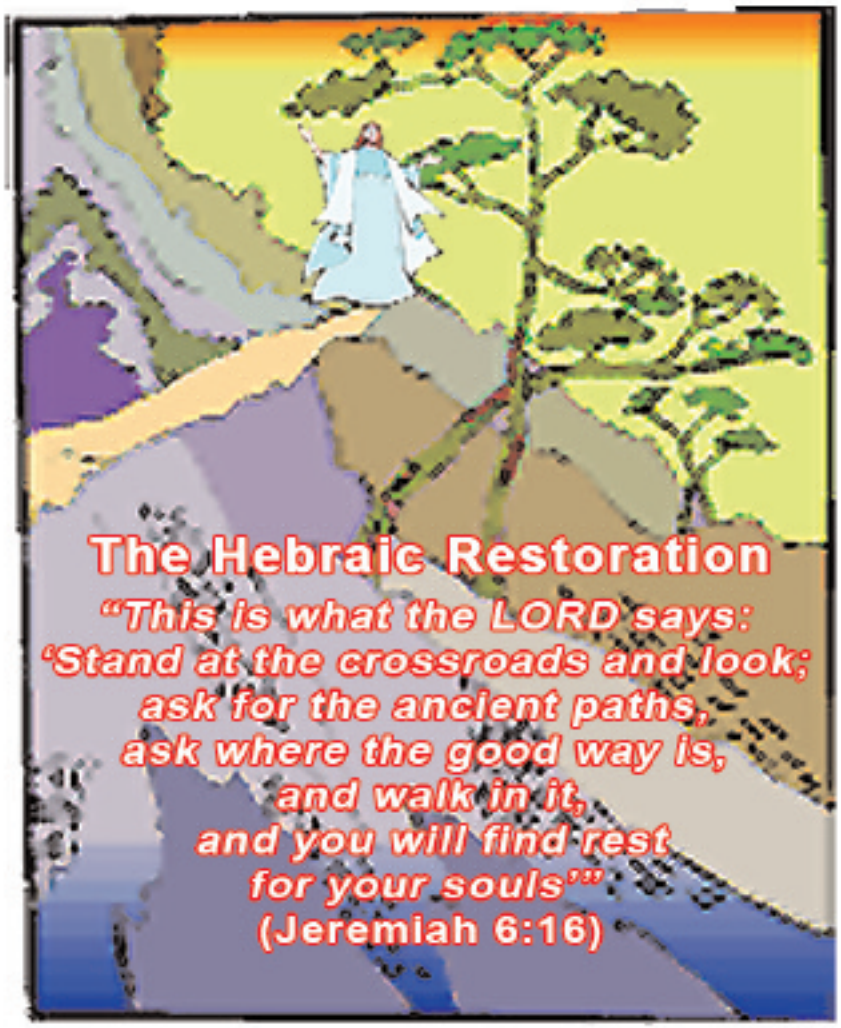
Lifebytes:

34. The Abrahamic Covenant
Groundwork For The Hebraic Restoration



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Dear Friends,

It seems like a lifetime ago when our Father told us to call the truths He began to reveal to us in Israel **"The Hebraic Restoration"**. In the years since our return to the United States He has progressively shown us *why* He wanted that which He is restoring to be called "Hebraic". And recently He has REALLY expanded our understanding of that!

For the past several months Sue has been going through books we've accumulated over the years. As she reads through them she recommends some for me to read, and passes the rest on to others. [In the past, whenever she's been prompted to "sift and toss" it's been God's early warning that we may be moving again. We'll see if this is the case now!]

"The kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (Matthew 13:52)

A few weeks ago Sue gave me ***Eternity In Their Hearts*** by Don Richardson to read. (You may be able to find it through Ebay or CBD. It's published by Regal Books, a division of GL Publications, Ventura, CA.) I'd first read the book when it came out in 1981. At that time Sue and I were at seminary, preparing to be missionaries to Nigeria (so we thought).

Richardson had been a missionary in Irian Jaya for a number of years, so my perspective when I first read his insightful volume was for the sake of cross-cultural evangelism. Rereading it 25 years later, I was able to recognize Holy Spirit-revealed truths pertaining to the Hebraic Restoration that I would never have gleaned earlier.

Matthew 13:52, above, immediately came to mind. I could perceive how key was God's timing for revisiting *Eternity In Their Hearts* — so that we, and you, can further understand the implications of the Hebraic foundations and our God-bequeathed responsibilities to lovingly serve His purposes of Kingdom fruitfulness.

The premise of Richardson's book comes from Ecclesiastes 3:11: "*He has made everything beautiful in its time.* ***He has also set eternity in the hearts of men****; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."* The author proves his case that God's ***general*** *revelation* of Himself has gone forth throughout the world beginning with Adam and Eve. <u>People are born with a *general* revelation of God in their heart</u>. No one is born an atheist!

Richardson cites twenty-six examples of tribes and cultures who knew of the existence of the One True God *before* Christian missionaries ever arrived. Some of the tribes were even told by God to expect *white men who would <u>come with the book</u> to show them how to relate to Him* (p. 84). Missionaries who ultimately came to these people were amazed to find how receptive they were to God's ***specific*** *revelation*—the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

God's *general* revelation of Himself is what Richardson calls ***"The Melchizedek Factor"***. God's *special, specific* revelation is called ***"The Abrahamic Covenant"***, which is foundational to the Hebraic Restoration.

You may remember that Abraham had grasped God's *general* revelation of Himself and therefore had left his homeland, Ur of the Chaldees, at God's command. In the midst of the notoriously pagan people of Canaan the Patriarch encountered the king and priest, Melchizedek, who already served the One True God, *El Elyon*:

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For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, ***priest of the Most High God****, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,* ***to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part*** *of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name,* ***king of righteousness****, and then also king of Salem, which is* ***king of peace*** (Hebrews 7:1,2).

Two men who walked in obedience to the general revelation of the Creator encountered each other. To Abraham was later given the special covenant revelation that he would father *many nations*, and that His descendants would be a blessing to *all mankind* (see Genesis 12:1-3, also 17:1-5). Yet in this first meeting, God's chosen Hebrew honored the Canaanite priest/king with a tenth of his spoils, and received a blessing from this priest's lips.

The Genesis account is clear that early on in their relationship Abraham well understood the purity and holiness of God. No way would he allow the heathen king of Sodom to take away an iota of God's glory by receiving anything from this arrogant ruler's hands!

'I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, ***'I*** *have made Abram rich'* (Genesis 14:22,23).

Richardson has a name for *sin's influence* in the world, an evil influence that attempts to destroy both knowledge of and trust in the One True God: ***"The Sodom Factor"***. "Sodom" stands against everything that is of God.

Those who have the Melchizedek Factor in their hearts—acceptance of the general revelation of God—keep themselves from giving in to the Sodom Factor. And, when they're made aware of the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, they readily embrace it.

These two worldwide influences are foundational to why some receive the Gospel readily and others don't. This understanding has also helped us understand why some readily embrace the Hebraic Foundations and others don't.

