

99-02-14b

Let's resume our study now in Genesis chapter 18, verse 14, where after Sarah laughs at the thought of having a child at her age, and actually at the idea of conceiving one at her age, this is really kind of what's in her mind. She hasn't thought forward all the way to the birth. She's thinking about all the effort that she and Abraham have put into conception without result.

The Lord said, Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I surely bear, since I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Is anything too hard for the Lord? This is the question. God is asking a lot of questions here.

Where is Sarah your wife? Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for the Lord? What this question does, to answer the question we left ourselves with at the end of the last lesson, is it shifts the focus of attention. What is Sarah thinking about when she laughs? What's in her view? She's thinking about herself and her husband and all of their efforts, how she has worn herself out trying to conceive. She's looking at herself.

She's looking at her circumstance, at her efforts, at the condition that her body is in and the body of her husband. God says, Why did you laugh? Is anything too hard for the Lord? If you're looking at the Lord, it's not impossible. If you're looking at the Lord, it's not insurmountable obstacles and difficulties standing in the way.

This is the question we need to ask ourselves when we find ourselves dubious, doubtful, worried, unable to exercise faith. We need to stop and consider what is it we're looking at. We've been examining this quite in detail in Colossians.

What is the truth that forms the picture of reality in our soul? What do we look at when we look at a situation? Do we look at it from human viewpoint or do we look at it from divine viewpoint? That's one way it has been expressed. This question that God asks is a prompt, an encouragement to shift perspective, to change viewpoint. If you find yourself looking and just laughing to yourself that the promise of God could come true or that the word of God would be valid in this situation, we're looking at it from the wrong perspective.

So, he doesn't stay with the theme of Abraham's age or Sarah's effort and her age. He says, Look at the Lord. Is anything too hard for the Lord? He doesn't illustrate it.

He doesn't explain it. He doesn't amplify it. He just says, Is anything too hard for the Lord? And that should be sufficient if people know about the Lord, if they know that he's the creator, if they know that he is the God of the universe, that he is the one who invented the reproductive process.

He is the one that created man from the dust of the ground. If he can scrape together the dust and breathe into it the breath of life, why should it be difficult for him to enable this couple to have a child? So, he doesn't go into it in detail at all. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Of course, the answer to that goes without saying.

There's nothing too difficult for him. And then he reiterates what he said back up in verse 10. I will return to you at the appointed time, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

When you look at it in Hebrew, this has more the idea that he's going to come back when the child is born. He says, I'm going to come back after the usual time has passed, and Sarah will be in possession of a son. He's not going to come back and make the birth take place so much as, you get the idea, and some translations actually say about this time next year, I will return.

He doesn't say Sarah will bear a child when I return, that I'm going to be here and make the birth happen. He says, I'll be back after some time has passed, after the appointed time has passed, and Sarah will be cradling a son in her arms. Sarah, of course, still has her eyes on herself.

She has not heeded the hint. She didn't get the hint. She didn't take the point when God said, is anything too hard for the Lord? She hasn't shifted her attention to the Lord.

She's worried now. She's embarrassed that God heard her laughing and heard the doubt expressed in her soul. So, God has already re-expressed this promise, and instead of being joyful, instead of being like Abraham when God said, go out and look at the stars, and Abraham believed God, and God credited it to him for righteousness, Sarah is still wrapped up in herself, and this has been Sarah's problem all along, is that she can't get past her own condition, her own desires, and sometimes when you want something really, really badly, and it doesn't come to pass, you don't see any way that it can come to pass, then even if the prospect of it is offered to protect yourself, you say, I don't want to believe that that can really happen.

She doesn't have any hope left. She's worn out her hope. She's worn out herself with her efforts, and even when God comes and promises it and says, there's nothing too hard for me, she can't wrap her mind around it.

She can't seize upon it and fasten on it as a hope. It doesn't say then she fell to the ground and said, thank you, Lord, or any such thing. Now she's all concerned about her prestige.

This is the issue in Sarah's soul all along. One of the main reasons she wants a child is her standing, the way that she is perceived. Now she's all concerned about the way that she's perceived, that she laughed in the presence of the Lord, and so she denies it,

saying, I did not laugh, for she was afraid.

She's afraid that she has, and you get the idea there might have been a little bit of a sharp tone in God's voice when he says, is anything too hard for the Lord? You ought to know better than to doubt this. Then he repeats himself. When someone has to repeat themselves, you get the idea they think you weren't listening the first time.

