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SIX LESSONS TO UNLOCKING THE TRUTH  
TO GOD'S HOLY LAND



Here is a story about the patriarch Abraham that you won't find in the Bible. This means that the story did not happen, but the *meaning* of the story is true and good and useful. It comes to us from the rabbinic tradition called *Midrash*. A *Midrash* is a story told by a preacher to illustrate an important biblical truth. Are you ready to listen?

Before Abraham set out on his journey of faith, he worked in the family business, which was making and selling idols. One day, fed up with idol worship that surrounded him in his country, Abraham destroyed almost every single idol in his father's store—smashing them to bits and pieces with a large stick. Abraham left only one idol standing, the biggest one of them all. He put the stick in the hand of the statue, and waited for his father to come back to the store.

When Terah arrived back at the shop, he couldn't believe what he saw! Abraham explained, "The biggest idol destroyed all the others!" Abraham pointed to the idol with the stick in its hand. "That's ridiculous," growled his angry father. "Everyone knows idols are only statues and don't actually do anything!"

"Exactly," said Abraham. "That's my point!" Abraham knew God was nothing like these idols of wood and stone. He had staged this little drama to teach his father about the foolishness of worshipping something made by the hands of men.

The ancient rabbis read the Old Testament and tried to use their imagination to create stories that would illustrate important biblical truths. A *Midrash* story is like a modern Christian preacher's attempt to tell a story during a sermon to illustrate what the Bible is teaching. This *Midrash* about Abraham, while it did not actually happen, asks an important question: "How did Abraham know to follow the one true God when he was surrounded by a culture that worshipped idols and many different gods?" This *Midrash* asks a second question, perhaps even more important: "Why did Abraham feel the need to teach his father this lesson?" These are questions worth asking!

Today is the fifth in a six-sermon series on the modern nation of Israel. This week in our series about Israel is about education, the fifth word in our acrostic ISRAEL: Israel is **I**mportant; Israel is a **S**tate, Israel teaches us about **R**ighteous giving, *Aliyah* ("returning to Israel"), Christians must become **E**ducated about Israel, and Israel teaches us to **L**ove our neighbour.

This imaginative story about Abraham is really a question about education. How did Abraham learn the truth about the One True God, and why did he feel compelled to tell others (including his father) about the God who created the universe? We can read the actual biblical account of Abraham in the Book of Genesis, starting in chapter 12 and stretching across 13 more chapters until it records his death, in chapter 25.

In both this *Midrash* and in the biblical account of the life of Abraham we see a man who was willing to *trust* God's promises, to *obey* the voice of God as he understood it, to *ask* questions, and to *take risks* in order to learn the truth. Abraham obeyed God and left his homeland, looking for the place God would lead him. As a result of such trusting obedience and risk-taking, Abraham came into a relationship with God, who is the author of all truth. Abraham not only learned the truth through his trusting obedience, he also met the Author of truth Himself. Abraham's example gives a path to maturity in the Lord: trust + obedience + curiosity + risk-taking leads us into deeper relationship with God and into a deeper understanding of our mission in life. Jesus is our ultimate example, yet the scripture makes clear that Abraham is the "father of faith" (Romans 4:16-17).

Abraham is the father of faith for both Jews and Christians. Abraham is the patriarch of the people of Israel. In the Book of Romans, the apostle Paul points us to the scriptural account of the story of Abraham: "What does Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (Romans 4:3). We, too, should be like Abraham. We should hear what the Scripture says about Israel and trust the testimony of the Scripture. That's why we have spent so much time in the earlier sermons in this series on the biblical basis for the importance of Israel and the prophetic fulfillment of the rebirth of Israel just 70 years ago. Like Abraham, we must trust and *express that trust in obedience*.

Here are two important points when we examine how Abraham came to faith. First, Abraham came to faith because *God called him*. Second, Abraham came to faith because of his trusting obedience, which empowered him to separate from the people around him. As we look at the modern nation of Israel and their 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary (which is approaching on April 19<sup>th</sup>), we can learn from the faith of Abraham.

Let's consider the first fact. Abraham came to faith because God first called him. Anything of eternal importance begins with God. Although faith is important, it is the Word of God that creates faith. Abraham heard the Word of God speaking to him directly; we can hear it in the Bible. The vital lesson for us to learn is that faith starts by hearing God's Word. But it is not enough to hear God's Word, we must courageously obey God's Word.

In this series, we have been considering the role of the modern nation of Israel as it relates to our faith as Christians. Our starting point must be the same as Abraham's. What has God spoken about Israel? In the first four weeks of the series, we learned about the importance of Israel and how the prophets predicted that Israel would become a nation again after a very long season of exile. This happened when Israel became a nation in 1948. The biblical evidence is overwhelming—the events of 1948 were God's will, foretold by His prophets.