Because this concept is so critical, let's go over this one more time:

The *Melchizedek Factor* is God's general revelation of Himself to mankind, both through the knowledge of eternity in their heart and through His creation. That His general revelation has been present from the beginning of creation is proclaimed by the apostle Paul:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, ***His eternal power and divine nature****, have been clearly seen,* ***being understood through what has been made****, so that they are without excuse* (Romans 1:20).

People who are responsive to the Melchizedek Factor are receptive when they hear God's special revelation—the Gospel—and willingly accept His Covenant. It is the Melchizedek Factor in their hearts that enables them to comprehend the Covenant union our Father offers them, and to fully relate to Him as their Father through the reconciling sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus.

Among cultures in which the Sodom Factor has been embraced by people for generations, however, the Melchizedek Factor in their hearts is destroyed. What

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occurs is a ***general toleration for sin, a self-serving focus and goal,*** and an oblivious ***failure to seek God and to relate to Him***—the doleful consequence represented by Sodom and Gomorrah.

We'll return to this discussion shortly, but first we want to introduce an important thought for you, especially if you've been engaged in the practices of Nicolaitan Christendom for a long time.

Much of western Christendom today with over 23,000 varied expressions is a result of the Sodom Factor. Religious forms and practices produce a self-satisfied complacency that resists or resents change. By contrast, intimate Covenant union with God is characterized by ongoing repentance and loving, obedient trust that yearns to be transformed into Christ's likeness, and serve His purposes.

Religious programs and rituals can mask over tolerated sin and are well able to function outside a Covenant relationship. That this is evident is testified to by the presence of anyone, no matter what their spiritual condition, occupying a pew on any given Sunday. Since no criteria for righteousness before a holy God are either established or respected, the Sodom Factor that caters to the flesh through soulish "worship" predominates.

Within much of western Christendom, clergy intermediaries (known theologically as "sacerdotals") run the religious system. This class of hired professionals hinders the individual's dependency on God by keeping the congregation in perpetual infancy. The attendees look to their clergy person to spoonfeed them spiritual truth and represent them before God. That way they themselves have no perceived responsibility to walk in holiness nor to trust Him as their Lord and Master.

How many parishioners even refer to their congregation as "Pastor So-and-So's church"? The Bible refers to this mindset and practice as "Nicolaitanism" (see Revelation 2:6,15). [For further insight on this, see our Hebraic Article: ***I Hate Nicolaitanism***, a free download on our website.]

As you continue on in this Lifebyte, keep in mind that the distinguishing difference between the Melchizedek Factor/ Abrahamic Covenant connection and the Sodom Factor has to do with *repentance and righteousness* versus toleration of sin and disregard for personal holiness. Remember, Melchizedek was referred to as *"king of **righteousness**"*. Our forefather Abraham, *"trusted God, and it was credited to him as **righteousness**"* (Galatians 3:6).

How important is obedient trust and the daily decision to walk righteously in the Spirit of Christ? *Pursuit of righteous living* and *continual willingness to repent* — to turn away from sin and turn to our Father to walk His way — is what distinguishes the followers of Jesus from those who embrace the Sodom Factor so prevalent in western Christianity today.

Both sin and the inherited sin nature that universally plague mankind began with Adam and Eve. The biblical city of Sodom represents an entire group of people who embraced sin of all kinds as their way of life. Genesis reveals that they were *"wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD"* (13:13). And God's reaction to their sin? Because they *"gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion, they **serve as an example** of those who **suffer the punishment** of eternal fire"* (Jude 1:7).

As we've warned previously, Dark Days of Chastisement are coming upon the United States. As we're coming to

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realize, chastisement is a merciful response from our righteous and loving Father. Through it He brings to repentance those in Christendom who entertain the Sodom Factor in their lifestyle. Seeking to blend in by adopting worldly ways and values, they've neglected to be *set apart in Jesus* and to *live righteously* according to His Spirit and His commands.

The arrogant resistance to God that produced such evil among the people of Sodom wasn't confined to their sexual perversion, nor is it manifested among people today only in regard to their sexual habits. The Sodom Factor is wider than this. Think about those you know who take credit for (or boast about) their own achievement or accomplishments or material assets yet make sure they occupy a Sunday morning pew. People who *alloy holiness with worldliness* give lip service to the existence of God but neither seek Him in humble dependence nor incline any of their thoughts toward Him to obey His ways or His Word (see Psalms 10:4, NKJV).

These might go through religious motions because of family tradition or societal/peer approval, but *in their heart* they spurn the reality of God as the Bible presents Him. They're unable to perceive *adversity*, for example, as part of God's refining plan because as long as their lifestyle is prosperous, they have no use for any personal relationship with God (see Psalms 10:6,11). The Sodom Factor rules their goals, values and practices.

Abraham clearly understood the difference between the righteous and the wicked. He sought to ensure that the upright of heart not be destroyed along with those who chose to live in darkness. The faithful Patriarch pleaded with God,

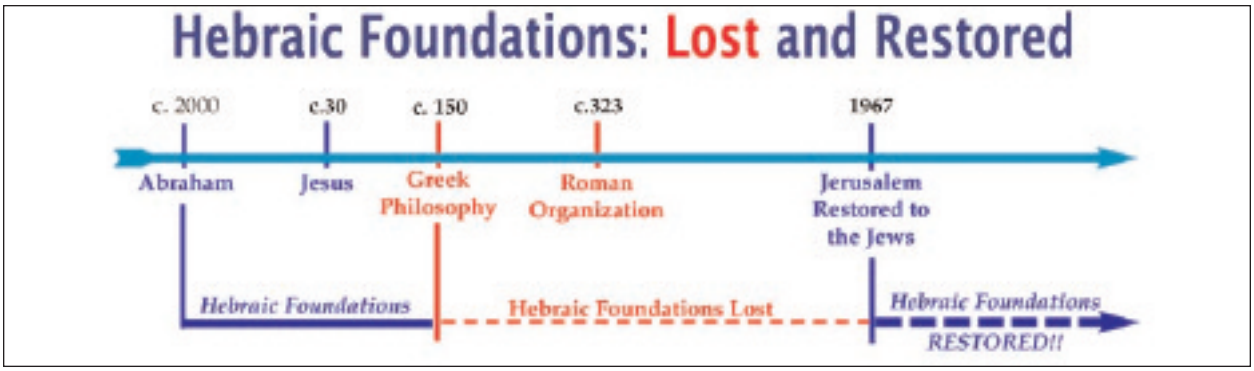
> *'Far be it from Thee to do such a thing,* ***to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike****. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth* ***deal justly****?'* (Genesis 18:25).

As a result of Abraham's appeal, God agreed not to destroy Sodom *if* 10 righteous people could be found (Genesis 18:32). (Interestingly, because God conceded to spare Sodom if 10 righteous were in its midst, Orthodox Jews require ten adult males, a group called a *minyan*, in order for public prayer to take place.) Our Hebraic forefathers understood that God hears only the prayers of the *righteous of heart* (Proverbs 15:29), so those who come before Him need to be right with Him if He's to respond! This truth has an important implication for those seeking to establish home fellowships today.

