

Abraham's Spiritual Life in 2000 B.C.

This is lesson #166 from my ongoing study of the book of Genesis. God mandates that Abraham (Abram until Gen. 17:5) walk before Him and to be complete (or, *spiritually mature*). Therefore, in Abraham's time, there must be the modus operandi of the spiritual life laid out so that Abraham could obey this command. Determining what the spiritual life is for Abraham is the focus of this study.

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Gen 17:1 When Abram was 99 years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me [or, *walk in My Presence*], and be complete [whole, sufficient, spiritually mature],...

In this first verse of Gen. 17, God identifies Himself and gives Abram two mandates: "*Walk in My Presence and be spiritually mature.*" These commands are both in the imperative mood; which suggests (1) these are things that God wants Abram to do; and (2) Abram understands what he is being commanded to do.

As we have already studied, *complete* is the adjective *tâmîym* (תָּמִיִּם) [pronounced *taw-MEEM*], which means *complete, whole, entire, sufficient, without blemish*. When spoken of a man, it means a man who operates on the basis of spiritual integrity; i.e., he is spiritually mature and in fellowship. Strong's #8549 BDB #1071. So far, we have one clear example of what it means to be *tâmîym*, Noah was declared to be *complete (whole, sufficient, spiritually mature)* in Gen. 6:9.

Therefore, let's step back and see if we can understand what the spiritual walk would be for Abram, based upon what stands written in his time.

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1. Salvation:
 - a. It is clear that salvation is based upon faith in Jehovah Elohim. Gen. 15:6 reads: *And Abram had believed Y^ehowah, and He [God] counted [or, valued, imputed, regarded] it [Abram's faith in Y^ehowah] to him as*

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righteousness.

- b. Throughout the book of Genesis, up to this point, we have seen the emphasis which is made upon animal sacrifices, which is a picture of Jesus Christ dying for our sins.
 - i. In order for Adam and the woman's nakedness to be covered by animal skins, those animals had to be killed, something which had never been done before. They had never seen anything die before and they had never seen blood before. Gen. 3:21
 - ii. God valued Abel's animal sacrifice over Cain's works (bringing a bloodless offering of vegetables). Gen. 4:1-7
 - iii. From the clean animals, Noah was to bring 7 pairs of them. My assumption is, some of those would be used for sacrifice. Gen. 7:2-3
 - iv. Noah, immediately after stepping off the Ark after the flood, began to offer animal sacrifices to God. Gen. 8:20-21
 - v. Abram, on several occasions, builds altars to God. Since this is clearly associated with Noah and offering up animal sacrifices, we may reasonably conclude that was the purpose of the altars built by Abram. Gen. 8:20 12:7-8 13:4, 18
 - vi. The author of Hebrews explains the connection between the animal sacrifices and the death of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 9:13-20). Even though the author of Hebrews was specifically describing the Mosaic code for sacrifices, this still applies to sacrifices of animals which occurred prior to the Mosaic Law. After all, he was writing to Jews about their rituals, telling them that the reality of those rituals had come to pass, so that there was no further need to practice these rituals now that Jesus had become our sacrifice, one man for all time. Heb. 9:23-28
- 2. Confession of sin (naming one's sins to God, for which R. B. Thieme, Jr. coined the word *rebound*).
 - a. When Adam and the woman had sinned, God has them first name their sins to Him. This is established first before God moves forward with His judgment. Gen. 3:9-13
 - b. God attempts to coax a confession of wrongdoing from Cain in Gen. 4:8-10, which confession, God does not seem to get. God imposes a permanent judgment of exile upon Cain in Gen. 4:11-12.
 - c. God speaks to Hagar and she admits what she has done. There is no punishment placed upon her; she is simply told to return to Abram and Sarai. Also, God makes a promise to Hagar about the descendants of her boy. So, interestingly enough, she sins, she admits this sin to God; and she is not punished by God but given promises from Him. Gen. 16:8-13
 - d. In raising a child and teaching them right from wrong, when they do wrong, the first thing that we do when they do wrong is get them to admit what it is that they have done that is wrong.

