

Doug Batchelor: Good morning, friends. We want to welcome you to the Sabbath School Study Hour. So glad to see each of you that are here at the Granite Bay Hilltop Church. We welcome you, and we want to welcome the many, many thousands we know are studying with us all over the world in different English-speaking countries that are joining us. We have some online members out there, as well, and welcome.

We're going to continue our study today on the book of Genesis. This is the foundation for all biblical truth. And the study today is lesson number 7, and it's dealing with the subject of the covenant that God made with Abraham. Now, with every study we like to make a free offer to just sort of enhance the lesson, something that'll go along with the lesson. Part of the study today deals with the subject of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah.

And we have a free offer. I hope you'll request this. The price is right. It's called, "Remember Lot's Wife." Now, sometimes I think people say, "Oh, this is a great book, you should read it," and they've not even read it. I've read this. It is really good, and it's been around for years. It's a classic, "Remember Lot's Wife" by Joe Cruz. If you like this lesson, then just ask for Offer #108 when you call. If you call, it's 866-788-3966. That's 866-Study-More. And in the US you can text. If you want to get it, you can download it. Text SH054, and you text that to 40544. Outside North America, you simply go to study.aftv.org and there you would type in SH054 to get your free copy of this book, can read it online. We'll send it to you, but you'll be blessed by that information.

Let's bow our heads. Loving Lord, we want to thank You so much for Your goodness and blessings, and we just thank You for the gift of Your Word. We pray that you'll be with us now in this study. I pray be in a special way be with Pastor Brummund and just enlighten his mind with Your Spirit, and that we all might be edified as a result. We thank You and pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Shawn Brummund: Good to be able to be with you here this morning and studying the Word of God. If there's one thing that this lesson and the quarterly, as we continue to go through Genesis, is confirming is that it is an impossibility to be able to thoroughly study the entire book of Genesis in three months. Thirteen Sabbath School lessons is not sufficient, but that's okay. This particular week is an extraordinary week in the fact that there are five chapters that we covered in one week. That's almost a chapter a day. And so please forgive me if I don't make it all the way through all the lesson study; because, you know, five chapters is just too much to be able to cover in 40-45 minutes time of study.

But the good news is this, that we are going to be able to look at some of those powerful truths that are revealed in those five chapters that help us to have a better understanding of God, help us to have a better understanding of the gospel and strengthen our faith, as we continue to walk with the Lord in the hope and the faith that He gives to us.

So, we have lots of good stuff that we're still going to be able to pull out of this particular lesson study. We're returning back to the life of Abraham. Last week, we started to look at the life of Abraham in some of those first chapters that introduced this patriarch of the faith, this father of many nations, this father of Israel, and the gospel that God continues to propagate and perpetrate throughout human history. And so as we come to those first years and the first century and a half after the flood, we find that God is zeroing in on Abraham as a key figure. And so Abraham is no small figure. And even by the time Jesus came, Abraham was still the biggest figure--well, him and Moses--it was probably a tie for first in the eyes of the religious Jews of Jesus' day. And as we came to the end of those chapters that introduced the life of Abraham, he is involved in a very real way. He has become a substantial and respected force and presence in the land of Canaan that God has promised to him. The Bible says that he was very wealthy and increased in possessions, livestock, gold, silver. Abraham is a substantial force and presence economically in the local economy of the civilizations of Canaan.

We also learned, as he was involved in a military operation, that he is also very much respected now amongst the different tribes and peoples for his military prowess and, of course, the success that came when he not only delivered Lot and his family, but also the kings and the rest of, most of the rest of the populations of Sodom and Gomorrah. And so Abraham, God is building a presence and a very real respect for this man in this part of the world. But Abraham is now past 75 years old. Abraham is not a young man. He is past--several years past the age of 75, and he still has no son.

Now, the promise that God had given to him that not only would God give him this promised prime real estate, the fertile crescent along the Mediterranean Sea, but that He would also give him descendants, and those descendants would multiply to as much as the sand of the sea, and God would make a nation, and all nations would be blessed through the descendants of Abraham and the faith that he would give as a legacy.

And so here's Abraham. He's in this foreign land. It's very much established. There are huge, fortified, walled cities. There is a very established economy. There is all kinds of military armies and kings that are established there, and Abraham is still kind of dealing with a little bit of post-traumatic syndrome after he came out of his first military experience. And so, as you and I sometimes face in our life, as we find this life is very much broken--this world, I should say, is very much broken; and because of that, there are storms, there are circumstances that all of us find ourselves traveling through, that sometimes fear and discouragement are our biggest enemies.

And Abraham was no different than you and me. He was just as human, he was just as frail, he had his own weaknesses, and so on, and fear and discouragement were very real enemies that he had to fight, demons that he had to fight, just like you and I do. And this was inevitably one of those junctures in his life. And just like you and me, when we come to God, God is there, and God comes along. And, you know, one of the things that we find repeated--I haven't counted--but can safely dozens that I would put my money on, hundreds of times throughout the Scriptures God says, "Don't be afraid. Do not fear. Do not worry. Don't be anxious. Do not fear. Do not worry. Do not fear. Do not worry," why? Because He knows that those are some of our biggest enemies in this life.