Again, as you go through this lesson, remember the disparity between *righteousness* and *tolerated sin*. In particular, scrutinize your own life, that of your family, and your fellowship family for areas in which the Sodom Factor may be influencing your lifestyle and decisions.

"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!" **(John 8:58)**

As Sue and I re-read *Eternity In Their Hearts* and marveled at the twenty-six examples of God's general revelation among very different cultures, we were deeply encouraged. We could recognize the enactment of specific revelation and the blessing which was promised to our spiritual father Abraham as our God inaugurated the Hebraic foundations 4,000 years ago:



"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:1-3)

Our Father commanded us to share the foundational truths which had been lost or disregarded for so many centuries. These foundational truths are especially vital if you hunger for a fruitful life of loving, obedient trust that pleases our Father, for as the Psalmist records, *"If the **foundations** are destroyed, what can the **righteous** do?"* (Psalm 11:3).

If you've watched the first segment of our ***Jesus In Your Home*** video series, then you're familiar with the timeline, above. This timeline presents a key truth for you to internalize because it will affect your own life choices in the Kingdom of God.

Richardson cites that Abraham not only *trusted* God, but had an ***"all peoples perspective"***. That God promised the man he would *be a blessing to all peoples on earth* is what the author refers to as the **"Abrahamic Covenant"**.

What does this mean to each of us as followers of Jesus today?

To live in Covenant with God means to live *in union* with Him.

To live *in union* with God means to fulfill His purposes by being a blessing to others.

Get a grip on this for your own life: Our Lord's 4,000-year-old plan is to use His chosen people, His "called-out ones", to *bless the peoples of the earth*. He first chose the Jewish people, and then all who would follow His Son Jesus, including you, to bless others as His representative.

Beginning with Abraham and continuing today, God chooses people to display His loving concern for mankind. Amid the world's majority who embrace the Sodom Factor there has always been a remnant who embrace the Melchizedek Factor. Even though they have not yet encountered either the Word of God nor the God of the Word, they are inclined through their *conscience* which has been given to them by God to bless others.

Many Jewish people in the Older Testament as well as at the time of Jesus and the Apostles lost sight of God's eternal purpose to reconcile sinful man with Himself. But there has always been a remnant of those who understood the Hebraic foundations of righteousness that comes by obedient trust in order to be a blessing to others in His Name.

Beginning with the Older Testament Richardson cites examples of Hebrews who *blessed* heathen Gentile peoples:

1. Abraham himself bore witness to the *Canaanites, Philistines, Hittites,* and (rather negatively by his deceit) to the *Egyptians*.
2. Joseph, the great grandson of Abraham, made up for his forefather's lack of righteous witness to the *Egyptian* nation. The youthful leader gave glory to the One True God and blessed all of Egypt in truly amazing ways.
3. The spies who entered Jericho before it was destroyed became a blessing to Rahab, a *Canaanite* harlot, and her family.
4. Naomi, a daughter of Abraham, was a blessing to two *Moabite* women, Ruth and Orpah.
5. Moses became a blessing to Jethro, his *Midianite* father-in-law (Exodus 18:1-12).
6. King David caused even his enemies, the *Philistines*, to acknowledge God's greatness.
7. The prophet Elijah was a blessing to a *Sidonian* widow in Zarephath (Luke 4:26).
8. The prophet Elisha, likewise, was a blessing to Naaman, a *Syrian* (see Luke 4:27).
9. Jonah, however reluctantly, became a blessing to the Gentile population of *Ninevah*.
10. King Solomon was a blessing to the *Sabaean* "Queen of the South" (Luke 11:31).
11. Daniel and his three colleagues, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were a blessing to *Babylonians*.
12. Esther and her cousin Mordecai were a blessing to the entire *Persian Empire* (see Esther 8:17).
13. Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Ezra, Nehemiah and other prophets declared the Word of the the Lord to various *Gentile nations*. (pp. 159-160)

We're told in the Gospel accounts that the preparatory ministry of John the Baptizer for the coming of Jesus was to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, *"And **all mankind** will see God's salvation"* (Luke 3:6).

The fearless prophet went further and told the Jews who embraced the self-serving Sodom Factor how to truly be counted as children of Abraham:

> *"**Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.** And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that **does not produce good fruit** will be **cut down and thrown into the fire**"* (Luke 3:8,9).

Sadly, increasing numbers of Gentiles so choose to identify with the "Jewishness" of Jesus that they become enamored with becoming "Jewish" through emphasizing observances and practices rather than loving-trust in the Lord Who died to redeem them. This focus does a disservice to the objective of our Father to reach all nations, not by calling them to "become Jewish", but to be one in Jesus regardless of ancestral heritage. And God made sure the *Gentiles* in the family line of Jesus were recognized in Scripture as well: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.

The Gospel accounts do include incidents of Jesus blessing non-Jews, an action that often incurred the ire of the arrogant Jewish religious establishment

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who had lost sight of Abraham's ***'all peoples perspective'***. The Sodom Factor ruled their self-serving motives, and Jesus called them "Hypocrites!" We today who would follow Jesus need to learn from this lesson and *be a blessing* just as He was a blessing to all who sought Him!

During one of several accounts of Jesus in the village of Capernaum a Gentile Centurion approached Him to ask that his stricken servant be healed. Can't you picture the horrified reaction of the Jews who heard Jesus *commend* this Roman soldier? *"I tell you the truth, I have not found* ***anyone in Israel*** *with such great faith"* (Matthew 8:10).

The Centurion already had in his heart a trust in God evidenced by the Melchizedek Factor. And now he encountered the prophesied Seed of Abraham Who was ready and willing to bless him! The Messiah was not solely the "property" of Israel!

As if that weren't enough to indicate the purpose of God to reach the nations, our Lord then went on to make this astonishing declaration. Those who dwelled beyond the confines of Israel and placed their trust in Him as conduits of His grace to bless others were also spiritually connected to Abraham: *"I say to you that many will come* ***from the east and the west****, and* ***will take their places at the feast with Abraham****, Isaac and Jacob in the* ***kingdom of heaven****"* (v.11).

The self-serving, sin-motivated Sodom Factor that controlled much of Pharisaical Judaism was not easy to erase, even among the followers of Jesus. Many clung to the arrogant lie that they had been "chosen" by God because of *their specialness*—that He wanted to bless them alone. From this exclusivist perspective, they failed to grasp the Abrahamic connection in the ministry of Jesus, and what He was role modeling for them in *being* a blessing to all peoples!

The complacently deluded of Jesus' time as well as we today are warned: *"I tell you that the* ***kingdom of God*** *will be* ***taken away from you*** *and* ***given to a people who will produce its fruit****"* (Matthew 21:43). Do remember this: Bearing fruit for God by being His blessing is non-optional.

