is more going on than just a prayerful conversation. There is no reference to Abraham seeing this in a vision, and he is clearly not in some deep meditative state of mind in the way he experiences God's presence in chapter 15. Here in 17, at one point Abraham specifically falls on his face before God! Now, we can't say for certain if God appeared in any type of human form to Abraham during this conversation, but verse one says God "appeared." Now in this twenty-second verse of the chapter we are told

not just that God left, but even in the English it comes out specifically that God "...left off talking with him,..." It's as if we are being told God walked away in some fashion. This becomes more of a visual as we are also then told the specific, God "...went up from Abraham." Thinking about both these facts being given together, maybe God did not so much walk away from Abraham and disappear, or ascend in some way while still in Abraham's sight, but there was some kind of knowledge that God was done with what He had to say. Abraham also says nothing more, and so God, in whatever form He may have manifest Himself, ascends back to heaven out of the direct presence of Abraham!

When we compare all this along with the next story told to us in chapter 18 about God coming by Abraham's tent, with the stories of how Moses much later on encounters God's presence, there are more interesting facts to consider. We do not have very much indication that God appeared to Moses in any kind of recognizable human form, for there is just the one incident where Moses and the elders witness God's presence together at Mount Sinai, and even this does not confirm God looked like a man at that appearing. (Ex. 24:9-11) However, we are told very specifically God appears in the form of cloud and fire to the people as He leads the nation from Egypt to the promised land, and at those times when they see God's presence descend to cover the tabernacle, which was very often as Moses went in to talk with God directly, a cloud is seen. For all this, what we are told in Exodus seems to indicate no man ever stood so directly in the presence of God as Moses did. (Ex. 33:11-20) To quantify this statement with the fact Abraham seems to talk directly with God in a true face to face as God appears in a human form kind of way, one is led to conclude that saying no one has spoken to God as directly as Moses, would have to do with the fact Moses, even more so than Abraham, Adam and Eve, or the like, came in the direct presence of God when He was not - for lack of a better term - "masked" in human form!

Especially as it relates to the story we read in the next chapter here in Genesis, God was walking in an open form. This is not to say He intended or was willing to walk among all men, as Abraham and Sarah are the only people it appears God spent any time with, and this is solidified in the fact that only the two angels go on to Sodom and Gomorrah. However, I repeat, God was in a human form and Abraham recognized Him. When God came to Adam and Eve, He definitely intended to walk among all men. It is only a technicality there were

only two humans alive at that point. After that, it became more difficult for God to walk among sinful men, and we see He does not; but He met with Abraham more directly than we see done for just about anyone else for quite some time before this. When it comes to the time of Moses, God appears in the form of something physical but certainly not at our level of human to human like interaction. This is what scared the people of Israel. When Moses directly meets with God in these very direct ways, he is alone, and that is why God says He never spoke face to face with anyone the way He did Moses.

By the time of the prophets of Israel, it seems clear God is speaking to them in the form we so often dramatize it all as happening when doing plays and the like, which is that God's voice is heard but no physical manifestation is there. This is the way Samuel was called into the ministry, but it is also pointed out, leading up to this there had been no open "vision" for some time. (I Sam. 3:1-14) Even Elijah when he returns to the very same mountain range where God met with Israel so long before, experienced wind, an earthquake, and fire, but all that was to make the point God was in the still small voice! (I Kin. 19:9-13) By the time we are down to Daniel during the Babylonian captivity, Daniel is only shown visions, and these are mostly directed by an angel speaking to him. It is not to say this kind of communication was not done before this time, but Daniel was greatly beloved of God, and in some cases fasted and prayed for long periods of time in order to receive what he did. (Dan. 9:21-23) There is no doubt that in looking at these facts we see a degrading of man that hinders the direct and even physical appearing of God among men!

This finally culminates in The Messiah coming in literal human flesh in order to walk among us on a daily basis. This was God enduring the physical the way we endure it and not being able to escape it at any point unless He chose to leave His physical life cycle, thus ending it, which is not what He came to do. This enduring meant He was touchable as any human is touchable, and as I said earlier there is no greater evidence of this than the fact He was able to be put to death. After His resurrection He appeared in a new form like never before, and which demonstrated the new form those granted eternal life shall one day possess. However, He did not stay because it was important that The Holy Ghost be able to come Who was not inhabited by this physicality - meaning He can be in all places at anytime! When He came on the day of Pentecost, which

is the Feast of Weeks or Shavuot, there was a physical manifestation, but it was and is carried out only through those who believe and are prepared to receive Him directly into themselves. We see even this comes in levels, as in Acts chapter 2 there are cloven tongues of fire and speaking in tongues.