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3. Faith-rest, which is knowing the promises, guarantees and doctrines of God, believing them and adhering to them.
 - a. God gave assurances to Cain, even though he may not have gotten back into fellowship. Gen. 4:14–15
 - b. God promises Noah (and all mankind) that He would never flood the earth again. Therefore, man was to operate on that basis, despite the fact that Noah and his 3 sons went through a world-wide flood. Gen. 9:9–16
 - c. God told Abram to go to the land of Canaan, but God also gave promises to Abram, toward which he was to exercise faith. Gen. 12:1–3
 - d. When Abram separated from Lot, God came to Abram again and gave him promises. Gen. 13:14–17
 - e. On occasion, God has to reinforce the promises that He made to Abram. Abram questions how these promises are to be fulfilled, and God reiterates the promise, and then gives Abram more information—more promises and prophecies to believe in. The implication is, if you are having trouble believing this or that doctrine, the key is to have more information (more doctrine). God does not simply stop right there, when Abram questions Him, and say, “I am not going to teach you any more until your first believe this.” God teaches Abram more. Gen. 15:1–21
 - f. Abram found out, after 13 years of silence from God, that one does not try to bring God’s promises to pass by means of human good or by doing things which are outside of God’s plan. Abram has also faced 13 years of household friction based upon his mistake of listening to his wife and stepping outside of the plan of God. Gen. 16
 - g. As we have recently studied, God even made specific promises to Hagar in Gen. 16:9–12.
 - h. This may seem pretty elementary, but some people do not get it: *you must have something to believe before you can exercise faith*. Having faith is meaningless unless that faith has an object and that object is true. Everyone has faith; everyone believes in a variety of things. People believe in global warming, evolution, supply-side economics, conservative principles socialism, and abortion (which they call a woman’s right to choose). These things may be true or false; but all kinds of people believe in some of those things. Having faith is not enough. God does not look down and say, “Wow, you *really* believe in evolution; your faith is strong; I appreciate that.” Your faith is of no value when it is placed in the wrong things. Your faith must have an object and that object is truth, also called Bible doctrine. It is not your faith, per se, which is meritorious; it is the object of your faith that is meritorious.
 - i. Paul will, many centuries later, tell us that there is a righteousness associated with faith in God’s promises. Rom. 4:19–22 **And [Abraham] being about a hundred years old, not weakening in faith, he did not consider his body to have died already [he was sexually dead], nor yet the death of Sarah's womb, and he did not stagger in unbelief at the promise**

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of God [that they would have a son], but was strengthened by faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what God has promised, He is also able to do. Because of this, "it was also counted to him for righteousness." You will note that Paul has taken the words of Gen. 15:6 and given them a different application here. Abram will place his faith in what God has promised, and *this* faith—the faith that Abram places in the promises of God—would be credited to Abram as righteousness. This is fascinating because Paul took a promise of salvation to Abram and gave it a new spin—his faith in God's promises. Therefore, subsequent to salvation, faith in God's promises are counted to Abram as righteousness. So there is an accumulated righteousness which is a part of our lives post-salvation, that when we believe God's promises, *this* faith is counted as righteousness. In the New Testament, we call this experiential sanctification or phase II sanctification. We are already saved, but we continue to accumulate righteousness based upon our faith in God's promises, doctrines and mandates.

