

Understanding God in the Old Testament

A God Who Can Be Trusted

Genesis 10-25

This morning I want to continue to look at “Understanding God in the Old Testament”. Last week we began our journey by looking at the beginning of time and mankind. Many times people think of the God of the Old Testament as a mean and angry God, yet what we learned last week is that the character of God shines through just as it does throughout the New Testament. Just as our theme verse tells us in **Hebrews 13:8** we find that God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

As we say last week, we serve a God who created and sustains the universe, we serve a God of mercy and grace, we serve a God who desires our worship, we serve a God of relationship, we serve a God who is moved by our disobedience, we serve a God of covenants (agreements), and we serve a God who values people.

We last left off with looking at the man Noah, a man who was close to God, in fact his family was spared from the flood because he was the only blameless man living on the earth. We now move onto the event of the Tower of Babel.

The Tower of Babel

In **Genesis 11:1-4** we read this account:

1 At one time all the people of the world spoke the same language and used the same words. 2 As the people migrated to the east, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there. 3 They began saying to each other, “Let’s make bricks and harden them with fire.” (In this region bricks were used instead of stone, and tar was used for mortar.) 4 Then they said, “Come, let’s build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world.”*

Just as we should expect, we find that even though God has given mankind a second chance, man still becomes self-centered, still seeks to find his identity outside of God, and still strives for value in his own eyes. This pretty much describes the world we live in doesn’t it?

I want you to notice that this building wasn’t for God – it was for their fame and ego. We know that according to archeologists that the Babylonians (which is who we are talking about here), built great towers called ziggurats. These were pyramid like buildings with a circular staircase that circled the tower until it reached the top where typically there as a shrine round which the signs of the zodiac were written.

Clearly this was a shrine to man. God sees their unity, he sees their ability and I think he can see the pattern again for mankind. Even though he promised to never destroy the earth again with a flood, he knows he needs to do something. So look what he does in **Genesis 11:5-9**:

5 But the Lord came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building. 6 “Look!” he said. “The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! 7 Come, let’s go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won’t be able to understand each other.” 8 In that way, the Lord scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why the city was called Babel, because that is where the Lord confused the people with different languages. In this way he scattered them all over the world.*

Today, we live in a time when man is building unity, combining efforts, simply to show themselves and the world, that there is nothing they can’t do. Unfortunately, most of it is done without the name of God and his sovereign power. **We try become our own solution to life, when God is waiting for us to return to him.** The scriptures tell us in **Exodus 34:14**:

14 You must worship no other gods, for the Lord, whose very name is Jealous, is a God who is jealous about his relationship with you.

*5 You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. **Exodus 20:5***

*They angered God by building shrines to other gods; they made him jealous with their idols. **Psalm 78:58***

Many people today live their lives in a effort to build a kingdom of their own – a personal shrine to themselves, showing their achievements, their possessions, and their self-sufficiency. They become their own god – the focal point of their lives when in reality the One who created us, who sustains us and gives us our next breath, waits for us to turn our eyes to him.

God will not allow things to stand in his way, and if we aren’t careful he will take everything we have away from us in an effort to have our hearts once again. The God of the Old and New Testament is a Jealous God. Life will not make sense, in fact, just as the term Babel literally means in the Hebrews “confusion” life will be confusing without our eyes on God.

We cannot be self-sufficient. We cannot think that we can solve our own problems. We cannot think that mankind is going to hold the answer. We need to turn our eyes to God who takes our lives and makes sense of it.

The Life of Abraham

We then move on to the life of Abraham. We all know that song of Father Abraham when we were children. We know that he is the beginning of a lineage of promise that reaches all the way to us today. What was special about Abraham? We read about Abraham in the great chapter of faith in **Hebrews 11:8:12**:

8 It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. 9 And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. 10 Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God. 11 It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. 12 And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.*

Now go on down and look at **verses 17-20**:

17 It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. 18 even though God had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted." 19 Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.*

We find Abraham as a man who was obedient. When God spoke to him, even when it didn't make sense, even when he didn't know where it was going to take him, he obeyed God because of His promises. Look at God's promise to Abraham in **Genesis 12:1-3**:

"Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

Abraham took God at his promises and began to follow Him, always reminding himself of what God spoke. I believe that **God's promises motivate faith**. When we remind ourselves of God's promise of salvation, his mercy, his forgiveness, his guidance, and his blessing, then we are more willing to step out and trust God in things that go beyond normal human reasoning.