So now Sarah is fearful that she's being perceived in a negative light and she's trying to correct it. She doesn't make the connection that God heard what she was saying in her heart the first time. So how can she deny it? How can she say, I did not laugh, when she very manifestly did, and God knew it and heard it the first time.

So now she's going to try to say that she didn't. But this is the kind of error that is caused by subjectivity. Eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstances, and this little short episode tells us more about what's going on in the soul of Sarah than if someone had done a big psychoanalytical couple of paragraphs on her.

You can see in the way she acts. You can see in the fruit of her life what the problem is in her soul. She's not heeding the voice of the Lord in the sense of hearing his promise and believing it.

She's not steadfastly waiting by faith for the fulfillment of the promise. Instead, even when God comes in person, an unprecedented act, it's virtually unique in the Bible that God will come to an individual and sit down and address him face to face like this. In these extraordinary circumstances, all she can think about is, I've worn myself out trying to have a child, and now you say I'm going to have one.

And she gets tickled, and then she gets embarrassed, and then she gets defensive. It's all about Sarah. Now, we need to address another passage of scripture at this point, because if you turn over to Hebrews chapter 11, Sarah is apparently presented as a hero of faith.

You think, well, this seems to be a contradiction, because it says in Hebrews 11.11, By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. You get the idea that the reason she was able to have Isaac is that she finally believed the promise. And yet there's no mention of that anywhere in Genesis.

It was Abraham who believed God and received the credit for righteousness. And there is a textual problem in Hebrews chapter 11. And to make a long story short, we're not in Hebrews 11, but let me just tell you that the way the New King James renders this, and if you look at the NIV versus the RSV, you'll see the difference of opinion among the translators.

I have a parallel Bible that's got the King James, the Amplified, the New American

Standard, and the NIV. And it's fun sometimes to go to some of these problem passages and look at each of the four translations side by side, and then you can open up a Nelson and a RSV and a New King James and some of the others, and sometimes there's no two of them that even, especially over in some of the Old Testament prophets, there's no two of them that even match. And so you start to say, well, I wonder if people really do know what the Bible says or not.

But this is one of the passages where the grammar allows for more than one interpretation. There is manuscript difference here. And basically, my best understanding of the way Hebrews 11, 11 should read is, by faith Sarah also herself received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because he judged him faithful who had promised.

And it's a reference back to Abraham, not to Sarah. She received strength to conceive. They together became parents because Abraham believed.

It's not a reference to the faith of Sarah, which is not mentioned or evidenced anywhere else in Scripture. The faith of Abraham is mentioned numerous places, but neither in Genesis or anywhere else does Sarah ever present it as really coming around. Now, there is another reference to Sarah that we might want to look at in this connection, over in 1 Peter 3, 6. While we're in the New Testament, you might just turn over there.

1 Peter 3, 6. This is in an exhortation section of 1 Peter, like unto the passage we're in in Colossians 3, and there's also one in Ephesians. Wives, obey your husbands and that sort of thing. In 1 Peter 3. Of course, you get the idea.

This is an exhortation that's repeated many places in Scripture. There's been a lot said about what a patriarchal society we have always had in human history, and that in biblical times there was this great dominance of the males, and the women were submissive and quiet, and never did rise up and rebuke their husbands or anything. If that's true, why do we have three or four separate, very emphatic passages in the New Testament that all tell wives that they need to be submissive? The reason is that this has been a problem all down through history.

Women have always chafed under the divine arrangement, and frankly, I don't blame them. There's a lot of us as husbands that aren't worthy of being followed and people being submissive to. Nevertheless, here's another one of those passages.

Wives, this is 1 Peter 3. Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives. By the way, this is another one of those apetho passages. Friday night, if you've been following along with that, the sons of disobedience, the word for disobedience there is apetho, A-P-E-I-T-H-O, and it means they do not heed.

They are not convinced. It doesn't reach the point of being believed as fact. So even if some do not obey the word, if they are indifferent to the word, if it doesn't convince them, if it doesn't motivate them to respond to the calling of God, they may be won by the conduct of their wives when they observe your chaste conduct in fear.

This is reverential respect. It's not craven terror. Do not let your adornment be outward, arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel.

