

# Abraham & the Balance of the Old Testament

## Douglas Jacoby, January 2021

### MAJOR ABRAHAMIC THEMES

#### 1. Covenant

- Ex 2:23-25; 3:6, 15-16; 4:5; 6:3,8; etc.
- "... God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob..."
- Not *cognitive* remembering, but *relational*

#### 2. Idolatry

- Josh 24:1-3
- ... "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many...'"
- *Genesis Rabbah* 38 (apocryphal story about Abram and his father's idol shop)
- Covenant requires the relinquishing of all idols!

#### 3. Land

- Landlessness, wandering nomad. Abraham, possessed only a field/cave at time of his death.
- 1 Ki 18:26; 2 Ki 13:23; Ps 47:9; Isa 29:22; 41:8; 51:2

#### 4. Faith

- Stepping out in faith (OT and NT)
- "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him (Isa 51:1-2).
- God's power! And faithfulness—if we are faithful!

### MISUSES OF THE TRADITION

#### 1. Reliance on numbers

- The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, the inhabitants of these waste places in the land of Israel keep saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess'" (Ezek 33:23-24).
- Why is their reasoning wrong? Not because God is powerless, or unfaithful to the terms of his covenant.
- It is *his people* who are unfaithful!
- Ezek 33:25-28

#### 2. Reliance on ancestry / heritage

- Matt 3:7-8
- John 8:33, 37, 39-49, 53, 56-58
- Selective memory re: history and heritage?
- Luther: "faith alone" in Rom 3—Abraham justified apart from the Law. *Law* refers NOT to obedience, or even to deeds, but to Torah (context of Romans). Luther adds an extra word ("alone"): *So halten wir nun dafür, daß der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werke, allein durch den Glauben* (Röm 3:28).

## CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIANS

### 1. Pride

- Brought up in the church?
- Long line of leadership? Many years of ministry?

### 2. Numbers games?

- 2 Sam 24
- Wrong, as they often imply an unhealthy ministry is healthy.
- They also tend to ignore the massive number of walkaways. (In most cities, ex-members outnumber actual members many times over!)
- Don't be too quick to criticize groups not growing quickly. Quality building—the tortoise and hare!
- Watch your theology. Parts of Protestantism are good and healthy—others not so.

## FURTHER REMINDERS FOR US

### 1. **Covenant**

- Remember that God is faithful.
- Covenant terms. Do our part!

### 2. **Idolatry**

- We have our own idols, esp. money, popularity, sex, military...
- Take a stand, like Abraham!

### 3. **Land**

- By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God (Heb 11:9-10).
- If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city (Heb 11:15-16).
- Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... (Heb 11:21-22).
- For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come (Heb 13:14).

### 4. **Faith**

- And all these, though commended through faith, did not receive what was promised (Heb 13:39).
- To be faithful means allegiance—fidelity.
- Abraham and Sarah are, for us, *exemplars par excellence*.