

## Grace and Mercy in the Old Testament

### I. - Abraham and the Energy of Faith

***“But after the graciousness and the kindness of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, in order that having been justified by that grace, we have become heirs according to the expectation of eternal life”*** (Titus 3:4-7).

It is generally assumed (by those who care) that God’s dealings with the people of the Old Testament were different than His dealings with the people of the New Testament era. It is further assumed that He deals only with the worthy. And thus, people who feel that they are not living up to the standards (of the Church at least) stay back from the Lord and hope only that He will somehow save them. And it is further assumed that the Lord only uses those who “have their lives together,” and that “unless one is in pretty good shape, one might as well not even bother the Lord.”

The big question is how does God take fallen creatures and expect them to become righteous, since the Fall divested humans of the necessary Spirit to accomplish this? The truth of the matter is that all mankind is being put to the test. Apart from God there would be no possibility of righteousness on the earth. So from the very beginning, the only thing that saved mankind was the extension of God’s grace. There were certain religious rituals and requirements, such as the use of blood sacrifices, but we are given very little information as to what God’s specific requirements were until we get to Moses. Immediately we encounter a spate of murders and godless activity, evolving in the famed Tower of Babel and the effort of mankind to express itself outside the parameters of God. This, of course, brought the confusion of tongues associated with the threat of a joint effort of unlimited exploit to the exclusion of God.

It was in this general region—Ur of the Chaldees—that God touched Abraham (or Abram, as he was originally known). Like Melchizedek and John the Baptist, he simply appeared in the course of history. We know nothing of his life prior to the moment that God touched him and sent him to Palestine, to become “a great nation.” That is not to say that there was not a meaningful development of Abraham, but rather that the divine focus does not include it. The same was true with Melchizedek, who simply appears on the scene. Abraham is regarded both in Romans and in Hebrews as a man of great faith. And yet we are not given a clue as to where he attained such faith. That, in itself, is an extremely important point.

Remember the issues of *The Messenger* in which we have discussed faith. We have seen it not as an attitude of the mind—the flesh—accumulated by any human exercise. We have seen it as an energy process from God touching the spirit and awakening it to become a child of God. The natural mind does not accommodate the things of the Spirit. *“The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned [discerned in the spirit]”* (I Corinthians 2:14). The common concept of faith is that it is a feeling of confidence developed in the mind. It really has little to do with the mind. It is a

process within the spirit. It functions often irrespective of the mind, which may at the time be entertaining doubts. We have spoken of Sarah, Abraham's wife, who was told by the angel that she would conceive a child. Sarah laughed and was required to call her child Isaac—she laughed—a symbol of her doubt. Nevertheless, she is listed in Hebrews 11 as having borne the child by faith.

There is a thread running through the entire Old Testament of God's functioning through many of the characters, in spite of their own personal inadequacies. He worked through them to accomplish His purposes in spite of their own inadequacies. It was simply His energy of faith flowing through them and accomplishing His purpose. We are going to look at some of these characters in the following series and show the prevalence of God's grace working in the Old Testament in spite of the faulty human natures through which He had to work.

The first of these is Abraham who is singular in the lack of evidence of his having accumulated faith by his own merit. He becomes the symbol in Romans of the kind of faith that was counted for righteousness. And yet it was not of his own merit. We have a classic example in the New Testament in the Apostle Paul, who was suddenly struck by the energy of God and became His fearless servant. The remarkable thing is that he was not bent on any mission of mercy or pilgrimage of faith, but was bent on extreme mischief against God's people.

Abraham was touched with an energy of faith that caused him to take his entire family for 1500 miles across the Fertile Crescent to the land of Palestine. We have no indication of how he felt along the way or what his misgivings might have been. The simple fact is that God touched him and he went to Palestine.

It is vital to see the connection with our own faith. It is a connection that is allowable by reason of Romans 4. We too are touched by the energy of God's faith and not our own. Paul makes it very plain in Philippians 3—*“Not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith”* (v.9).

I cannot stress enough that it is the energy of God in our spirits that is true faith and not feelings of confidence in our human mind or flesh. Christ can be working in one's life in very special ways, accomplishing special purposes, and yet the mind cannot always escape the doubts that are based on the often uncontrollable processes of human thought.

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