Jesus informed the Jews, and all of us today, of His criteria for the Final Judgment: *being a blessing* through meeting the practical needs of others. This includes such simple acts of kindness as offering food, drink, hospitality, clothing, healing compassion, and comfort in confinement. (See Matthew 25:31-46.)

His command to bless the unfortunate may have been His way to warn against the Sodom Factor. Ezekiel voices a key accusation from God against Sodom: *"Sodom was arrogant, overfed and unconcerned;* ***they did not help the poor and needy****"* (16:49).

May we as followers of Jesus heed His warning and make His criteria for the Final Judgment our way of life. Let's set aside any focus on today's parlance of "getting saved". Instead, let's start becoming *God's blessing to others*. This is counter to much of western Christendom, and will call for determination and the power of God to help us bless others as Jesus calls for.

Even after the resurrection of Jesus the Apostles still failed to understand their connection through Him to the Covenant of Abraham to be a blessing to *all nations*. It took two persecutions to finally drive them out of Jerusalem to fulfill their Lord's commands to reach

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out beyond their comfort zone with the Good News:

> *"**All authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. **Therefore go** and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything** I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

> *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will **be My witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all **Judea** and **Samaria**, and to the **ends of the earth**"* (Acts 1:8).

These commands were not given as an after-thought by Jesus, nor were they easy listening for His disciples. (For a Jew to even communicate with the despised Samaritans was loathsome, never mind proclaim the loving redemption Jesus was offering them! And as for the rest of the "pagan world", well...)

As the promised *"Seed of Abraham"* (Galatians 3:16), Jesus was passing along the 2,000-year-old plan of God to bless all the peoples of the earth. Jesus did not come to *give* the Great Commission to those who had no intention of sharing it! He came to ***take away*** the proud exclusivity from those who had already possessed the prototype "to bless all peoples" for two thousand years but done almost nothing with it.

As God made plain especially to His servants Peter and Paul, it was time for *Gentiles* to be entrusted with the same imperative in Newer Testament form to carry out God's promise to Abraham. In essence, Jesus was telling His disciples, "Go find those who have the Melchizedek Factor and bless them by fulfilling the Covenant of Abraham and revealing the redemptive victory of the Messiah!"

That the Patriarch knew this would someday happen is corroborated by Paul: *"The Scripture foresaw that God would **justify <u>the Gentiles</u> by faith**, and **announced the gospel in advance to Abraham**: '**<u>All nations</u>** will be blessed through you'"* (Galatians 3:8).

> ***"Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His Name <u>to all nations</u>, beginning at Jerusalem."***
> (Luke 24:47)

Many Christians of the "Lord, bless **me**" mindset regard the Holy Spirit's awesome anointing of the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2) as the inauguration of the Church. <u>Our Father, however, intended this event to be the bridge to connect the blessing of all peoples which He gave to Abraham with the obedient and loving service of Gentiles who, by their trust in His Son Jesus, would become His blessing</u>.

As Holy Spirit power came upon these first disciples, they were able to speak miraculously in many Gentile languages. Many from other lands who were present in Jerusalem that Pentecost morning marveled that these unschooled folk were so fluent in such a variety of tongues!

The Spirit-endued ability to "speak in tongues" beyond Hebrew was not given by God to bless those who spoke. It would have been a rather useless gift if only their own blessing were intended. However, seen in continuity with the ministry of Jesus to fulfill all that had been prophesied about Him, the bestowal of the ability to speak in Gentile languages could have only one main pur-

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pose: to make clear that the Holy Spirit's power was and is given with a specific goal: the *evangelization of all peoples*.

Mike: I was in the Navy when I became a follower of Jesus in 1977. One Sunday while our ship was in Subic Bay in the Philippines, the brothers onboard and I went into town to worship. We came upon a small congregation on a side street. By the end of the service each of us had experienced a strong presence of the Holy Spirit.

We thanked the pastor for allowing us to take part with them, and commented that we were grateful the service had been in English. Astonished, he and the Filipinos with him commented that *none* of the service had been in English. Everything had been in Tagalog. Wow!!!

Several years later we were part of a congregation in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Just prior to a time of corporate prayer, the pastor asked if I would close. As I waited for the different petitions to be made, one woman began to pray in Portuguese. (Many Portuguese families of fishermen were in the congregation.)

I recalled my years as an altar boy when Masses were done in Latin, and my frustration because I couldn't understand anything going on. As the woman continued to intercede in her language, I prayed, "God, how can we all be edified if we don't understand this woman's prayers?" I suddenly began to cry, and words in English came from my mouth as the woman prayed.

Later we found out my words were an exact translation of her Portuguese! The Spirit of Christ knew we needed understanding, and He was pleased to bless us with it.

You may remember that during the first wave of persecution in Jerusalem, the Apostles remained in the city while the deacon, Philip, headed down to Samaria. Only afterward did John and Peter leave Jerusalem to build on Philip's success (Acts 8). The deacon-turned-evangelist was led by the Spirit to continue to fulfill the blessing promise to Abraham by reaching out beyond the confines of Jerusalem. The deacon rather than the Apostles understood the Abrahamic connection to *be a blessing* and acted on it.

It took a God-initiated vision for Peter to be willing to go the Gentile, Cornelius, to share the Gospel with him and his household and friends (Acts 10). And still, those in Jerusalem attacked his obedient act of blessing the Gentiles.

Again, this *reluctance* to bless all peoples but care only for yourself is the **Sodom Factor**. It's a narrow, selfish perspective that God's primary concern is to **bless me**. Any inclination or response to bless others is secondary to God "wanting me to be happy". This is the same *arrogant, overfed and unconcerned* mindset that ultimately led to the destruction of both Sodom and its sister city, Gomorrah (see Ezekiel 16:49).

Throughout Nicolaitan Christendom the Sodom Factor is now the controlling viewpoint—a perspective that grieves God's heart and has stirred Him to confront it in those who have "ears to hear". Because of the pervasive self-seeking Sodom Factor within so many who call themselves Christian, He is once again restoring understanding of, and responsibility to, the everlasting Abrahamic Covenant. This is "**The Hebraic Restoration**".

The restoration of the Hebraic foundations is really our Father's challenge to the Sodom Factor which controls much of Christendom today as it did the religious establishment of Israel at the time of Jesus.

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"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"
(Galatians 3:29)

If the Holy Spirit has assured you that the Hebraic Restoration of His glorious truths is truly our Father's plan to continue His 4,000-year-old recruitment of people who would be His blessing, then you must also realize that you're being presented with a choice:

To walk obediently in trust by the Abraham Factor,
or
To walk in self-serving disobedience according to the Sodom Factor.

It's up to you. You can incorporate into your life ALL the loving truths and goals of our Father and be His blessing to all peoples—The Abraham Factor. Or, you can adapt SOME OR NONE of these truths to your life and live for yourself—The Sodom Factor. The *way of life* you choose will evidence your decision.