This, by the way, doesn't mean that you should not arrange your hair or put on apparel. The idea that let your adornment be with truth and so forth, people say, well, you've got some denominations that don't wear makeup and so forth. Well, if they're going to follow that injunction, they should not wear clothes either.

Because it says, do not let your adornment be outward, arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on apparel. It doesn't say fine apparel, it's just apparel. If you're not going to adorn yourself, if you're not going to fix your hair, then don't put on any apparel either, and you can be consistent.

Rather, the hidden person of the heart with the incorruptible-ness of gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. It means this is where the emphasis should be. This is where you should look for your beauty.

Develop your beauty internally, and it doesn't matter what you look like on the outside. Of course, the parallel is true for men. There's a lot of, especially when you're a teenager and so forth, and different guys enter puberty at different stages and to different extents and so on.

Some guys muscle up and are able to grow their... In the 70s, the big thing was how fast can you get your sideburns to grow and this kind of thing. Other people are late bloomers and don't even shave until they get in their 20s. This becomes a big deal, and one of the great comforts that teenagers, whether male or female, can take is that your masculinity or your femininity, your handsomeness or your beauty is very much a function of what is in your soul, not what is in your body.

All of us have known people. You can think back on ladies you have known that just struck you. When you think of someone who's really beautiful and very feminine and very impressive, if you stop and think about some of the individuals that fall in that category in your mind, if you think hard, you realize that some of them are not really attractive in the physical sense.

They're not going to be in the Sears catalog modeling the latest fashions. It's the way they carry themselves, and it's their self-image that comes out. It's what kind of person they are.

They're stable. They are poised. They have confidence without being arrogant and that

sort of thing.

This is what Peter is talking about here. Gentle and quiet spirit, it's precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.

Just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, whose daughter you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. So Sarah is used here as an example of a woman of beauty. But the example that is cited here is not her faith in the promise for a son.

It is rather in her submission to Abraham. This goes back to the beginning of the chapter. Be submissive to your husbands, even if they don't obey the word, they can be won by your good conduct.

Abraham, at the point that Sarah obeyed him and called him Lord, what are our examples of that in Genesis? When Abraham said, don't call me your husband, call me your brother. Say that you are my sister. Abraham does this a couple of times and Sarah obeyed.

Even though her husband was off base, she was submissive in that regard. When Abraham told her various things with regard to Hagar and Ishmael and so forth, she was submissive in that regard, and that is a proper thing. Peter is saying to the women, you can be the daughter, or you can emulate Sarah in terms of obedience, if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

There is a lot you can say about this passage with regard to there is a time for a woman to leave a man to whom she is married, and this is one of the criteria. If you wind up being afraid with terror because of physical abuse, because of the degeneration that a man undergoes if he gets into substance abuse and that kind of thing, it is legitimate to leave. One of the conditions under which you are submissive is that you do good and you are not afraid with any terror.

If you wind up being terrorized, you are not to stay with your husband. It is not God's will to misprioritize the various injunctions of Scripture. There is a lot we can say about that, but I just want to point out here that even though when you read this chapter you get the idea that Peter is holding Sarah up as an example of faith and obedience, this is in the specific context of her relationship to Abraham, not so much her relationship to God.

She doesn't do too well when it comes to putting faith in the promise of God, but she does well when it comes to being submissive and honoring the leadership of her husband Abraham. That is the part of her life that Peter brings into view here. So anyway, those are a couple of New Testament mentions of Sarah who is in view here, certainly in view in terms of her own outlook here.

She is occupied with herself when she denies. Here God has said, you left. This, by the

way, is something that we often do and it's another reminder to us.

God will convict us, and the person of the Holy Spirit, he will tell us when we have done wrong. Now Sarah laughs at the promise of God, and this is a wrong thing. And God says, why did you laugh? And the Holy Spirit will prompt us within and say, why did you fail in this way? Why did you doubt? Why did you operate outside of faith? Why did you cave in to human viewpoint? Why did you worry? Why did you commit this mental attitude sin? Why did you commit this sin of the tongue? Why did you commit this overt sin? God will speak.

It's an interesting thing because the whole verb for confess in Greek, do you remember the Greek word for confession? Homo logeo. Logeo is to say a word, to speak a word. Homo, of course, means the same, like homosexual, same sex, homogenous.

You take the different parts of milk and you homogenize it. You make it all one thing. You make it the same so the cream doesn't rise to the top.