While I have seen and experienced the speaking in tongues part, for all the intensity of The Holy Ghost's presence I have been fortunate enough to be a part of, I have yet to see the fire. To be crystal clear on this issue, just as I do not believe tongues have ceased, I do not believe the fire, nor even the sound of the rushing wind, is something that can no longer be experienced. It is all a matter of intensity, which is dictated mostly by the willingness of God's people to yield to Him. Not hearing the wind or seeing the fire is no more proof they are no longer part of the way The Holy Ghost is willing to manifest Himself than the lack of speaking in tongues in many churches is proof it is no more. The entire point is that as humans we have steadily lost the ability to have the presence of God directly among us, which is clearly something God desires to do. We do not see it based on the fact we as a society and world have grown in our sinfulness overall. We have also grown in our own personal failure to desire God and make the sacrifices of worldly things that keep our lives clean, pure, and both able to receive and experience such a direct presence of God!

Now, in talking about obedience to God and His will, the next and closing verses of chapter 17 are amazing. I know when doing a study like this where we cover so many things on our way through the verses, it can seem like a very long time ago that we talked about how God told Abraham about the symbol of circumcision. However, in spite of that, we must remember this commandment of the symbol of the covenant God was making with Abraham did, in fact, come in the same conversation as everything we've been talking about since we entered chapter 17. It can also be hard to think of it as all taking place in one day. This is an example of how much value there is in continuing to read the Word of God straight through even when you are getting regular in depth teaching. I talk a lot about how sad it is people do not take the time to hear a sermon and consider what they've heard in the context of the surrounding verses by reading those verses or being knowledgeable of them already. This is because context is king when it comes to communication! An investigation into knowing if anything a preacher or teacher is saying has any truth to

it or not can and should start with understanding whether they are putting the scripture they are teaching about in the context it was written in or not.

Context can go much deeper than just reading through it, and that is some of what we hope to accomplish in a study such as this one as well as tie many of the individual verses to the Bible as a whole. This is because to teach one verse is to teach the Bible, and if we can't support what we are saying from Genesis to Revelation there is something wrong with what we believe or what we think we understand. Thus, there is value in going into long conversations about just one verse but not without keeping in mind the context of the whole. There is no greater way to maintain our understanding of overall Biblical context than to just keep reading through the Bible day after day for ourselves!

If we read directly from verse 1 to verse 23 it is easier to grasp the importance of what we are told, which is that it was in this very same day Abraham has his conversation with God about all this that he goes right to work implementing the symbolism God gave him for his house. What is amazing about this is Abraham himself is ninety-nine years old when he goes through the procedure of circumcision. In the day and age which they lived there is little evidence they had very good equipment such as surgical knives with which to perform such a task. While there was likely some natural substance known to help with the pain, I believe it can go without saying they did not have sophisticated anesthetic or numbing medications that could be used to ease the pain while performing it. Beyond that, there is the truth that the most likely way to stop the bleeding was done by cauterization, which even the slightest mistake in applying could have caused not just more pain in the long term, but even permanent damage.

This may sound like I'm just attempting to be gruesome in some way, but all these are thoughts that should not be overlooked in thinking about the fact Abraham was given the information he was given about how he was to begin using this symbolism, and every male in his house has the procedure performed on them in that very day. Again, I'm not attempting to belabor the point, but this means they did not start with some servant as a test subject for how to do this procedure, and after perfecting the technique over several tries they move on to the more direct family members and Abraham himself. Just how much knowledge they may

or may not have had about performing medical procedures or anything like this is something I guess we'll never know; but in any case, they followed what God said without hesitation, and this has interesting ramifications.

Beyond the profound obedience shown in the fact when God told Abraham to do something he simply did it, the other aspects to this are that as we talked about when covering the commandment from God to do this, even those bought with money who were part of Abraham's house took on this symbol. This brings us to two more amazing facts. First, this is not just a painful procedure, and in particular for the adult males, but the recovery time can be lengthy. The risk of infection or other complications are also high. Just how high complications are can also be greatly affected by how much each person is allowed the time to rest, recover, and take care to keep as clean as possible. What this means is that in one day every man of Abraham's house was basically put on sick leave until further notice, and for a house the size of Abraham's, this is no small thing! One can only imagine the work was then up to the women, who in a day and age without what we would call modern conveniences, not just inside the home but outside as well, such as stores, restaurants and the like, the women already had plenty to do! Taking on all the animals there were to feed and care for, doing all the daily chores of keeping up with stocking supplies such as wood for the cooking stoves and anything that could not simply be let go until the men were better, all had to be done along with having to take care of the men in this state of recovery.