But know this: If you've embraced the Gospel of the Covenant that leads to salvation, your pilgrimage in Jesus is affirming to our Father that you'll live as a blessing to other people. This is the true meaning of the following oft-quoted passage. As verse 10 proclaims, God intends that we *bless others* if we are to live in Covenant union on our journey in Him:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are ***God's workmanship,*** *created in Christ Jesus* ***to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*** (Ephesians 2:8-10).

To recap:

There is no way that Jesus the Messiah, THE Seed of Abraham, would have missed the "all-peoples imperative" of His ministry on earth! God had given Abraham an irrevocable oath—His Name and His character were tied into His promise. Jesus has chosen those who follow Him to complete this promise to the world around us.

Anyone who does not understand this privileged responsibility can't possibly understand what God has been doing throughout the ages. Instead, they'll erroneously perceive history, even Church history, as an account of the events of man rather than the intervention of a caring Father to fulfill His divine plan to bless all peoples.

If Jesus could declare, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work"* (John 4:34), do you think any less is required of us who follow Him today? He commands us to *"go"* so that we'll realize that the Covenant which God made with Abraham to *be a blessing to all peoples* applies to all who follow Jesus. We who would be true to our Father must be *apperceptive* to understand and live out our 4,000-year-old "ancient path" connection to the purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Abrahamic Covenant is the very backbone of the Bible—the line along which all further revelation in Scripture makes sense. Personal knowledge that you as a Spirit-indwelled follower of Jesus are recruited to carry on God's promise is His way to stimulate you to fulfill what He has prepared in advance for you to accomplish. This truth compels you to grow in your dependency on your Father and to seek His special revelation for you, His *rhema* each day as to what He wants you to do.

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If you recall, the unchanging, living Word of God is the *logos* (1 Peter 1:23). But Peter then tells us that *"the **word** of the Lord abides forever. And this is the **word** which was preached to you"* (v. 25). ***Rhema*** is used here to describe the *applied* Word of God—the trusting obedience to the *logos* that's commanded of those who follow Jesus. And we're commanded to be a blessing to all nations (including our pagan neighbors) by showing them Jesus in the clay pot of our God-dependent selves.

This requires humility to accomplish. If anything, this awareness keeps us from faulting the Israelites for failing to carry out the Abrahamic Covenant among the nations they penetrated! Paul's discourse to the believers in Rome on the Gentile's relationship to the Jewish people warns us as well: *"They [the Jewish people who refused to trust Jesus] were **broken off because of unbelief**, and you stand by faith. **Do not be arrogant, but be afraid**"* (Romans 11:20).

Be afraid that you too may have given in to the Sodom Factor. You have a choice: to walk "Hebraic" according to the eternal Abrahamic Covenant that was so embodied by our Lord Jesus, or to struggle to balance the worldly, self-seeking pleasures of Sodom with a religious veneer of counterfeit grace.

Do you grieve that revisionist theologians over the centuries have altered God's Word to fit their particular creedal positions and their desire to appeal to those with worldly values? Contemporary Christendom overflows with so many self-serving divisions because God's unchanging Word has been violated, manipulated and, more recently, neglected by a generation of ***pew-sitting sluggards*** who desire nothing more "spiritual" than to attend religious performances put on by dynamic worship teams and entertaining preachers.

Not only are these who are giving way to the Sodom Factor ignoring their mandate to bless those around them; they've totally disregarded God's heart to reach the nations headed for a Christless eternity.

If your fellowship with others *does not* spur you on to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant, then you are serving yourself, not God. Be careful of where this decision will lead you!!!

(For more on apperception and revisionism, see our Hebraic Article: ***The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation***; also **Section 2, Segment 2: *Apperceiving God's Word*** in the *Jesus in Your Home* video series. All are a free download on our website.)

Distinguishing Between the Melchizedek Factor and Sodom Factor

Have you ever considered Lot's *motive* for choosing to live in Sodom with his wife and daughters? Here is a close relative of Abraham who chose to remain in a sin-dominated society. Centuries later Peter does give him some credit: *"Lot, a **righteous man**, who was **distressed** by the filthy lives of lawless men"* (2 Peter 2:7).

But we need to remember that Lot was in Sodom because he *already* had the self-serving Sodom Factor in his heart. When the tension between Abraham's and Lot's herdsmen arose, the older man graciously offered Lot first choice over where to live. Lot guided his selection not by the will of God as Abraham had, but by worldly, selfish motives of what looked good:

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Lot ***looked up and saw*** *that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered,* ***like*** *the garden of the LORD,* ***like*** *the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)* (Genesis 13:10).

There's a lesson here for us today as well. Beware of counterfeits that "look good"! (Remember the enticing fruit in the Garden that "looked good" to Eve?) Anything that is "like" the authentic will of God may ensnare your desires but not be of Him.

Lot's self-serving motive later brought about tragic consequences. His decision to remain among the desperate filth of Sodom cost him the life of his wife and resulted in incest with his two daughters. The descendants of those offspring, Moab and Ammon, became a thorn in the side of Israel, repeatedly trying to lead them astray. It was a king of Moab who hired Balaam to curse Israel! Finally, God pronounced upon the descendants of both Moab and Ammon that their land would be "perpetual desolation" like Sodom and Gomorrah (Zephaniah 2:9).

Where do you think Lot's daughters learned to seduce their father and have intercourse with him? By living in Sodom. We'll expand upon this shortly, but consider this: With Christians today leading this nation in divorce, *where* do you think children are learning how to shatter marriage covenants? Within the law-less realm of Nicolaitan Christendom, wherein the ways of the world have made deep incursions.

Lot Settled Among Tares

In Matthew, Chapter 13, Jesus presents several vivid parables to illustrate seed and the soil in which it is planted. When his disciples were finally alone with Him, they asked specifically for an explanation of the parable of the Wheat and the Tares. (See vv. 24-30; 36-43.)

If you recall, the sower had sown good seed in his fields but an enemy took advantage of the carelessness of the seed-tenders and planted weed seeds among the good seed.

Now, wheat and tares pretty much look the same on the outside as they're growing. But the tares never produce grain! They use up good nutrients but are worthless to the farmer. Yet trying to snatch away the tares will only endanger the good plants. It's at harvest time at the end of the age when the angels will first gather "all who offend and those who commit lawlessness" (v. 41) to burn. Then the good wheat will be stored in our Lord's "barn".

How does this apply to our discussion about Lot and the "ungodly, lawless soil" of Sodom in which he chose to raise his family? Let's review. Jesus is the Sower. HE initiates the redemptive opportunity for all to take hold of when they turn away from darkness to enter His light.

The field is the *world* (not the Church, as some mistakenly imply) in which we all have sinned and desperately need redemption. The "good seed" corresponds to the fruitful Kingdom sons, while the tares, which may *look like* the wheat, are really damaging weeds of worldly wickedness.

Again, it's the "looks like" element that so deceives both the world and the weed itself! The world thinks the tare has the same goals and values as it does (even if the tare may be a little different on the the outside through a few religious practices or do's and don'ts).