Well, homo logeo means to say the same thing, to acknowledge something that has been said. Well, if you're confessing your sin, what are you doing? You're saying the same thing. This means somebody else already said it.

Who is it that already said what your sin was? It's God. The Holy Spirit has already convicted. Jesus said the Spirit will come.

He will convict the world. He'll convict everybody, believers and unbelievers, of sin, righteousness and judgment. When we go to God and claim, however we choose to look at it, claim 1 John 1.9, when we come before God to be cleansed, to acknowledge our faults and our transgressions and to be forgiven and cleansed by the grace of God, we are saying the same thing.

That means it's something else. We're not having to necessarily dig this up and identify it from scratch. God, the Holy Spirit, is going to say, you didn't have faith here.

You didn't operate out of faith in this area. And we acknowledge that. We assent and we say, yes, Lord, you're right.

This is Sarah's opportunity here, isn't it? Indeed, Lord, I did laugh. For how can a woman of my age bear children? That's all she would have had to say. But she denied it.

And, of course, you get the idea now. And this is comical when you think about it. Remember the picture.

You've got the tree there with the shade, the Oaks of Mamre. The Lord is reclining there. The tent is behind him.

Sarah has got her ear to the flap listening. She's not in view. She's not a party to the

conversation.

The menfolk are out there and she's back in the tent. God says to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh? And he says, is anything too hard for the Lord? I will come at the time of life and Sarah will have a son. Then you hear this voice from behind the flap.

I did not laugh. She's not even in the circle of conversation. I didn't laugh.

It just comes muffled from behind the tent. And this is the extent to which Sarah is concerned about how she's perceived. And she's afraid that she's under condemnation here.

And instead of acknowledging it and recognizing that God is gracious, why should she be afraid? God says, when I come back next year, you're going to have a child. He says to Abraham, Sarah's going to have a child by the time I visit you next year, after the point of time has passed. But it's an irrational fear.

She's afraid. She's self-conscious. She's embarrassed.

It's all about herself. We have to watch for this because this is what happens to us. And if there's a single point of application you take away from our study this morning, this is it.

We have to be careful that when God speaks in our soul through His Word and through His Spirit and points out an area of weakness, an area of failure, an area where we're not operating in faith, that's exactly what happens to Sarah here. He says, why do you consider this impossible? Why do you doubt? Why do you think that this is an impossibility? There's nothing too hard for the Lord. We need to watch.

We have an opportunity. We have a choice. We can have the response of Abraham, believe God and have it credited as righteousness, to say the same thing, homo logeo.

God points out where we have failed and we acknowledge it. We say, I did, and this is an area where I want to do better. And we can pray for guidance.

We can pray for perception and understanding. We can pray that the Scriptures will transform us in that area, that the landscape of our soul will be changed, that the valleys will be filled in, the mountains will be made low, and that there will be a straight path for God in our soul. Or we can react and we can compound our error by denying what God is telling us.

That wasn't really wrong. I didn't really fail there. I did not.

You hear kids do this with each other all the time. You broke my toy. I did not.

Yes, you did. No, I didn't. They go back and forth.

And there's this denial, even when it's very obvious everyone saw it happen. Sometimes we just irrationally deny. I did not.

It wasn't me. It wasn't my fault. It was something in my background.

It was something in my upbringing. It's not my fault. We shift the blame.

We sublimate it. We assign it to someone else. You can think of lots of examples of that.

That's what we have to watch for. God will point out our weakness. We can either say the same thing.

We can homo logeo. We can acknowledge our failing. God is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse.

God has already prefaced this with a promise, and he repeats the promise. This observation saying, why did Sarah laugh, the promise is on each side of it. It's in a sandwich between the irrevocable, immutable promise of God.

I will come back when the appointed time has passed, and Sarah will have a son in her possession. And yet, Sarah doesn't have the faith. She's all caught up in herself.

We don't want to make that mistake. And the way that this is presented, you see that the last verse in this section, after God has made this wonderful statement, and you want to just savor that, you kind of wish that this section ended right after verse 14. I will return to you according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

But you get this postscript. Sarah spoils it when she comes back and says, she denied it. I did not laugh.

And she was afraid. And he said, no, but you did laugh. And this is the first and only time that God addresses Sarah directly.

He was gracious. He asks it in the form of a question. Why did Sarah laugh to Abraham? But when she denies it, now he addresses her directly, and he says, no, you laughed.

