

9. The Triumph of Faith

Biblical material: Genesis 20:1-25:10.

Quotes

- Everyone is entitled to his own opinion but not his own facts. *Daniel Patrick Moynihan*
- In faith there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don't. *Blaise Pascal*
- Faith... Must be enforced by reason...When faith becomes blind it dies. *Mahatma Gandhi*
- With most people unbelief in one thing is founded upon blind belief in another. *Georg Christoph Lichtenberg*

Questions

Who sinned in the Abimelech story? How is the story of the intended sacrifice of Isaac a demonstration of faith? How does God choose to test human beings? What is the role of our reason in all of this? How are we to understand the story of the choosing of Rebekah? Is this process still valid today? And what about all the jewelry?!

Discussion

Much in these chapters portrays a society very different to ours. The story of Abimelech sounds odd to our ears, especially because it was Abraham's lie, and not Abimelech's actions, that are surely the problem here. Yet it seems that despite his innocence, Abimelech is still punished, and has to pay Sarah recompense!

Similarly the story of the intended sacrifice of Isaac. Many point to this as a magnificent example of the triumph of "faith" over "reason." Abraham knows that God has promised to make of him a great nation through Isaac. Yet God tells him to offer his son as a human sacrifice. From both the aspect of divine promise and divine law such a sacrifice should be rejected. The fact that Abraham accepts is supposed to be a wonderful example of unquestioning faith.

But is it? Did not Abraham spend a *long* time in discussion with God en route to Mount Moriah? We have no record of the conversation, but it would be ridiculous to assume no dialogue took place. The fact that Abraham was confident in God supplying the answer at the time of the sacrifice indicates that *his faith was not unquestioning obedience but informed trust.*

So instead of being a prime example of blind faith, the experience of Abraham is exactly the opposite. It is because he knows God so well that he can have total confidence. He is not operating blindly, but with his eyes wide open, knowing from a host of past experience that God will never act contrary to his truthful, trustworthy character. Certainly Abraham needed to learn the lesson of not trusting in his own ideas to ensure that God's purposes would be achieved, but when God spoke the second time on the mountain, it was to confirm God's intention to make of Abraham a great nation, through Isaac. Obedience is important, but not without understanding.

The story of Sodom studies in the last lesson is evidence enough of the depravity of most people in those days. No wonder Abraham wanted a different influence on his son, and chose to send his servant to find a wife from his own people.

It's interesting that the choice of Rebekah comes from not from her beauty (though she was) but from her attitude of graciousness and hospitality. Character is more important than outward appearance—and note also her determination to leave and fulfill the call.

Comment

“Well, let's consult with the Lord.” Isn't that the way to do it? Abraham did this when, after miraculously giving him the son, God said, “Take your son, and sacrifice him.” For awhile Abraham wondered how this could possibly make sense, and for three days and three nights he wondered how it could make sense. I don't think his problem was so much, “How could God ask me to sacrifice and kill my son?”, but “How could God ask me to kill the son that He had given me so miraculously, and the one He said would be the father of many nations? That doesn't make sense, God.”

But faith and trust, as I understand it - faith says, “God, now that I'm convinced that it's You speaking, I am on my way. I don't know how You are going to work this out, but I KNOW it will make sense. So God, because I trust You to make sense as always, may I reverently ask You questions on the way?” And for three days and three nights Abraham asked questions. And in the end, he came to the conclusion that God would either provide a substitute, or He'd resurrect his son, so that He could fulfill the promise, you see, and the book of Hebrews says Abraham was right.

So I don't think trust means you don't ask questions and wonder why. Trust means, “I'm on my way, but may I reverently ask You why?” And then we grow in understanding, and when it was all over, Abraham trusted God more than ever, it seems to me. So the point you make I think is a very crucial one. Adam tried to solve the problem himself; it was much too complicated, and it did show a measure of distrust. Eve distrusted. She accepted Satan's lies, and Adam showed distrust also. Is it possible that Adam reasoned, “I know God is so gracious, surely He won't go through with that threatened penalty of death; He'll forgive us.”? But was that the problem? Did God forgive them?

But does forgiveness heal the damage done? See, they were changed by sin and distrust. They had become vulnerable now, as you suggested, to the deceptions of the adversary. And so God forgave them, but now there was need for discipline and healing and all those other things. So I think Adam misunderstood that warning, “In the day you eat thereof you will die,” as a threat, as a penalty, “In the day you eat thereof I will have to execute you.” And he thought, “Here is my lovely wife, and this is our first offense. Surely He'll forgive.” Yes, He forgave, but that doesn't heal the damage done. *A. Graham Maxwell, Tape “Genesis” (Riverside).*

Ellen White Comments

Satan came into our world, and led men into temptation. With sin came sickness and suffering, for we reap that which we sow. Satan afterward caused man to charge upon God the suffering which is but the sure result of transgression of physical law. God is thus falsely accused, and his character misrepresented. He is charged with doing that which Satan himself has done. God would have his people expose this falsehood of the enemy. To them he has given the light of the gospel of health, and as his representative they are to give the light to others. As they work to relieve suffering humanity, they are to point out the origin of all suffering, and direct the mind to Jesus, the great Healer of both soul and body. His heart of sympathy goes out to all earth's sufferers, and with every one who works for their relief he cooperates. As with his

blessing health returns, the character of God will be vindicated, and the lie thrust back upon Satan, its originator. {SpM 127.1}

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