The tare, meanwhile, is deceived into thinking it's acceptable to God because of the self-imposed differences by which

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it excuses its otherwise worldly inner motivations. In other words, the heart of the tare is *lawless*, just as is the world.

The sower of the tares, the master deceiver Satan, has established a lethal lie in the minds of both the world and the tares, and this lie will continue until the end of the age. Then the worldly tares will be gathered for fiery judgment while the righteous will stand out in the glory of God in His Kingdom.

The soil in which you nourish your children's hearts is *your* responsibility to fertilize and water with truth, and to cultivate by hindering worldly weed growth or snatching out tares that do try to take root!

Parents today need to apperceive God's Word and regain the righteous motivation of Abraham. Are you unknowingly raising your children to be tainted by the *Sodom Factor*—not by its wicked influence in the world, but by its influence in your fellowship relationships, your congregation or your denomination?

Let's review the funnel illustration we used in ***the Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*** and in our ***Lifebyte 33: Do You See As God Sees?***

(Funnel 1) Biblical repentance requires that you confess your sin in order to come to the center of the funnel, *and* begin to be *sanctified* as you turn away from that which is sinful. Sanctification brings you further down the funnel to be transformed into greater Christ-likeness through your ongoing obedient trust.

(Funnel 2) The **Sodom Factor** in Christendom today is producing widespread apostasy. First, multitudes of man-made counterfeit gospels are being peddled to attract people to an easy message of no-cost "getting saved".

So-called "seeker-friendly" preachers make no further demands on the individual than to agree with a few particular Bible truths. Perpetrators of these counterfeits, however, ignore God's requirement for *repentance*—of the demand of our holy Lord to turn away from sin and be conformed by His Spirit to the likeness of Jesus through sanctification. And, they speak nothing of hell and judgment. Thus, there is no fear of God. People are free to make Him into any form of deity they want. His impact on their lives becomes meaningless.

The Sodom Factor encourages people to camp on the sides of the funnel where they can entertain sin and worldly values, all the while deceived into thinking that they're right with God. Like Sodom, ever-increasing toleration for sin has become noticeable all throughout western Christendom.

As the psalmist warns about those who choose to willfully sin, *"He says to himself, "God has forgotten; He covers His face and never sees"* (Psalms 10:11). The great deceit? The false assurance of a counterfeit gospel that because "I'm saved" I can sin without consequence—a modern-day perversion of grace.

The funnel tares are an alloy. They hang out on the sides with a veneer of religiosity but indulge their sin nature

with worldly ways and motives. The tragedy is the blasphemous portrayal of God and His Word that they give to the world. Non-believers see no difference between the lifestyles, goals and values of these "tare Christians" and themselves, so they decide that Christianity is either hypocritical or just another religion.

Many religious leaders at both the congregational and denominational level have set aside God's holy requirements of His Lordship and set up man-pleasing, man-centered religious systems. This isn't new. Many among the Jews of Jesus's time altered biblical truth as well. Therefore the Apostle John alludes to Jerusalem as *"figuratively called* ***Sodom*** *and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified"* (Revelation 11:8).

For the past 1900 years Christianity has strayed far from God's intent of a relationship of love-grounded obedient trust that serves His redemptive purposes. Grace has been perverted into a self-gratifying license to sin, while the foundational truths of the apostles and prophets have languished. The "walk" has ceased to match the "talk": *"He whose* ***walk is upright*** *fears the LORD, but he whose* ***ways are devious*** *[sinful] despises Him"* (Proverbs 14:2).

Keep in mind an historical event that holds great warning for us today. Up until the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, the general understanding of the Jewish people in regard to their relationship with God was one of obedient trust (even if it was perverted by Pharisaical fences of traditions). However, when the Temple was destroyed, sacrifices for sin could no longer be offered. To compensate for this loss, *rabbinical Judaism* provided a "bloodless" means of acceptability in God's sight. Through intense expansion and nitpicking of the law and the teachings of the forefathers, man could justify his own righteousness through good works and by trying to keep from sinning.

Thus was eliminated the need for the Messiah's once-for-all prophesied sacrifice which was accomplished in Jesus. Covered up or explained away was the biblical truth of the detestability of sin, so vile in God's sight that it demands a life in exchange: *"And* ***according to the Law****, one may almost say, all things are* ***cleansed with blood****, and without* ***shedding of blood*** *there is* ***no forgiveness****"* (Hebrews 9:22).

Since much of Nicolaitan Christianity ignores the detestability of sin and the need to repent by turning away from it and walking in righteousness, people sense no NEED for the Messiah either.

If you're joining together with others in fellowship *without* repentance being a key criterion for your gathering, you are serving the Sodom Factor. This principle holds true as well for house churches in which ***communal righteousness*** in Jesus is not the foremost criterion for your fellowship. You can't be a blessing if you're walking in fellowship with the alloy of darkness. No matter how you label yourself, fellowshipping with darkness makes you a Sodom Factor individual.

In contrast, followers of Jesus who spur one another on in righteous living find themselves walking in a peace and confidence that get noticed. Think back to our discussion of the priest/king, Melchizedek, to whom Abraham offered a tithe and received a blessing. His name means "king of righteousness". How can you distinguish righteousness in your midst? The prophet assures us:

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*The **fruit** of righteousness will be **peace**; the **effect** of righteousness will be **quietness and confidence forever*** (Isaiah 32:17).

The quiet and peaceful heart of the confident righteous person presses him forward in God's loving purpose to bless others. He's well aware that his righteous lifestyle comes from his union with his righteous Lord, so he has nothing to hide! "*The righteous are as **bold as a lion***" (Proverbs 28:1b). If the people who were seduced by self-serving Nicolaitan religion over the centuries had been righteous and bold as lions, the world would overflow with followers of Jesus today.

Melchizedek Factor in Followers of Jesus: *Bless Others*
Sodom Factor In Christendom: *Bless Me*

If you've been half-hearted in your pursuit to make the scriptural Hebraic foundations your way of life, you really need to look at your motives:

- **In your faith enactment, *why* do you do what you do?**
- **What *aren't* you doing to be God's blessing to others that they might experience His grace through you?**
- **Are pleasure-seeking and personal security more important to you than personal sacrifice and availability for our Lord's service?**

If you're more concerned with what you have in this life, and if your financial security and pleasurable lifestyle are more important than your service to God by blessing other people, then you are controlled by the element of the Sodom Factor called *idolatry*. No matter how *you* evaluate your spiritual walk, God sees you living on the sides of the funnel, indulging your sin nature. (We encourage you to read and discuss ***Lifebyte 32: God's Warning For Today: "The Many Faces of Idolatry***".)

The Melchizedek Factor/Abrahamic Covenant in a follower of Jesus is readily apparent in their ***viable trust in God***. (And, if and when you stumble and repent, you're also assured by trust that you're indeed cleansed and forgiven, not held captive by regret! You're restored to availability for His purposes.)