These days, on the world stage, the question of Israel is not a popular subject. Frequently, Israel is depicted as the aggressor in Middle East conflicts. Yet, we have learned from the series that God is going to bless those who stand with Israel and God resists those who stand against Israel. The first step in coming to understand our faith response regarding the nation of Israel is to understand that God's blessings and God's warnings from the Old Testament still apply to us today. If we criticize Israel merely to go along with public opinion, we are on shaky ground. Yet, if we stand in favor of Israel and speak the truth on Israel's behalf, we may find ourselves at odds with the majority's opinion, either in our country or with others around the world. Sometimes, speaking the truth of what God has said involves great risk and public disapproval.

Here is a second lesson, from another book of the Bible. In the Book of Numbers, chapter 13, Israel was getting ready to enter the Land of Promise (Israel). Moses sent 12 spies to survey the land before the people of Israel crossed the Jordan River. Ten of the spies came back with a negative report. They said that the Canaanites, the people who lived on the land, were too strong and too powerful for the people of Israel. But two of the 12 spies came back with a positive report. While those two spies did not ignore the facts that the people who already lived in the Land of Promise were indeed big and powerful, these two spies reminded the people of Israel about their personal history with God's miraculous, saving power, the promises of God, and the benefits promised to those who stand with God.

As a result of the bad report given by the 10 spies, the people of Israel were shaken and afraid. They forgot the blessings of God and His deliverance from Egypt, when God had so recently, miraculously, acted on their behalf. Instead, they were convinced that they would be destroyed as they tried to occupy the Land of Promise. As a result, an entire generation of God's people missed their opportunity to enjoy the blessings of God's Promised Land, and ended up wandering in the wilderness for the rest of their lives. Only Caleb and Joshua, the two faithful spies, entered the Land of Promise 40 years later. This account from the Book of Numbers tells us what is popular isn't always right, and what is right isn't always popular.

We face a similar challenge today. It is sometimes unpopular to support Israel, but does that mean we should forget the commands or the promises of God to stand with Israel? The words that God spoke over Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 still apply to us today. Those who bless Israel will themselves be blessed and those who curse Israel will themselves be cursed.

One final group of passages from the Psalms will help us understand the connection between education and faith. King David recorded the voice of God in Psalm 32: 8-10

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

Do not be like the horse or the mule,

which have no understanding

but must be controlled by bit and bridle

or they will not come to you.

Many are the woes of the wicked,

but the LORD's unfailing love

surrounds the one who trusts in him.

Do you see the connection? God told David that His instruction (verse 8) comes to those who trust Him (verse 10). Our trust in God unlocks revelation and clarity regarding what is right in God's eyes.

David also wrote: "*Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long*" (Psalm 25:5). From this verse (and plenty of others like it) we see Scripture clearly tells us that God will teach us what we need to know and that we can trust in Him as our guide. Our response is to humbly receive His instruction and trust in the loving God who longs to teach us. There is a cycle, a rhythm, a pattern: Trust in God comes from His Word; our trust brings greater levels of understanding of God's will; and the final step of obedience requires even more trust in God.

Only so much can be taught from the pulpit. Eventually, these questions of trusting God's Word and moving to put His will into action are the responsibility of every individual believer. As we talk about the need to be educated regarding what God's Word says about the modern state of Israel, you may be challenged as you consider what the next steps in your own life should be. But the point of biblical education is to take Godly action, guided by Godly character. Godly actions should be taken by organizations and churches, *and they should also be taken by each one of God's people*. This means that we ourselves must consider how to apply the truth of God's Word in our everyday settings.

**There are at least three steps every Christian should take to become educated about the relationship between Israel and our own Christian faith:**

1. Pray for Israel. You can join with believers and supporters from around the world via The Fellowship's prayer team, or submit prayers online. Check into the daily radio program, "Holyland Moments", dedicated to helping Christians pray for their Jewish brothers and sisters.
2. Consider visiting Israel. You can see firsthand this amazing land of God's Promise and gain insight into the issues facing Israel today. And choose a tour-provider that is tuned in to the issues you care about. For example, The Fellowship offers tours throughout the year and highly recommends visiting Israel.
3. Explore mission work that builds bridges between Jews and Christians and affirms friendship with Israel. Living and working alongside the people of Israel is a life-changing experience.

These suggestions are an excellent starting point. But they are only a starting point! Each one of us must study the Scriptures ourselves and become fully convinced of the truth of God's Word as we understand it. Then, beyond understanding, we are called to make a *personal application* in faith, believing that the hand of God (or the eye of God) will direct us as we seek to respond to His instruction humbly, obediently, and lovingly.