You think, how big of a sin is laughing? Well, look at the interchange that takes place around this lack of faith on Sarah's part. It's a big deal. It's the biggest deal.

And this is what we often miss. When do you see God coming down in person and talking about someone's overt sins? It's much more of an emphasis throughout Scripture on what happens in our heart, what takes place in our heart. Is there faith or is there lack of faith? And God, for the first and only time in Genesis, talks directly to Sarah.

He spends more time talking to Hagar than he spends talking to Sarah. He says one word, and it's a word of rebuke. It's a word of correction.

It's a word of instruction in righteousness. And he contradicts her because she's telling him a falsehood. He says, no, but you did laugh.

So this is also a reminder to us in the area of confession and acknowledgement of sin that if we fail to acknowledge, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, where we have failed, God will make a stronger point. This is the New Testament passages we have with regard to whom the Lord loves he chastens, and he scourges every son whom he receives. And we are not forgiven unless we forgive others.

If we fail in this area, God will point it out. We will get that stronger, more direct word, just as Sarah does here. As we continue forward in Genesis 18 and arrive at verse 16, then the men arose from there and looked towards Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on their way.

This is very fascinating because we know where the Oaks of Mamre are, and you can't see Sodom from there. If you look in the back of your Bible at your map, you might just take a moment and do so. Find a map of the Holy Land or of Palestine or whatever they call it in your Bible.

Try to find it in Old Testament times if you can. I've got one that says the 12 tribes of Canaan. You can see, and if you can't find it, Hebron.

If you look at the Dead Sea, find a map that's got the Dead Sea on it. If you divided the Dead Sea into thirds, right where the first third and the second third, the northern third and the central third meet, if you go straight west, that's where Hebron is. It's probably 20, not quite 20 miles, maybe 15 miles inland from the Dead Sea.

When you look down at the southern end of the Dead Sea, this is where you may see Zohar listed there. This is where Sodom and Gomorrah used to be, actually underneath the water there at the southern tip of the Dead Sea. So you draw a line there and you say, well, my goodness, this looks like a good 40-something miles as the crow flies.

And even at an elevation, you can't see that far. I can sit downtown. I'm on the 19th floor of a building, and we have a water tower just a block or so from our house here, and I measured on a map, and it's about 11 miles as the crow flies.

And I'm 19 floors up, and I can just see that water tower on the horizon. So to be able to see 40 miles from Hebron isn't really possible. The closest you can get to Hebron and see the southern edge of the Dead Sea is about three miles east of Hebron.

There's a village that exists there today, but this is in the hill country of Judea, and there are some pretty tall hills in Judea. And if you go about three miles east of Hebron, there is a hilltop there, and there's a village that exists there even today. And on a clear day, you can look between the peaks of the hills of Judea, and you can actually see the Dead Sea, and you can see all the way down to the southern tip.

And this is traditionally the site of the occurrences we're about to study in Genesis 18. It could have been there or anywhere closer, but not at Hebron, not at the tent. You can't just glance to the side there and see Sodom because it's 40-something miles away.

So when it says in Genesis 18 that the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, in Abraham, it says they looked toward Sodom. This isn't so much the idea that they looked over at it and saw the little buildings and people scurrying around, but they made preparation to continue their journey. They were looking toward Sodom.

They had the idea, well, we're gathering up our gear, we're girding up our loins here and getting ready to resume our journey in the direction of Sodom. The fascinating thing when you think about this is that God made a point of passing by. Obviously, God could have, if you think of Him appearing on the surface of the earth and going to Sodom, He could have come from any direction.

He could have appeared right on the outskirts of the city. He could have appeared in Lot's backyard. Instead, He's going to make this journey on foot and He starts up somewhere on the other side of Hebron so that He can pass by Abraham on the way down to Sodom.

God makes a point of alighting or appearing on the earth and setting a path that will bring Him right by Abraham's tent. You look at the distance there from Hebron to Sodom. Why does God appear way up in the hills of Judea to go down and take a look at Sodom? Because His stated purpose is to go down and see if it's as bad as everyone says, if it matches the outcry that has come up to Him in heaven.

God makes a point of passing by. God makes an issue. This is what's about to happen here beginning in verse 16.

Abraham went with them to see them on the way. So Abraham is going to travel with them a distance. It's sort of like, well, I know the area here.