And so here we find a man named Abraham, great man of faith, but also very human. And he's now realizing that God's calling to inherit this land that was promised him is going to involve way more time. It's going to involve way more strain than he ever anticipated when God had first called him. He packed up his goods, packed up his family, and traveled to the Promised Land.

Kind of reminds me of our Lead Pastor, Doug Batchelor. Now, he has publicly expressed--many of you may recall him expressing that even from this platform, more than once, that if he had known how long and difficult the task of building the Word Center was going to be--now, that's the facilities that we're blessed with now, amen? These are the facilities that we can worship and serve and help people to know the gospel and the truth in these last days. The Amazing Facts building, you know, with its much greater capacity than it had in the old building, to continue to propagate the Word and the truth in these last days. All of it is a blessing, but if God had revealed--and Doug Batchelor is on record of confessing this--if God had revealed how long and how difficult and how strainful that task would be, he would've hesitated, and he's not sure if he would've signed up.

When God called me to the ministry back in 1992, I was just freshly baptized. I was barely out of the baptismal waters, and God says, "I want you to be an evangelist and a preacher." And so I signed up for college. I began to study my theology in full-time studies. And when I signed up for college, I sincerely believed that within one to two years, I would be finished with the studies, I didn't need to graduate, I would be a full-time evangelist out in the field. A long story short, four years later, I graduated with my BA. And still, it was four years after that, again, before I actually preached my first evangelistic prophecy seminar.

And so a lot of times the things--you know, reminds me of a statement, the one Jesus made to His disciples one day. It's in John chapter 16 and verse 12. He said, "I still have many things to share with you

or to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." You know, there's a tactfulness that God knows. He knows that we are weak. And so He knows that sometimes the goals and the callings that He gives to us as believers, if He revealed all the information, and He kind of just spelled it all out from beginning to end, He knows that we would just kind of collapse and buckle under and say, "There's no way, Lord." And thank God that He's--God understands our weakness, amen? Thank God that God understands that--and He is patient with us, and He's tactful with His calling and the pathway that He calls us to be able to sometimes sacrifice in some very real ways, to be able to accomplish His goals in our lives.

Well, with that introduction, I want to invite you to open your Bibles. We're going to go to Revelation--sorry, not Revelation--but the first book of the Bible, not the last one. Revelation chapter 15, which is our first chapter of the lesson study this week. We're going to Rev--I keep wanting to say Revelation, don't I? We're going to go to Genesis chapter 15 and verse 6. Genesis chapter 15 and verse 6. And when we come to this chapter, to this verse, it is a signature verse for this chapter. It is the gospel that Abraham understood. It is the gospel that Abraham lived under. It's the same gospel that is offered to you and I. Unlike many of our Christian friends that sometimes misunderstand the Old Testament gospel, and somehow believe that in the Old Testament, you kind of earned your way into heaven. You kept the law of Moses strictly enough until you finally found yourself--and I just heard that with a preacher on Christian radio just the other week repeat it again, and so preachers are still teaching from the pulpit, some pulpits--not all of them, but some of them--that in the Old Testament, you know, the curse of being in the Old Testament era was that, you know, you had to earn your salvation by keeping the Ten Commandments, and the law of Moses, and so on.

But thank God, we live in the New Testament, where God gives us grace. He justifies us freely through our faith and the grace that God gives to us. But that is simply not true. That preacher and those Christians are not studying their Bible, not carefully enough, at least, because the Bible tells us that Abraham was saved by grace through faith, just as much as you and I were.

In fact, as this lesson study points out, Paul actually was inspired by God to run with these chapters that we're looking at, that in this window of time in the life of Abraham, and God expounds on that in Romans chapter 4 and in Galatians chapter 4, and it talks about the fact that, that this represents--that the gospel that Abraham lived under is the same gospel that Paul and the apostles and the Christian church lives under, as well. So, as we come to verse 6, it says, "And he believed," that is Abraham, "and Abraham believed in the Lord." That's faith. "And He accounted it to him for righteousness." He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Now, was Abraham's faith and belief sincere and saving? Yes, it was. Okay, the Bible record tells us. Of course, it confirms that it's sincere, doesn't it? He says, "And he believed." The Bible doesn't tell us lies. It tells us truth. And so his faith was very sincere. His belief was very sincere. Was it a saving faith? Sure it was. Abraham was counted as a child of God, a prophet of God.

God doesn't call unsaved people to be prophets. He only calls faithful saved people to be prophets. Peter made that very clear in his first letter, that God only calls holy men of God, who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. And so, yes, Abraham had a very sincere belief. He had a saving belief. And the Bible confirms that very clearly.