Abraham's trust found him obeying God in major ways that continue to astonish people today:

- leaving his ancestral Ur of the Chaldees and the security of his extended family;
- refusing the worldly enticement of treasure from the heathen king of Sodom;
- willing to offer up his beloved son Isaac by the knife of his own hand.

That's the kind of *alive trust* our Lord wants to do in your life as you daily yield to His transformational work! For His presence and power to increase in you so that your life as His follower blesses others, then so must denial of selfish goals, desires and motivations also increase. Jesus commands this: "*If anyone would come after Me, he must **deny himself** and **take up his cross daily** and **follow Me***" (Luke 9:23).

This daily process requires your sanctification as you yield to the loving work of the Master. Time on your knees crying out to become more like Jesus must become the hallmark of your petitions to God so you can see beyond your own needs and reach out to others.

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We've already discussed some of the "Kingdom of heaven" parables recorded by Matthew in chapter 13. For the sake of our discussion in this Lifebyte, we're using the parables to contrast the *Sodom Factor of worldliness* with the *Abrahamic Covenant of a transformed/transforming life*.

For instance, in verses 31-33, the element of human willingness and involvement brings about a particular type of transformation. A man took a mustard seed and planted it in soil. A woman took some leaven and worked it into the dough. Both the seed and the yeast had *untapped* potential for fruitfulness until they were "internalized" by the soil and the dough, respectively. Until that happened, no transformation could occur. And, the soil and the dough would be fruitless without the seed and the yeast.

But notice the BIG results from the effort to plant and knead in the right kind of medium. That tiny seed grew into a plant large enough to shelter birds from the hot Israeli sun! The little bit of leaven worked its way through 3 MEASURES of dough to produce life-sustaining bread! Talk about transformation! From seed to seedling to tree. From yeast to dough to bread. And like the seed growing and the yeast permeating, the process of OUR transformation is *ongoing*.

Jesus used parables of natural, everyday matters to open the minds of his hearers to the realm beyond the physical to the supernatural. The *transformation* of the seed and the yeast in the *physical* realm (a type of "general revelation") pictures the *spiritual* dimension of the Kingdom of heaven — a "redemptive revelation"!

A *heart for righteousness* is key for the continuing process of transformation in your personal life ***and*** in your fellowship with others. And righteousness must be built on a repentant lifestyle. Personal righteousness and communal righteousness are the relational glue for fellowship. Only through righteousness can the work of sanctification produce Christ-likeness in each of you.

If *"righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people"* (Proverbs 14:34), think of the impact of righteousness vs. tolerated sin in your fellowship with others. What answered prayers is your determination to walk in righteousness in His Spirit producing from our Lord's hand and heart?

Consider what your testimonies of our Father's faithfulness will do to spur you and your children on into greater sacrifice in blessing others. And, seriously weigh the pain you bring to our loving Lord if you'd rather cling to your tolerated sin than bring Him praise through answered prayer.

The Abrahamic Covenant stimulates your heart to be what we call ***"obedience based"***. Because of your relationship of love-grounded obedient trust in Jesus, you follow through in what He tells you regardless of any perceived outcome.

To be God's blessing "in the flesh" to others calls for your purposeful seeking of His *rhema* for you and your household. God unswervingly guided Abraham and all the others who live out the Abrahamic Covenant. So too you need to seek our Father to make clear what He wants you to do.

There is no explanatory rationale to His guidance. Yet, His direction is always *clear* in the first step He wants you to take, *concise* in that He probably won't give you the whole picture at once, and *replete* with His power to complete what He commands you.

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How different is the Nicolaitan system of much of organizational Christianity! Systematized religion is ruled by *outcome-based* people who are controlled by what they *do for* God without even knowing if God wants it done. They look for and copy techniques and programs that other "successful" people are using.

The practice of western evangelicalism, for all its self-exalting assumptions about being God's instrument in the world, leads Christendom in relying on techniques and programs. These use entertaining "hooks" to arouse interest, then solicit mental agreement with scriptural concepts.

However, they diminish or completely ignore the biblical requirements for reconciliation with our Father through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus:

- personal ownership of sinful depravity;
- responding to the Spirit by turning away from sin and receiving God's forgiveness;
- gratefully walking in obedient trust in the Lordship of Jesus as His yielded servant.

Like the Sodom-swayed Pharisees who preceded them, many of today's evangelicals have done more to *inoculate* the world against Jesus than to help people live wholeheartedly as His followers.

Their own statistics confirm this: Less than 10% of those who embrace the counterfeit gospels and enter their technique-oriented follow-up programs are found to follow Jesus just five years later. The most famous of the current evangelists revealed that less than 4% of those who "go forward" at a stadium event press on with Jesus as the Lord of their life in obedient trust.

We've grieved as we've encountered the "inoculated" who feel they've "tried religion" or even "tried Jesus" but recognized there was no transformation (because there was no Spirit within). Have you considered how Jesus' rebuke to the Pharisees and experts of the Law of the Jerusalem religious system could also apply to evangelicals who present a shallow, non-transformational false gospel?

> *"...you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (*Matthew 23:15).

That there should exist such a widespread Sodom Factor *within* western Christendom should come as no surprise. For example, Jesus repeatedly spoke of the kingdom of heaven containing both the wicked and the righteous. Hard to believe? First, examine His description of the "least" and the "greatest" IN THE KINGDOM:

> *"Whoever then* ***annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others****, shall be called* ***least in the kingdom of heaven****; but whoever* ***keeps and teaches them****, he shall be called* ***great in the kingdom of heaven****"* (Matthew 5:19).

Those who are practicing and teaching *lawlessness* (breaking one of God's commands) are present *within the kingdom*.

Jesus later speaks of the kingdom of heaven as a dragnet that is filled with all kinds of fish. The good fish are sorted out and collected while the bad are tossed away. He then relates that at the end of the age, the angels will separate the wicked from the righteous. Yet for now, both the righteous and the wicked are in the kingdom "net". (See Matthew 13:47-50.)

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Finally, for the sake of our discussion and because so often western Christendom ignores or discounts the Older Testament, let's mine Matthew 13:52 for truth about what's in the kingdom of heaven:

> *"Therefore **every scribe** [expert in the Hebrew Scriptures] who has become a disciple of the **kingdom of heaven** is like a **head of a household**, who brings forth **out of his treasure** things **new and old**."*

The righteous commands of God, His holy and awesome character, His revealing relationship with Israel in so many dimensions, and His marvelous prophecies of encouragement and warning are among the glorious store of treasure we find in the **Older** Testament. And like the scribe, we in His kingdom can bring forth out of the Hebrew Scriptures a deepened and expanded grasp of the **Newer** Testament truths that our Lord Jesus has made full—not just so that we'll *know* them but that we'll be changed through *applying* them to our lives as the Spirit does His transformational work in us.

All of which leads to this: If your life is guided by the Abrahamic Covenant, how can YOU become God's blessing in sharing the Gospel? First, you reveal your Covenant union with God in the *way you live*. You live concerned for the total well-being of others as our Lord would do if He were you.