Let me show you the best path to continue on down south to the Dead Sea, is the idea. Of course, God knows good and well. He doesn't even have to be walking.

But in verse 17, the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing? Since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him. This is an amazing section of Scripture.

This is basically God delivering a soliloquy. We saw Hamlet this past week, the Mel Gibson version, which was quite good. But you know, you've got several soliloquies in there, to be or not to be.

That is the question, whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows. Or the person will deliver themselves of their inmost thoughts. When actors are strutting about on the stage, it is not like a book where you can narrate and say, he thought to himself, or he was worried.

You can't see what is inside. So in a play, on the stage, one of the conventions for getting the inmost thoughts out, even in TV, we can have flashbacks. We can have little dream sequences where you can see what is going on.

Someone is picturing in their mind what they wish would happen. But you can't do that on the stage. So when a story is being presented in terms of the principal individuals involved, how do you know what they are thinking? You either have to have an omniscient narrator, or they have to unburden their soul in speech.

God does that here. You have the passage that says, Who has known the mind of the Lord? Well, even the omniscient narrator of Genesis, so to speak, does not presume to give us the mind of the Lord. It doesn't say the Lord thought to himself, or the Lord thought.

Instead, God, in the person of this visitor, delivers this soliloquy. He says, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing? He doesn't say, Abraham, I am not going to hide from you what I am about to do. He speaks of Abraham in the third person.

And yet, apparently, he spoke these words out loud. This is a classic device that is used to express what is in the heart. Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing? Since Abraham will become a great and mighty nation, the nations of the earth will be blessed, why does God reveal to Abraham? Why does he appear in Hebron and come by the oak trees of Mamre and sit down and spend these hours quietly eating the meal? If you think about it, all the preparation time, all of the eating time spends the better part of the day, the whole afternoon, in Abraham's presence, just so that these words can be delivered, this plan of God can be delivered to Abraham.

God, in other words, puts himself out, does a unique and special thing to make sure Abraham knows what he is about to do and to make an issue of it before Abraham. Why? Verse 19, I have known him. Now, what does this mean that God knows Abraham? This is know in the special sense.

This is know in the covenant sense. God knows everything and everyone. But to know someone in this sense is to know and be known in a special way.

This is a phrase or a type of statement that is made elsewhere in Scripture about the relationship between God and someone who has special standing. We saw this, for example, in Exodus 33, our Scripture reading this morning. Remember when the golden calf incident has just passed and God tells all the children of Israel to take off their

ornaments that he may know what to do with them.

And then in verse 11 of Exodus 33, the Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. Moses says in verse 12, You say to me, Bring up this people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, I know you by name, and you have found grace in my sight.

Now, therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in your sight, show me now your way that I may know you. God knows these individuals of great faith, these individuals who advance, who heed, who know the word of God and keep it, and they come to know God. God says to Abraham, I have known you.

Therefore, I'm not going to hide from you what I'm about to do. There's a lot of other people God could have gone to. He could have gone directly to Lot.

He's the one that's most concerned, living right there in Sodom. But Lot only gets visited because he's related to Abraham. God knows Abraham, knows him by name, just like he knows Moses by name.

And therefore, he reveals what he's about to do. God does the same thing with Moses. He brings Moses up and he says, He says, stand aside, Moses, I'll wipe out these people.

I'll make a new nation out of you. God does this on purpose. He puts this issue before Moses.

He's going to put this issue before Abraham on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It's a test. There's a reason for it.

God could have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and not said boo to Abraham. God could have wiped out Israel and never said a word about it to Moses until after the fact. Could have presented him with a fait accompli.

Moses could have come down from Mount Sinai and here's the smoking corpses of what used to be the remnant, the nation of Israel, and said, Well, Moses, while we were up in the mountain, they worshipped the golden calf. There it is. And so I wiped them out.

And I'm going to start over with you. It could have been a fait accompli in both of these cases. But in each case, God says, I am about to do something.

I have known you. I'm revealing this to you. I'm not going to hide my will from you.

And this becomes a decision point for the believer in question. This is what God does with us all the time. God, if we are making any effort at all to progress in the plan of God, God knows us.

And he wants us to know his will. And by in so doing, when we come to know the will of

God, it brings us to decision points. It brings us to the place of needing to pray, to set priorities, to act, or to refrain from acting.