Was it a fully mature and perfect faith? No. The Bible also makes that very clear. In the chapters that follow, that becomes abundantly clear that the faith that Abraham had was sincere. It was saving, but it was still in process. It was still maturing. It had still not yet been perfected.

Now, years later, we find a different Abraham, don't we? We find an Abraham where God says, you know, "Take your son, your only son, your only begotten, miraculous son, Isaac, bring him up onto a mountain and sacrifice him." And Hebrews tells us that Abraham's faith had matured and grown so well that by that point, it tells us in the book of Hebrews that Abraham put two and two together and realized, "Man alive, if I follow through with this, this is still my son, my only son, the one whom God has promised will be the father of all my grandchildren and great grandchildren and great, great, great,

great, great, great, great grandchildren. And so if I do follow through with this, and I take the life of my son, God will surely, inevitably resurrect him back to life again, so that he can marry and bear children."

Now, that's a mature faith, amen? So, God matures us. We see he's in process, but even with our immature--even in his immature faith in the beginning years, he's still in a saving relationship with Jesus. Why? Because he believed, and it was accounted to him as righteousness. Now, Paul quotes that same verse in Romans, in chapter 4, and he talks about the fact that this is justification by faith, through God's grace, that He gives to us. That's good news. Amen? That God reckons, He imputes, He accounts to your account the righteousness of Christ because of your faith in Him.

So, when God looks down upon Abraham, even though He looks down, and He sees a fumbling, stumbling man--because truly, he's on record of doing that. He's already lied once. He's on--he's going to repeat the same lie in the future again, you know, to save his skin. Then we find him sleeping with his--the hand-servant of his wife, Sarah, so that they might bear a child, that wasn't part of God's plan in the first place. And so we find that he does make some very real blunders and some bad choices, but he's still counted righteous and perfect according to his faith and belief.

And so when God looked down upon Abraham, He said, "Listen, I know that we're still in process here. We've still got some work to do in your life. But as far as I'm concerned, you're perfect." Now, He winks while He says that, doesn't He? He says, "Now you and I both know," as He looks down upon Abraham, "Now you and I both know that you're not perfect; but as far as I'm concerned, because of your faith and My grace and this coming life and death of Jesus Christ, My Son, you are counted perfect in my eyes. You are justified, and you can live in that hope."

That's the heart of the gospel, is it not? Now, the other half is sanctification, and we're going to talk about that as we continue here, as well, and so we don't want to leave the other half of the gospel out, as sometimes we as Christians can make the mistake of doing. And so we find here, as we come back to the story of Genesis chapter 15, 16, 17, that there are three sons, three sons that are offered by Abraham to God. The first two sons are illegitimate sons. They're not part of God's plan. The first one was Abraham's favorite servant. He was a servant that was born into his home, so he must've been the son of one of his previous--current servants. And so there is a family of servants in his home that gives birth to a boy, and this boy becomes Abraham's favorite and most loved and trusted servant.

And so as Abraham--the years are going by now. You know, we're talking--he's coming on 85. And as he comes on 85 years old, he says, "Listen, you know, obviously, I must have misunderstood the message that God had for me. There must've been some disconnect there. And so I'm going to have to pick Eleazar as my-- my servant as my son. Now, this is a boy that was born in his camp that Abraham has known since birth, and so he kind of adopted him under his wings, and he thought, "Well, this must-- what God means, you know, that He wants me to adopt this servant into my family and into my inheritance." And as we know, as we've read the chapters--as I hope you have because we can't read the chapters today--is that God says, "No, he's not the one. The one that I was talking about, the son that will inherit this land and his descendants will come from your own body." And we read that in Genesis chapter 15 and verse 4.

The second son that is presented in these chapters is the one that Abraham has with his wife's maidservant, handmaid. And so Hagar the Egyptian, this Egyptian handmaid that is the number-one handmaid and servant of Sarah--you know, again, now we're talking 85 years old. Makes that very clear in chapter 16. Verse 3, it tells us that Abraham is now 85 years old. They've been hanging out in the Promised Land for 10 years now. Now, for God, 10 years is like a blink of an eye--not even. But for you and I, 10 years is a little bit longer than that, isn't that? And so they're thinking, "Man alive, we've been here 10 years, and God has made it clear to me now that Eleazar's not the one, so we've got to come up with a second son."

And so the second son was Sarah's idea this time. And so Sarah comes up to her husband one day and says, "Listen, you know, it's been 10 years now. You're 85. I mean, time's ticking. You know, my biological

clock has expired. You know, I've got a younger handmaiden here. I'm sure she'll be fertile, and she'll be able to produce you a son. And I can bear a son through her, a surrogate son." Now, this is not unusual, she didn't come up with that idea. This was practiced in her culture, and at different times in different families and royalty and so on, especially. And so this is not unusual as far as the concept goes, but it is not part of God's plan. And so he says--she says, "Listen, take her as a secondary wife. You know, marry her. We'll make it "right," and you go and sleep with her and conceive, and we'll have a child and a son through him."