Through out the account of Abraham we find that God reminds Abraham 6 times (Chapters 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 22) of his promise to bless him with land and offspring – a

constant reminder of God's promises. **God comes to us today to remind us of His promise and tells us if we will simply trust him and believe him in our everyday lives, he will fulfill everything he has told in Scripture and even in our personal times with Him.** That is why when Jesus was serving the last supper during the Passover, he constantly said "do this in remembrance of me." – do not forget my promises.

Now, Abraham was one who obeyed God and trusted Him, but it doesn't mean that Abraham didn't have his moments when his faith wavered a little bit. We read in Genesis 12 of a time when he travels with his wife Sarah to Egypt, and out of fear for his life, tells his wife to lie and tell them they she is his sister, because the scriptures tell us that she was so beautiful. Now you would think that if God promises to be with you and to bless you, that you would trust that it would include divine protection. But just as any of us would, **there are and will be times when our faith wavers and we try to take things into our own hands.** The result is that it will always backfire on us.

You would of thought that Abraham would have learned it the first time, but we read later on in Genesis 20 where he does the exact same thing. **Even those who are mentioned in Scripture as great leaders of faith, had their moments of weakness and distrust in the promises of God.** But that is where God's grace, mercy and patience come into play. He still chooses to come close, to keep us as the apple of his eye, to knock on our hearts door, to grant us more than we deserve, despite how we respond or react. **Romans 5:8** tells us:

8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

God's patience with us is part of his promise. Yet, there are times when Abraham showed great leaps of faith like when he took 318 men born of his household, and chased a great army that was comprised of 4 Kings.

Then there is the story that many know about the sacrifice of his son Isaac. It was as if Abraham didn't blink an eye when God told him to offer his son, the very one who was suppose to fulfill the promise of God to have many decedents. The confidence is not only mentioned in the book of Hebrews where it tells us that Abraham was confident that God would raise Isaac from the dead, but also in the account of the story in **Genesis 22:1-5**:

1 Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am." 2 "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you." 3 The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 "Stay here

with the donkey,” Abraham told the servants. “The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back.”

I want you to notice two things about Abrahams faith in God: First, **Abrahams faith resulted in an immediate response.** It tells us that he got up the next day. **We can evaluate our faith based on the time from God’s initial request to our immediate obedience.** Hopefully, as we walk with God more and more, that span of time is becoming quicker and quicker.

I also want you to notice Abrahams words of confidence in verse 5, that “we will come right back.” **Even when things don’t make sense, faith clings to the promises of God and speaks and lives as if they will come true.** We read that God shows his provision and adherence to his promises and provides a ram for a sacrifice. And in **Genesis 22:14** it tells us:

14 Abraham named the place Yahweh-Jireh (which means "the LORD will provide"). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

In this account of Abraham we see the trustworthiness of God. He is one who can be trusted, even when things don’t make sense. **Psalm 22:4-5** tells us:

4 Our ancestors trusted in you, and you rescued them. 5 They cried out to you and were saved. They trusted in you and were never disgraced.

*1 God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. 2 So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. 3 Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! **Psalm 46:1-3***

Even when Peter walked out to Jesus on the water (a step of faith) Jesus said in **Matthew 14:31:**

31 Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

Even when we have seen the hand of God do the most incredible things, we have experienced his incredible provision, we have seen the miracle of spiritual resurrection in the lives of people, many times Jesus comes to us and says, “why did you doubt me?”

Some of us may feel that God has given up on his promise for our personal lives, some of us may feel like he has given up on his promise for his church, some of us may feel like our lives don’t make sense and that we have simply become wandering pilgrims in a strange land (like Abraham) not knowing where we are going or doing, yet following a dream or expectation of something of greater value than this world.

God comes to us today and says, “I have been there in the past, I will am here right now. I have proven myself time and time again. Why do you doubt me? Remember my promises, allow them to instill hope and purpose in you. Live today with confidence in me – do not become so self-sufficient that you take the place of me.”

“Don’t live your life relying upon your own achievements, your own possessions, your own abilities, but turn your eyes to me, for I am a jealous God who is jealous for a relationship with you. So get up and live your life with anticipation, respond to my promises beginning today, and I will not let you down.”

Let’s Pray!

(Repentance / Forgiveness / Confidence)