4. The concept of grace—which is an attitude that results in acts that bestow upon people that which they do not deserve.
 - a. From the very beginning, God came to Abram and promised to make a great nation of him and to give him the land of Canaan. At this time, Abram had done very little that we could consider meritorious. Gen. 12:1–3
 - b. Abram rescued Lot. It was Lot who chose to associate himself with the most degenerate elements of Canaan. Lot did not deserve Abram's faithfulness or the deliverance that he brought to pass. Gen. 14:12–16
 - c. Abram is gracious toward the King of Sodom, returning to him both his people and all of their belongings, which Abram could have legitimately kept. Gen. 14:21–23
 - d. However, closely associated with Abram's graciousness is his not requiring his friends to be held to the same standard. That is, Abram did not impose his standards of righteousness upon others. They were remunerated for their services. Gen. 14:24
 - e. Even though we have grace being taught throughout Gen. 14, the Old Testament word for *grace* will not be found until Gen. 19:19 (which will indicate that, in the midst of judgment, there is God's grace).
5. Blessing by association and cursing by association.
 - a. Forever, nations would be cursed or blessed based upon their relationship with God's people, the Jews. Gen. 12:3 ("And I will bless those who bless you, and curse the one despising you. And in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.")
 - b. Lot was blessed by his association with Abram. Gen. 13:6
 - c. Lot was cursed by his association with the worst elements of Canaan. Gen. 14:12–14 15:13–16 19:1–28
 - d. This concept may be further generalized into being blessed if you are in

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association with those associated with God; and cursed if you are in association with those who are in rebellion against God.

6. The concept that Jesus Christ (in the Old Testament, Jehovah Elohim) controls history. This is most clearly seen and understood in Gen. 14 and 19 (which chapter, obviously, we have not studied yet).
 - a. We have already studied Gen. 14, which is simultaneously, one of the greatest and one of the most ignored chapters in Scripture. Abram led a tiny battalion of about 300 men against a brigade of possibly 3000–5000 well-trained soldiers and they defeated the larger army, causing them to retreat, and changing history in that region.
 - i. By the way, if you scoff at this and say, “That is just silly; these things don’t happen.” Israel today is a tiny country; it is 0.2% of land mass of the Middle East. All around them are people who have been raised from childhood to hate the Jews. There are nearly 8 million people in Israel, $\frac{3}{4}$ ^{ths} of whom are Jewish (I write this in 2012). They are surrounded by countries which hate them. Egypt has about 85 million people and various political parties in Egypt continually speak of the destruction of Israel. Syria has nearly 23 million people. Iran has about 78 million people. All of these nations are, for the most part, hostile toward Israel. There are 1 billion Muslims in this world; they are hostile to Israel. Why don’t they simply attack Israel? Because of 6 days in 1967, when the Jews fought against Syria, Egypt and Iraq and defeated them. Israel fought an offensive war and God gave them victory. Although a repeat of this war in 1973 was not as successful for Israel (they were not as aggressive to begin with), still, the small population of Israel held their own against nations which were much larger (Egypt and Syria). Since Israel’s war of independence, there have been a dozen wars between the Jews and others in their periphery, and Israel has continued to increase their land holdings.
 - b. Back to Gen. 14, and God controlling history. God wanted Abram to meet Melchizedek, which came about because of Abram’s military victory, which took place in the proximity of Melchizedek’s city. Jesus Christ controls history.
 - c. Abram showed grace to the King of Sodom, which gave him a window of time during which he could have turned his own city-nation around. However, this king simply took from Abram what he was given, and had little interest in what was in Abram’s soul to make him do what he did. Similarly, the king of Sodom and his people had little interest in Melchizedek.
 - d. Quite obviously, with the flood and with the confusion of the languages, God has controlled history throughout the ages.
 - e. In application to today, we believers in the United States must continue to have faith in Jesus Christ controlling human history, because our nation

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is in the worst shape it has ever been in. There are many nations with large armies that do not like us. We have a national debt as we have never had before. Our government has made trillions more in promises which it has no ability to keep (with regards to social security and medicare), and we have a huge number of people who refuse to think that this is a problem. So, whatever happens in the next year, or the next decade or in the next half-century, our faith needs to be in Jesus Christ, that He controls history.