Well, the plan works, doesn't it? She conceives, he marries her, he goes into her, she conceives, and she has a son. Aha, there it is, Lord. And so Abraham offers up to Jesus and to his Father, and he says, "There it is. Here's the son. Finally, things are coming together." And for 13 years, he believed that was the truth, until Abraham--until God shows up once again. And so we find that God is needing to show up once again, and He doesn't show up for quite a while. Again, 13 years after Sarah and Abraham, you know, come up with this scenario. And so Ishmael is growing into this strong and healthy young man, and Abraham has taken him under his wing, inevitably, as his firstborn, and he loves little Ishmael.

But in chapter 17, Abraham is now 99 years old. God appears to him again. And in the midst of that conversation outside of--first of all, He says, "Listen, your name shall no longer be Abram, exalted father, but you shall be called Abraham, which means father of nations; for out of you shall come nations and kings of nations." And so you can see Abraham nodding and saying, "Okay, this is great. Things are coming together. Things are working just the way as I understand it, and the plan of God is, yes, Ishmael is going to have these children, and they're going to develop into nations and kings. This is wonderful." And then God says, "I want you to circumcise you, yourself, every male, Ishmael, all of the males within your camp, and this will be a sign of the covenant that I'm making with you, a physical, visible sign."

But then God kind of confuses Abraham when we come to verse 15, because in verse 15 it says, "Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarah, your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.'" Now Sarai means "my princess." And my princess means Abraham's princess. Now God says, "You shall no longer--Sarai's name shall no longer just be your princess, but she shall be called Sarah, which means princess, universal princess. Now her name will mean that she is the mother of all nations and the mother of kings. From her body will come kings and nations, as well."

Now Abraham is scratching his head and saying, "Wait a minute, this is not going as planned. How does Ishmael fit into that? That's not the way things are going." And so God knows that He's changing Sarai's name to princess, mother of kings and nations is-- it would inevitably confuse the mind of Abraham. And so God just makes it plain in verse 16 and says, "I will bless her, and I will also give you a son by her. And then I will bless her, and she shall become a mother of nations. Kings of people shall come from her." And so God unpacks this new name and says, "Listen, I know you're confused, but this is My plan all along. You just kind of monkeyed it up because you thought you would help Me out, you and Sarai."

Fascinating story. Verse 17, Abraham fell on his face. And what does he do? He laughs. Now, we don't know if he laughed out of skepticism, like, "Lord, this is crazy talk. You know, what is this? You know--" And he responds in such a way, he says, "Listen, can an old man that's 100--" now, he rounds it off. Have you noticed that the older you get, you kind of round off your age? You know, you're 58, and your birthday is in 6 months or 5 months from now, and you kind of already calling yourself 59. I don't know why. It's just kind of a pattern. The older you get, you kind of start rounding your age off older than it already is.

And Abraham's no different. He's 99 years old, according to verse 1, but Abraham responds and says, "Can a man that's 100 years old have a child? I mean, come on. Sarah's 90 years old now. She's--menopause is way back there. You know, she experienced--the hot flashes are already over. There's no way that she can have a son, Lord." And, of course, Abraham is still speaking on earthly terms. He's thinking on earthly terms, isn't he?

Now, you and I don't want to be too critical, because too often we always think in earthly terms as well. And more than once, we forget, you know, that the Lord is divine, and nothing is impossible with the Lord. We're always trying to cover our bases, you know, and the Lord's coming along and said, "Listen, you can try to cover your bases, but I already have them all covered anyway, and some of the bases are going to be covered in an impossible way that no economic strategy is going to solve," and so on.

You know, we're always trying to cover our bases. God does talk about planning for the future, so we don't want to be foolish; but at the same time, we always want to keep leaning upon God and saying, "Lord, whatever You call me to do, wherever You call me to go, whatever needs I have, I know You'll provide. Some of them will come through pragmatic, natural consequences and avenues, and sometimes they'll come miraculously. But whatever way that You provide, I know that You will provide for me."

And so that's one of the lessons we can pick up from this is that we want to pray that we can think more like God thinks and less like Abraham is thinking at this point. And so this is given to us for our lesson, so that we can learn the lessons that Abraham learned the hard way, and we might be able to avoid some of these different bumps in the road. All right, and so God says, "No, no, no, Sarah, your wife, shall bear a son."

So, what's the answer in verse 19? When Abraham kind of says, "And then Abraham says, 'By the way, don't forget Ishmael, and let's just put Ishmael out into the front.'" You know, whenever I come to this, it reminds me of Peter. You know, Peter had been fishing all night. And so him and his brother Andrew, James, John, they were out there fishing like they do, and they always fish at night because their nets were larger. They didn't have that nice, clear nylon netting that we have and the lines that we use where the fish can't see, even in the daytime, our lines when we're fishing, but they didn't have that back then. So, their lines were much more visible under the water.