You bear witness as opportunity arises to reveal His faithful involvement in your life through answered prayer. For example, a recent occasion to give Him praise came up on a flight home. As we were chatting with a seat partner we were prompted by the Spirit to build off something he'd mentioned about golf! I told him how God had intervened when I could no longer use my old steel-shaft clubs because of shoulder pain. Our Lord provided a whole new set of graphite clubs for me by appearing in a vision to a golf pro at a public course who followed His direction to GIVE me that set of clubs while I was on the 18th hole of what I thought would be my last round!

As we shared numerous demonstrations of our Father's answer to prayer, our seatmate, a self-described atheist, asked if we had a business card so he could go to our website. This was a Jesus he'd never encountered before! And we were grateful to our Lord that He had allowed us to be a blessing to this man that he might begin to respond to the Spirit's wooing.

When you're concerned for others as our Lord is, you care not only for their eternal destiny (which is of course primary), but also for their physical and emotional needs which He's concerned with as well. Guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit within you, you can follow the footsteps of your Master and respond to those around you as He did!

We want to share a warning for you especially if you're leading a home fellowship: Make sure your fellowship family *multiplies*. If they don't because you're comfortable and content with just "being there" for each other, you're only blessing yourselves. You are purposely neglecting the Abrahamic Factor to be a blessing to others who need to encounter our Lord. You are sons of Sodom in your heart!

Keep in mind that it took two persecutions for the Apostles to finally leave Jerusalem. Perhaps they were afflicted with the "headquarters fever" which

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afflicts so many today: staying behind and sending others to go forth. Be alert to opportunities the Spirit presents when He calls YOU to "leave Ur of the Chaldees" and go forth, even if it's just to the other side of town!

And yes, multiplying your fellowship family so you can ***go forth*** to be a blessing to others who need to see Jesus in you is painful. As you multiply, you're ***leaving*** the intimacy of precious others behind. But learn a lesson from the bee:

As a hive grows, it swarms to find a new location. The stronger, older queen leaves and takes some worker/followers with her. She leaves the new, younger queen behind in the established hive with her own follower/workers. This is what you must do.

The Sodom Factor influences modern Christendom to take the opposite tack. The "bless me" folks who have long experienced the goodness of our Lord stay where they're comfortably rooted. They send out the weaker, less experienced to bless others. That's why over 75% of contemporary missionaries don't make it through their first overseas tour.

(Funnel 3) If you're a parent or grandparent we have a word of caution for you. Don't stay mired in guilt over past failures or sins. If you've confessed and repented of them and asked forgiveness of those whom you've hurt, press on! Focus on the Lord Who has cleansed and purified you for His purposes to be fulfilled *through you*.

We've met too many parents who fail to help their children grow in righteousness because they themselves are still plagued by thoughts of their own past sins.

When our Father forgives your sins, He forgets them! Don't let Satan or other people remind you of them to get you down; instead, give praise to our Lord that He has changed you from what you once were and did! You're a work in progress that He's purposing to keep transforming if you're humble and yielded to let Him.

No one is born already sanctified! Our Father knew while you were raising your children that you were also undergoing your own sanctification. If you've continued to grow in Christ-likeness (even if it's been a stop-and-restart process!), then your way of life is *different* today — more aligned with His Word.

Rather than looking back at your past life and feeling like a failure, remember this: Your children weren't born sanctified either. In fact, they were born as you were, controlled by a sin nature—fertile ground for the Sodom Factor.

We all are sinners, but we don't have to live with unconfessed sin! You need to model God's repentant way of life for your family. Remember, repentance entails both confession of your sins and sanctification as you move down the funnel, "filling in the ruts" with the righteous work of the Spirit in you. Do this, and forget your past sins as God has.

Engrave on your heart the words of Jesus our King:

*"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is **fit for service** in the **kingdom of God**"* (Luke 9:62). Keep your eyes ahead on Him!

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"Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:60)

If you have the Melchizedek Factor and are seeking to be a blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant, you're *called to serve* in the Kingdom of God. What do you know about this Kingdom?

First, it has nothing to do with the Nicolaitan religious system and church buildings or services. Remember, *you* are one of the *ekklesia*, the called-out ones. You were called out of the world's ways and values to serve in God's Kingdom. Let's go over what Kingdom life looks like as you respond to some questions about your own life.

Remember the *obedient trust* of Abraham that was credited to him as righteousness? There was an absolute trust in that relationship that mirrors that of a humble loving child. And as our Lord Jesus reminds us, *"anyone who will not* ***receive the kingdom of God like a little child*** *will never enter it"* (Mark 10:15).

- **In your own words, write what you believe Jesus means by this statement.**

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_____
_____
_____

- **Ask those who know you well to evaluate your childlike trust in God.**

"But seek first ***His kingdom and His righteousness****, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Matthew 6:33).

- **What do you believe this command means?**

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_____
_____
_____

- **How does what you just wrote differ from your lifestyle?**

_____
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"Anyone who breaks ***one of the least of these commandments*** *and teaches others to do the same will be called* ***least in the kingdom of heaven****, but whoever* ***practices and teaches these commands*** *will be called* ***great in the kingdom of heaven****"* (Matthew 5:19; see also 28:18-20).

- **Jesus points out that those who practice and teach His commands will be great in the Kingdom. What are the commands He refers to? Where are they found in the Bible?**

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_____

- **How are you doing in keeping His commands and teaching others to do so?**

_____
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_____
_____
_____

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to ***enter the kingdom of heaven****. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to* ***enter the kingdom of God****'"* (Matthew 19:23,24).

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• **In your own words, write what you believe Jesus means by this.**

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_____

• **Ask those who know you well if you place more trust in what you have than in God.**

"Blessed are you who are poor, for ***yours is the kingdom of God****"* (Luke 6:20).

• **In your own words, write what you believe Jesus means by this.**

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• **How does your life compare to what you've just written?**

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"And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to ***proclaim the kingdom of God****, and to perform healing"* (Luke 9:1).

"And ***these signs will accompany those who trust****: In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well"* (Mark 16:17,18).

• **Jesus gave power and authority to His followers, promising He would affirm their ministry to bless others through wondrous signs. How true has this been in your own life?**

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• **If this hasn't at all been your experience, was Jesus lying, or is there something lacking in your life? Explain.**

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"Blessed are those who are ***persecuted because of righteousness****, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:10; see also John 16:2).

• **What do you think being *persecuted for righteousness* means?**

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• **Describe times when you encountered persecution for righteousness. If you can't, why do think this is so?**

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"And this ***gospel of the kingdom*** *will be preached in the* ***whole world*** *as a testimony* ***to all nations****, and then the end will*

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come" (Matthew 24:14).

- **What are you doing to help spread the true Gospel? What would our Lord have you do?**

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- **Are you truly in your heart looking for "the end to come", or have things of this world, whether family or creature comforts, enticed you to hope He holds off His return?**

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