7. Obedience to God's commands:
 - a. God told Noah about the flood to come and told him what to do to prepare for it. What Noah did in building the ark and gathering all of the animals was acting in obedience to God's Word. Gen. 6:12–22
 - b. The Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–5) was disobeying the order from God for man to swarm the earth (Gen. 9:7). God told Noah not to worry about being flooded after the great flood, and the Tower of Babel appears to have been built with the partial intention of a place of safety in a great flood.
 - c. God came to Abram and told him to move to Canaan. The Jewish race is dependent upon Abram's obedience to God's geographical will. Gen. 12:1–5
 - d. Abram tried to fulfill God's promises to him by having sex with Hagar, in order to raise up a son, and God put Abram on the shelf for 13 years. His faith and resultant actions were misplaced. Gen. 16:3–4, 16 17:1
8. Living our lives, making choices and doing things, based upon what we know about God. God did not follow Abram every step of the way, saying, "Now, go 5 miles southwest, take a 10 minute rest, and then go 3 miles west." That is, the spiritual life does not consist of following a long list of specific, narrow and tedious commands from God, which guide our each and every step. Obedience to God, does not mean that He stands there as a drill sergeant, orchestrating our each and every move, Whose orders we obey robotically. The process is far more organic than that.
 - a. Let me give you the football game analogy. During a football game, every individual player operates on the basis of free will and, even though there are well-defined and well-practiced plays, every player has to also be cognizant of events transpiring around them. 11 coaches are not simultaneously speaking into 11 headsets telling each and every player what to do next. God has designed us to have a modicum of independence and to make a variety of free will choices. However, these choices must be made according to the rules of the game, as football players must follow. A pass receiver might see an open spot out of bounds, but he is wasting his time to rush to that open spot in the stands.
 - b. God appears to Abram about a half-dozen times, and each time is for a fairly short period of time. In the interim of these appearances are years of Abram's life, where he functions, having God's promises, but without

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having God continually come to him, telling him exactly what to do moment by moment. Gen. 14 is a perfect example of Abram doing what is right, but without God telling him exactly what to do, moment by moment. Although God is always with Abram, as He is with all of us, God is not right there with us, telling us each and every step to take and direction to move in. For this reason, Hagar calls Him, a *God of Seeing*.

- c. Therefore, the function of our free will in our lives and doing what ought to be done is very much the spiritual life (in conjunction with being in fellowship and knowing God's Word). In Gen. 14, Abram did not sit around and wait for God to give him marching orders. He had to act and he acted. He had to save his nephew Lot. Gen. 14 represents one of Abram's greatest spiritual victories. One might even say there was symbolic indication of this spiritual victory, where Abram went from offering animal sacrifices to taking the wine and bread in a pre-Church Age communion service. Gen. 14:18
- d. Many systems of evil seek to restrict the free will of man, particularly when it comes to expressing our spiritual lives. In communist countries, Christianity is all but outlawed; in Muslim countries, Christianity is outlawed and/or viciously persecuted; in liberal thinking, no government official ought to publically profess faith in God or faith in Jesus Christ. We have actually had government authorities tell chaplains and pastors what they can and cannot say in various services.
 - i. There was an attempt to [remove God from public prayers at veterans' funerals](#) (leading to the common sense question, *just Who the hell are you praying to, then?*).
 - ii. New York City Mayor Bloomberg thought that [prayers mentioning God at a 9-11 memorial were inappropriate](#) (causing many to ask, just who exactly are we praying to, then?).
 - iii. One religious writer for the Washington Post [warns that there are times the majority in a democracy ought not to get what it wants](#), if we are speaking of the 65% of Americans who want to see prayer reinstituted in school. He also suggests considering prayers without the mention of God or religion, whatever that means.
 - iv. We have a myriad of instances where the words *Christmas* and *Easter* are virtually banned from mention, in public schools which just happen to celebrate those holidays each and every year. Many such schools do not hold a Christmas pageant or allow the singing of Christmas songs, even though this is a rich tradition in American history. If a principal of a school came on the intercom and recited George Washington's Thanksgiving message or even a public prayer from FDR, he would be disciplined or fired by the school board for his over-the-top religious fervor.
 - v. Chaplain Klingenschmitt's, a former Navy Chaplain, [was court-martialed and fired for praying publicly in uniform "in Jesus](#)