And so the fishermen, the professional fishermen understood that the best time to fish is when it's dark out because then they can't see the lines of the netting. And so him and--Peter and his fishing colleagues, they were all--they'd been fishing all night long, and they know where every hot spot in the entire Sea of Galilee is. They know every square inch of that lake. You know, they grew up fishing from a little boy. As early as they could talk, they were out on that lake. They knew everything--he says--you know, Peter--you know, Jesus is preaching early one morning. And a tired Peter and his fellows, you know, they're wrapping up their night, and they're cleaning the nets while they're listening to the words of Christ. And Christ kind of stops and says, "Peter, listen, I want you to take those nets, put them back in the boat. Go out into the deep water there again. The first deep water that you see, throw your nets back in."

And Peter, you know, he's looking around, and he's trying to be tactful. You know, he respects the Lord. He already understands that Jesus is no normal rabbi. He's no ordinary person or rabbi. And so he's looking around and saying, "How do I handle this one? You know, I just--I want to respect Him, but obviously Jesus doesn't know a lot about fishing. I know a lot about fishing. I was brought up--I'm a professional fisherman. Jesus is not." So, he says, "Lord, you know, listen, I don't know how to tell You this, but I've been fishing all night, and that's the prime time to fish. Nobody fishes--no professional fishes during the day. I've been fishing all night, and I haven't caught anything, and I went to every single hot spot on this lake. And You're telling me now that I'm going to go out and catch some fish just like that in the daytime? Nevertheless, Lord--"

You can almost see Jesus looking at Peter and saying, "Just go ahead and do it." And so with that pause and that look that Jesus inevitably gave to Peter, Peter says, "Nevertheless, Lord, okay, all right, I'll go out." And so he goes out, and we know the rest of the story. You know, he started catching so many fish, more fish in one go, in one spot than he had ever caught in his entire professional life. It was so full, the nets became so full so fast, that the nets began to break. And not only that, but then his boat became so full that it began to sink. And not only that, but then as he called James and John to bring their boat over. Their boat became so full, it began to sink with fish.

And then Peter, at that point, realized, "Wait a minute. This guy is a professional fisherman. Maybe He does know more about fishing than I do." And not only that, but more importantly, he fell at His feet, and he says, "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man." He understood the greatness and the divinity and the power that was found in Jesus Christ. And he understood that God can achieve the impossible, and that's what God is teaching both Sarah and Abraham, as they are maturing in that very sincere and saving faith that they have.

While God is continuing to account that grace and that righteousness and justification before Abraham and Sarah, they were also maturing in that other divine miracle that works in your life and mine called sanctification. He's becoming more and more mature in his faith. His character is growing. His integrity is becoming stronger, and that's what God does in our life, doesn't He? For me, that was the best. I didn't even know about justification until years after I gave my heart to the Lord. I didn't even know about that good news. You know, that wasn't an issue. For me, He would change me, you know? I went from this arrogant, self-centered, selfish, drunken, womanizing young man to this newborn, honest, loving, Spirit-filled person that He had made me in the years that followed. That was the good news because I realized the contrast, and I realized, "Man alive, my life is way better with Jesus and having His Spirit than it was before."

Before, my heart was empty. Now I was prospering in a lot of different sinful ways, and there was a lot of pleasures that I was engaging in, but it was all empty, it all came up empty. But then when I found Christ, and He changed me, and that sanctifying miracle started to take place, and He matured my faith, even as He continues to do today, by the way. Then I became more like Jesus, and the Spirit made me a new person. "Behold, all things have become new," the Bible says, when you come in Christ. And that's what's happened with Abraham and with Sarah, and that miracle continues as God is patiently working with him and with Sarah, as they continue on.

And so God continues on, as we come through chapter 17, and we come to chapter 18, and it is here now that God appears again, and we have God and the two angels in the form of men that are appearing before Abraham. And Abraham goes out quickly, as being the great man of hospitality that he is, setting that prime model for hospitality for you and I to those who are in need of a roof over their head in a difficult situation.

So, here is these three traveling strangers. Abraham goes out, greets them, brings them in, and invites them to be able to have this meal. And in the midst of this, he begins to recognize, "Hey, wait a minute, these are no ordinary men." That transition, that self-awareness started to come, and he started to realize, "Wait a minute, these are not just traveling men. There's a divinity, there's a presence with these men."

And sure enough, as the conversation goes on, the one that is the Lord Himself, an Angel of the Lord, with a capital A, Jesus is in the form of a human traveler, man, that is traveling. He goes on, and He expresses to Abraham, as Sarah is kind of behind him, out of sight, but kind of lingering by the door of the tent with her ear pointed in the right direction--and as her ear is pointed in the direction of the conversation, she's eavesdropping. And God knows it, of course. God knows everything. And where is it? Verse 10, chapter 18 and verse 10, "I will certainly return to you, and according to the time of life--" That means the 9-month period that we think of in pregnancy, a term, or three terms, as we call it. "And behold, Sarah, your wife, shall have a son."