This is a common pattern in Scripture. You have not only here in Exodus 33, but also in Deuteronomy chapter 9 and verse 24, Moses says, You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you. This is Moses talking to the nation of Israel.

He says, This is a relationship. Moses, of course, has known Israel and known about Israel. He grew up in it, knowing that he was Jewish from birth.

Even though he was raised in Pharaoh's household, his mother had him until he was six or seven. And he knew, as I mentioned before, the idea that somebody surprised him with his robe when he was an adult. And he was amazed to discover that he was Israelite.

It's just not so. It makes a good story, but it's not biblical. But this is in the sense of leadership.

Moses has known Israel, has had a relationship with them as their leader. And ever since he's been associated with them, they've been rebellious. That's his point.

So that's the way that this special use of the verb yada in Hebrew, Y-A-D-A, is found. In Deuteronomy 34.10, you have God once again as the subject of the verb. Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom.

Moses had laid his hands on him. The children of Israel heeded him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses. But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.

So this is a special relationship with God that comes to those who pursue that relationship by faith. God knows Abraham. God knows Moses.

In 2 Samuel 7.20, David is spoken of in these terms. King David went and sat before the Lord. In 2 Samuel 7.18, he said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that you have brought me this far? And yet this was a small thing in your sight, O Lord God, and you have also spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come.

Is this the manner of man, O Lord God? David is receiving promises that are similar to and are actually an outgrowth of the promises to Abraham. Now what more can David say to you? For you, Lord God, know your servant. For your word's sake and according to your own heart, you have done all these great things to make your servant know them.

God comes to know David. God causes David to come to know himself and his plan. Therefore you are great, O Lord God.

And he goes on from there. But this is a special knowledge. This is a knowledge that

speaks of relationship.

You'll find the same thing. We won't turn there, but you'll find it in Jeremiah 1.5. You'll find it in Jeremiah 12.3. In Hosea 13.5. And in Amos 3.2. What I want to focus on are a couple of New Testament usages of this same language. Once again, if you were writing those down, the ones we didn't look at in the Old Testament, Jeremiah 1.5, Jeremiah 12.3, Hosea 13.5, and Amos 3.2. But turn with me to Matthew 7.23. This is a much misunderstood passage in the New Testament.

Matthew 7.23. This is at the end of the parable. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? Then I will declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. This is generally, throughout the world, understood to be a reference to unbelievers. But no unbelievers are going to be coming to Jesus in that day because they're not resurrected.

And any of the surviving unbelievers from the tribulation will have been destroyed by the breath of his mouth, by the word he speaks when he comes. And there isn't going to be anybody coming to the Lord in that day of his return and saying, Lord, didn't we do all these wonderful things? No unbelievers are going to be capable of that. They're all dead.

And those dead will not live until the thousand years are complete and the great white throne judgment takes place. These are believers. Specifically, these are Israelite, Jewish believers who thought they were doing the will of God when they did these things.

But they never cultivated their relationship with God and God never came to know them in the sense that he knows Abraham, in the sense that he knows Moses, in the sense that he knows David. Because God did not know them, they didn't know him and they didn't know his plan and his will. God reveals himself to us.

He enters into that knowledge relationship that goes both ways when we respond by faith to the word of God, when we ask and seek and knock. And then there is knowledge both ways. God knows us in a personal, unique way.

And we come to know God in the way that these great figures of the Old Testament have done. And if we fail that, all of our efforts are in vain. Lord, Lord, look at all the great things we did and we did it in your name.

Oh, glory to God. You know, you hear this on all the TV shows. Glory to God.

Hallelujah. Praise God. Glory to his name.

Let's sing another praise chorus. Jesus is going to speak here. We want to keep our dispensation straight.

He's talking to Israel. But the principle applies just as much to our age as to theirs. Many are going to come and say, Lord, Lord, we did all these things in your name.

And he's going to say, I never knew you. It doesn't mean they're not saved. It doesn't mean they haven't been resurrected or that they're not in the kingdom.

But they never entered into that knowledge relationship with God. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. And this means that they are not going to enjoy proximity, closeness, the personal presence of God.

This is what happened to Israel in Exodus 33 when the tent of meeting got pitched outside the camp. When Israel first left Egypt, the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire were in the center of the camp. Later on, the ark of the covenant will reside in the tabernacle in the center of the camp.

And Israel will pitch their tents on four sides.