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- [name."](#)
- e. We have the illustration of our own children. We want the best for them and we don't want them to make a series of life-destroying mistakes. Therefore, we raise them with the best intentions of guiding them, knowing that, at some point, they will function independently of us. The last thing a normal parent wants to do is be with their child every minute of the day telling them what to do next and what not to do. I believe the contemporary term for this is *helicopter parents*.
 - f. We live lives, therefore, with some independence from God, but functioning within the boundaries that He has established.
9. When Abram meets Melchizedek, they seem to bond immediately, based upon the fact that they both worship of the same God, even though these men had no previous contact and are likely only distantly related to one another (they share the common ancestors of Adam and Noah, but are probably descended from different sons of Noah).
10. In this era, there was a rudimentary understanding of the [laws of divine establishment](#), which many rulers attempted to [codify](#) into law at that time. These were laws which applied to all of their citizens, in order to have an orderly society. Again, Gen. 14, while illustrating Abram able to act and make good decisions without God telling him what to do; we also got to peer into the understandings of morality and the interaction of nations at that time.
- a. Some of these laws of divine establishment would include punishment by society for murder. However, there is no indication in Scripture that this ought to be practiced by vigilantes. Gen. 9:6
 - b. The concept of nationalism over internationalism is taught in Gen. 11:1–9
 - c. The right of self-defense, the right of defending one's own family, and the right to the spoils of war are all found in Gen. 14.
 - d. Although God would give the land of Canaan to Abram's progeny, this would be based upon the great degeneracy of the Canaanite people in the land. This also indicates that, being the first people into a geographical area does not guarantee perpetual ownership or control over that geographical area, either morally or actually. Gen. 12:1–2 13:15–17 15:13–16 17: 19:1–28
 - e. God punishes nations for great degeneracy within that nation, which punishment can include being defeated militarily and even having one's land taken away. Gen. 15:13–16 19:1–28
11. Although there are the laws of divine establishment and there was an attempt to codify that which is true, that does not mean that cultural norms and standards define what is right and wrong.
- a. When Abram and Sarai decided to use Hagar as a surrogate mother, this was in accordance with the customs of that day, but it was not in God's directive will that Abram impregnate Hagar.
 - b. Although it was legitimate for Abram to keep the goods and people that he liberated in Gen. 14, he kept neither. At this point, he was obeying higher

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principles of his faith in God blessing him as He had promised.

12. There is a concept of right and wrong—one's conscience—which is embedded in the soul. This conscience appears to be fairly well-developed in some, and I would attribute that to parental training and guidance.
13. So, even though we do not have the spiritual life laid out for us step-by-step in the book of Genesis, there is enough information here so that we can understand that there was, nevertheless, a well-defined spiritual life. Furthermore, when God tells Abram to live the spiritual life, that suggests that Abram understood what God was telling him to do.

This information, primarily culled from Gen. 3–16, taken with the various laws and codes which were developed during this time period, indicates that there was certainly a rudimentary spiritual life for believers as well as a national code of morality and justice for unbelievers (which we call the laws of divine establishment).

Similarly, the book of Job, besides giving us a lot of information about the Angelic Conflict in the first two chapters, also allows us to see 4 men from the ancient world discussing their ideas about God, the world they live in, their lives, and the application of what they believed to be universal spiritual laws to their lives. This book, more than likely, took place prior to Abram or coterminous with Abram's life.

For an historical context, I believe it is important to stop, like we did here, and review, and see if there was a spiritual life defined for believers in Abram's era, as there is for us in the Church Age. Because Gen. 3–16 covers an era of 1000–2000 years, the limited amount of writing that exists in the canon of Scripture has to be carefully searched to recognize the continuities between our time and theirs. Furthermore, this helps to explain what God means when He tells Abraham to walk before Him and to be spiritually mature:

Gen 17:1 When Abram was 99 years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be spiritually mature,...

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