Sarah was listening in the tent door, which was behind him. "Now, Abraham and Sarah were old and well advanced in age, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing." It's such an endearing kind of personal scene that we find here. "And so the Lord said to Abram, 'Why did Sarah laugh?' saying, 'Shall I bear a child in being that I'm old?' 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?'" And so the Lord is helping move Sarah and Abraham forward in their faith and to recognize that some of the things that God calls us to do or the things that He promises in our life are literally, are impossible. On a human plane, they are impossible. Physically speaking, scientifically speaking, economically speaking, educationally speaking, whatever avenue and field that God is talking to you about, sometimes He achieves the impossible. And

so He says, "Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time, I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

But here we have Sarah denying it, saying, "I didn't laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "Oh, but you did laugh." Yeah, so we have this, almost like a family conversation here, you know, and it's so endearing, you know, because Sarah really loved the Lord, didn't she? She had a very sincere love for God, just like Abraham. These are two very godly, God-fearing, Spirit-filled, justified, sanctified couple of God, but they have their weaknesses. And God is working and helping them work through those weaknesses to mature their faith. And thank God that we can see that He does that with them, and He does that with me.

We can know if God did that with this great patriarch, the highest, most exalted, most important figure since the flood, up to Jesus, then certainly He also works with us. And so I take great comfort and encouragement in that, and also instruction as well. God always calls us on our sin, doesn't He? Did Sarah sin at that moment? Yeah, she disbelieved, which is probably just as bad, maybe worse, and then she goes ahead and says, "No, I didn't laugh."

You know, sometimes when we're under pressure, we're not as honest as we should be. And she finds herself in an awkward pressure and situation, so she bends the truth and says, "No, I didn't laugh." And God says, "Oh, no, let's be honest here," no pun intended, "but you did laugh. You didn't tell the truth, did you?" And sometimes we kind of wink at each other's dishonesty sometimes, don't we? We wink at our own dishonesty and say, "Well, Lord, I was in a pinch there, you know. I had to be able to twist the truth to be able to smooth things over." And God never tells us to smooth things over with dishonesty. God tells us that we are to be honest at all times. And, you know, so dishonesty is never justified. It's never justified. It's a sin 100% of every minute of every day. And so we have to be careful on that. Yeah, God calls us to be honest at all times.

All right, and, of course, the supernatural-- was Isaac conceived? Did God fulfill His promise that He gave? Sure, He did. You know, He said, "You will have a son through your own body," which originally He had told Abraham. Now He comes and clarifies and says, "Listen, I guess I didn't clarify well enough with you that it would not be only your own body but also Sarah's body, not her handmaid's body but Sarah's body will conceive. And she will conceive well after--"

It reminds me of Lazarus. You know, Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick and that he was about to die, he was so sick. And so Jesus, instead of running straight off to Bethany, where His friend Lazarus was there, that He might save her--save him--He hangs out for another four days in whatever town He was in, at a distance. And what was Jesus doing that for? Well, number one, He wanted Lazarus to be able to breathe his last breath. He wanted his heart to stop. He wanted Lazarus to be buried, and then He wanted Lazarus to rest in the grave for four days.

You know, scholars, fascinatingly discovered that the reason that He wanted four days is because the Jews believed somehow--there's a superstitious traditional religious belief that if someone died, if their heart stopped beating, there is still a possibility that the spirit of life can return back to them, and they can come back to life within three days. And so, Jesus, knowing, almost for certain knowing that, waited four full days because He didn't want that excuse to be able to be used in explaining this miraculous, divine resurrection that He was about to perform. And so He shows up, and He performs this miracle. And He says, "Lazarus, come forth." And poof, there's Lazarus, waddles out. You know, his heart is beating again and he's trying to take off his swaddling cloths and people are helping him--not swaddling cloths, but burial cloths and such. And I believe that God waited on purpose.

In fact, the evidence is there that God waited on purpose until not only did Sarah experience menopause, but then menopause was distant history, just like Lazarus. He wanted to make sure that he was not only dead and buried, but he was buried and dead for four full days. And same here with Sarah. God waited until Sarah not only went through menopause, but until menopause was far distant in the history of her life, so that when it really did take place, that both Abraham, Sarah, and every other human being that understood the details of this story would know that it was only by a divine miracle.

Only by God's divine supernatural working did she conceive.

And there is a miracle that is symbolized, and Paul picks up on this, as God is working through the apostle and prophet Paul, in Romans chapter 4 and in Galatians chapter 4, as he expands on some of the mistakes that Abraham and Sarah had made with Hagar and so on and uses that to symbolize two different religious experiences that we can have.

Religion number one is produced by the flesh, our human strength and effort. Now, this is the most popular form of Christianity today and always has been, historically, is when we lean upon our own human strength and our own righteousness, and our own goodness, and our own effort to be able to find ourself becoming a godly man or woman, a child of God.