While I'm sure Abraham's house was well organized, the fact this conversation of Abraham's and the circumcision of all the males was done in one day means no extra work was done in advance of this in order to stock up and prepare for it. On top of all the issues of work needing to be done, there is also the fact the house was now left defenseless in the face of anything from thieves all the way to all-out attack by another power. If we look again at the story about how Abraham went after the kings to recover what the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah could not protect in the first place nor recover after the fact, and how Abraham using his own men and supplies did what the kings could not do in recovering everything and defeating the coalition of kings that had started all this, one should have a good picture of how big Abraham's house and possessions were. (Gen. 14) There were plenty of people who, due to jealousy, spite, etc., might have wanted to take

advantage of a situation such as this. However, this is another way in which Abraham did not waver at the promises of God. He trusted God would protect and provide for them, as he wasted no time in conforming his house to the commandment of God! This begs from us all the question of, would we do the same?

The second aspect of this is what an amazing thing this is to ask of every individual male in his house. No matter how odd or unpleasant going through such a procedure as this was for the men, and as Moses' wife later shows, even something the women might have objected being done to their husbands and sons, from the youngest to the oldest, there is not a single indication anyone refused or resisted compliance to this new ordinance Abraham just came back from his talk with God and asked them to do! (Ex. 4:24-26) In the Law of Moses there is an ordinance about servants that were bought only having to serve for six years before they were to be set free, but if the servant saw it in his best interest to stay with his master for life, he did not have to go. (Ex. 21:1-6) The symbol for this was basically a hole would be made in the servants ear, presumably to place an earring of sorts, that would symbolize the person's willingness to commit to a lifetime of service. This procedure was not nearly as serious as that of circumcision, but it was intended to be something that would be hard to force on a person as a way to simply claim they had made the commitment. If it had been forced and an ornament of some sort was used to signify what house they belonged to, this also was something a person could simply remove; and if the hole in the ear was not very large, the skin would grow back over such a hole and make it hard to tell it was ever there!

While Abraham was not asking for something that was in the public view, he was asking his servants to do something far more painful and permanent than that put in the law to signify a person's dedication to serving a particular master. It was also something very much not easily forced upon a person. One should note here there is no narrative about Abraham giving a speech explaining how if anyone did not want to take on this symbol they were free to leave his house. All this indicates that Abraham's servants, all the way from those who already desired to be with him and had joined his house for the purpose of being with him for life, to those simply bought for the purpose of having enough servants to take care of all the possessions God had blessed Abraham with, were so dedicated to this man of God they believed him, and without resistance

went through this procedure! In many ways this has some foreshadowing to the fact the children of Israel would later have to trust Moses as the one who would speak to God, and what he told them they would follow.

As Israel traveled to the promised land they showed they had a lot of trouble doing this in spite of having to admit they were so scared of the direct presence of God that they witnessed at Mount Sinai, they themselves had made the request for this arrangement of having Moses as their go-between. However, God confirmed to Moses the people had spoken well in asking for this because, as we started this segment discussing, standing before the direct presence of God is no small matter. Thus, the children of Israel needed Moses, and they would have never made it without his leadership, which he was able to provide only by following God and receiving instructions for what to do when things were beyond human ability. All these examples foreshadowed how much we all need Jesus to be our intercessor between us and God The Father. Far too many people who claim to be Christians today will follow a minister because they find it the path of most ease; but as the saying goes, you cannot follow the wrong path and get to the right destination.

The Messiah has come, and John the Baptist, being the greatest prophet born of women, said he had to decrease because Jesus needed to increase! (Luke 7:28, John 3:25-36) Jesus came so we would have no question as to who the man is that we should be following and looking to for our example. Being God, Jesus came as a man so that it would not be so hard to stand before the direct presence of God. He also told us about The Father so we would understand, even if we have trouble seeing only a man in Jesus Christ, it should still be clearly understood He is the man between us and God! "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16 We are a demanding creature and very strong willed, but God has given every one of us the chance we need to find and follow the right path!

Until next time, Shalom!

