

“For Better”: Abraham and Sarah’s Experience of the Promise of God

GENESIS 12:1-20; 15:1-16:6; 18:1-15; 21:1-7

Vows that are honest about the actual expectations of people today might go like this: “I take you for better, for riches, for health, as long as we both shall love.” What people fail to realize is that even “for better” in a marriage is a gift and an achievement, not the inevitable result of being in love. Biblically, marriage is a vocation that demands our all. As a vocation it is a response to the call of God that summons us beyond our self-interests to live by the promise and provision of God. In one sense, we do not choose to be married as we might choose one occupation over another. We are chosen and called. No matter what motives and interests were present in our minds when we made our covenant, we soon discover as Christians that we are being captivated by God for something even greater than a successful or wonderful marriage. But when God calls and commands, he promises to provide all that we need to accomplish his will.

1. Do you think that being in love will inevitably lead to a “for better” marriage? Why or why not?

READ GENESIS 12:1-9.

2. If there is an atlas in your Bible, trace the journey Abram, Sarai, and Lot made. What gave them the confidence to leave behind the old securities in Haran to risk making a new life in Canaan hundreds of miles away?

3. In what ways was this move both a problem and a blessing to the marriage of Abram and Sarai?

READ GENESIS 12:10-20.

4. From this narrow escape, what should Abram have learned about taking matters into his own hands?

READ GENESIS 15:1-16:6.

5. With so many assurances from God, why did Abram try to provide himself with offspring by having sex with Sarai’s servant girl Hagar?

6. Into what bind did Sarai put Abram (16:2,5)?

The Bible says that Abram “believed the LORD” (15:6) and that this faith was regarded by God as righteousness. How, then, do you account for Abram’s actions?

READ GENESIS 18:1-15.

7. After one more divine reassurance in which Abram (exalted father) was renamed Abraham (father of many), and Sarai was renamed Sarah (princess), Abraham received three angel visitors. What do you now see happening in the relationship of Abraham and Sarah as they struggled to believe the promise of God?

Why did living by God's promise require not only individual faith but shared faith and cooperation for Abraham and Sarah?

READ GENESIS 21:1-7.

8. Why was Isaac's name (which means "he laughs") so fitting?
- When, if ever, in your life together has God turned the laughter of unbelief into the laughter of joy?
9. It has been said that humor is an act of worship because in not taking ourselves too seriously, we are implicitly admitting that we are creatures and not God. What role do you think humor could have in your marriage in hard times and in times of plenty?

10. Couples who are married in Christ are, like Abraham and Sarah, called to live by many wonderful promises that cannot be seen but must be believed. Which promises of God give you hope that your marriage can be "for better"?

11. What have you learned from the story of Abraham and Sarah about living together by the promises of God (other than the fact that laughter is not a good birth-control measure!)?