Religion number two, and that is represented and symbolized by Hagar and the child that was conceived through the human effort and surmising of both Sarah and Abraham. But then religion number two is produced by the Spirit, and the religion that is produced by the Spirit is by God's divine strength and effort. It is a miraculous occurrence that takes place in your life and mine. For you to become truly born again requires a miracle. The fact that I am standing up before you here today instead of carousing through the nightclubs and getting drunk and chasing women and doing all kinds of selfish and sinful things that I used to do before the Lord had found me. The only reason that I stand and then be able to teach the Word of God to you today is because God has worked a miracle in me.

There is something that God has done and continues to do through me that I could never do on my own. And even if every single person here was to try to help me, you still couldn't make me the man that I am today. No self-help guru, no psychologist, no pop psychologist, no expert in the mental or emotional field could ever make me what I am today. There is no method within--and I'm not downplaying psychology and psychiatric--psychiatry, because they have their place when they're rightly understood and applied. But none of it--all of it comes up empty without the miracle of Jesus in the heart, being born again and recognizing that I am a sinful, selfish, self-centered human being, and the only way that I can overcome that is by the miracle of Christ within my heart, to be born again.

This is where we find divine strength. This is where we find divine effort. Do I cooperate with the Lord? Yes, of course. The number-one avenue of cooperation, the number-one part that I need to get before the Lord is twofold. Number one, my belief in faith. And number two, to surrender, to surrender before the Lord. And so every morning I'm on my knees surrendering before the Lord and saying, "Lord, work a miracle in my life again today. Take this sinful, self-centered, selfish heart, and continue to make it the heart that you have made it. I surrender before You, Lord. Whatever You call me to do, help me to be Your servant today. Help me to live out Your ways today. Help me to be the person that I could never be without You. Do Your work in me, Lord, because I can't do it." And friends, that is the difference between religion number one and the experience in religion number two. Religion number one is represented by Hagar and the conception that she received and that, through a surrogate kind of scenario, Sarah received, and then Abraham being involved, strictly on a earthly, human plane.

Number two, we find Isaac. Now, Isaac shouldn't be. Isaac should never have existed. Abraham and Sarah could've tried for 100 years, and almost did try for 100 years, and they weren't able to produce a son. But when God got involved and God used His divine strength and power to do the work that Abraham and Sarah could never do on their own, that is when Isaac came to be. And so Isaac represents justification by faith and God's grace, yes, but also sanctification that God gives to us as well, the miracle of God changing us. "Behold, all things have become new," the Bible tells us, 1 Corinthians--2 Corinthians 5, verse 17. And so, that is the great miracle and the truth that God brings to us.

Well, I knew that we weren't able to get through all of it. You'll have to forgive me. If you haven't read the chapter of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah and the destruction there, there's some very good things to look at there. Read the chapter, go through your lesson study, and I'm sure you'll be able to pull out some important truths there, as well.

Don't forget to take advantage of our free gift offer today. If you haven't heard about it at the beginning of our program, want to make sure that we offer it one more time, which is "Remember Lot's Wife." And so, again, this is on the last chapter, chapter 19, that we look at in this lesson study. It's free offer # 108. All you have to do is dial 1-866-788-3966. That's 1-866-788-3966. Ask for free offer # 108. Love to be able to put this into your hands. It's available if you're in North America or any of the US territories.

If you want to take advantage of a downloaded copy on your phone, you can go ahead and text the code SH054, and you want to dial that to 40544. And that's only available if you're in the United States with the cellular networks that are available here. If you're in another part of the world, we also have a website which is study.aftv.org/SH054, and that can be downloaded on the internet anywhere around the world. Make sure you take advantage of that and continue to grow in the knowledge of God's Word. Until next week, we look forward to seeing you then. May God bless you and keep you.

Announcer: Don't forget to request today's life-changing free resource. Not only can you receive this free gift in the mail, you can download a digital copy straight to your computer or mobile device. To get your digital copy of today's free gift, simply text the keyword on your screen to 40544 or visit the web address shown on your screen, and be sure to select the digital download option on the request page. It's now easier than ever for you to study God's Word with Amazing Facts wherever and whenever you want, and most important, to share it with others.

Announcer: Amazing Facts, Changed Lives.

Christine VanOrder: I was born into a family of criminals. When I got older, and I started breaking the rules, no one ever taught me about, "Thou shalt not steal and thou shalt not lie, thou shalt not commit adultery," anything like that. When I became a runaway at 14, I was just a wild and lost child. I had somebody tell me, "Hey, you want to earn some money cleaning this guy's kitchen?" So, I went to this house on a different side of town than I was used to. Someone kept giving me alcoholic drinks. And being 115 pounds and 14 years old, it really didn't take much time before I was so inebriated that I had no control over what was going on around me.

He took me to another location, another town, and I was put in isolation. I would come out to be abused between 3 and 8 times a day. I was degraded. I was humiliated. I had no value as a human being. And I learned very quickly that what I felt and what I thought and how this made me feel did not matter to him at all. If I even thought about not doing what he wanted me to do, I would have a gun to my head, a knife to my throat.

There was one time in particular where he had been tormenting me psychologically. And one day he said, "Oh, you'll never kill yourself. You'll never do it." And almost defiantly, I was like, "Yes, I will." And he handed me a big old handful of pills, and I took them. While I was overdosing--and I had been overdosing all night--I cried out to a God that I didn't even believe in.

And at that very moment, in the most powerful way, God shone His light on me, and He gave me peace of mind like I'd never had. And He let me know right then and there while I was on that bathroom floor that He was real and that He was love and that I did not know how at that time, but He was going to help me.

A little less than a year later, I became pregnant at 15. I loved my son with my whole heart. He also became something that my abuser could use against me in order to pump more fear and coercion. I had finally got away from my abuser, and I had finally built up a support system to help me stay on the move and stay on the run. And I was at my grandmother's house. And on my son's third birthday, he--he took my son. And when I called the police and said, "My son's just been kidnapped," they said, "He's the father, and we can't do anything about it."

After my son was gone, I lost my mind. I started doing drugs. And within a month and a half, I robbed a convenience store. So, I was sentenced to 70 months, 5 years, 10 months in prison. And it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I started attending the church services in prison 7 days a week. It blew

my mind. I was hooked. And then we went through--it was "Millennium of Prophecy," and NET '99, that just solidified my faith in such a powerful way, and I knew that God was leading me. Even the guards there commented on how much I had changed. And since I started doing the studies on Amazing Facts, I was so excited about what I was learning that I was coming back from there and trying to convert my hardened criminal friends with the Storacles of Prophecy.

Every question I ever had, every worry, everything that I ever wondered about, the Bible answered everything, and it was so clear and so easy to understand. It's been 11 years since I've been out of prison. I am married to an amazing, wonderful man, my first non-abusive relationship in my whole entire life.

Before we got married, we watched the "Millennium of Prophecy" series together, and it was just such a blessing to be able to see him learn and see him grow. And I feel like my life now is just a gift, that every single thing that happened to me bad in the past is nothing compared to the joy and happiness and the stability that I have now. My name is Christine VanOrder, and my life has been changed by Jesus Christ and Amazing Facts.

Announcer: Amazing Facts, Changed Lives

Nita Littlefield: I'm Tlingit Indian from Sitka, Alaska. My Tlingit name is [speaking Tlingit] It was a very depressing time for the people of Alaska. A lot of alcohol abuse was taking place. And unfortunately, my mother got caught up in the alcohol. It made myself and my siblings grow up in a pretty horrible environment. It was really hard to understand God. It was really hard to understand what love was.

I ended up having a child in my 12th grade and leaving home when I was 15 years old. But somehow, somehow, we made it. And I became a loner, I became a hermit. So, I went up to the biggest marijuana county, to Humboldt County, and started my new career. Things weren't right though. No matter how nice I kept thinking life was living up on top of the mountain, not having to worry about wearing clothing, just waking up and watching the plants grow, searching still for more and more.

I went to the post office, and I was standing there by myself. I looked down and here was this, what is called a handbill, a postcard. And the letters on it grabbed my attention and it said, "Revelations." I'd never heard Revelation taught before, and I thought, "Gosh, that would have been so good." I looked at the time and the day and I said, "Wow, that's today."

And for six weeks, I sat there in the front seat of that building and could not believe the things that I heard. And I found this hunger, that I had in my heart for decades being filled. I was actually like a starving child, you know, wanting to get into learn more about Revelations. And I chose to be baptized on April 3. Even though I chose to serve God, I kept falling. I was going to Bible studies all--four times a week and just so hungry to learn as much as possible.

God, just overnight, had me studying the Word of God through AFCOE, and the miracles that happened through AFCOE is so incredible. The only preacher I was listening to was Pastor Doug Batchelor, who I didn't even call by his name. I called him the caveman. And then here, all of a sudden, I'm sitting in front of him in his classroom, learning from him.

On October 11, I sat there, though, in my room saying, "Lord, here I am studying Your Word. But what, what am I doing here? What do I need to do? What is it you want me to do?" And that night about 1 in the morning, God spoke to me and He said, "I want you to write a note to Pastor Doug and tell him what you do." I sat there and I says, "No, I'm not going to write a note. I'm not going to write a note."

And I said okay, so I ripped off a piece of paper, and I wrote on the note and I said, "I'm an experienced fashion designer. I can sew anything. I could make any patterns. If there's any way that I can be of any service to you, God told me to be bold and tell you." And I walked up and I handed him the note, and he didn't know what it was, but he said, "Thank you." And four hours later, I got a phone call from Amazing Facts. Pastor Doug told me that I was an answer to their prayers. They had been looking for a wardrobe stylist for their new film that they're producing.

Male: Action, two, three.

Nita: Amazing Facts has changed my life in the direction that God wants me to go. And now, out of all the knowledge that was taught to me, I'm able to go out into this world and share the gospel and finish the work for Jesus Christ.

Doug Batchelor: Friends, it's because of God's blessing and your support that thousands of others like Nita have found Jesus and everlasting life.