

99-04-11b

We're ready now to resume our study in Genesis chapter 21. This is the culmination of several chapters of anticipation. From the time that Abram left Ur of the Chaldees back in chapter 12, God has been promising him a future, has been promising him that he would be the father of many nations, that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed, that he would have a son from his own loins, and that his servant Eliezer would not be his heir, but that he would have his own son who would be his heir.

And the fulfillment of that has now taken place, and Isaac has been born. But immediately the birth of Isaac causes conflict in the household, and Abraham has to choose. If you think about this, for 14 years now, Abraham has had a son.

It's not the son of promise, but he's a son. He's in the household, and you can imagine Abraham, after waiting for 86 years for a son, is excited to have a son, and is probably a doting father, and has developed a relationship with Ishmael, and has found out a lot of what it's like to have a son, and to have hopes for him, and to teach him and train him, and involve him in all of the things that fathers do with their children. And suddenly the son of promise has come.

Isaac is born, and of course this is the son that he has with Sarah, his wife of so many years. And so here's the son that God promised, and that God said would be his heir, and the line through which all of these promises would be fulfilled. But this leaves Ishmael in kind of an awkward spot, because you've got 14 years of history with Ishmael.

And when this conflict arises, it says in verse 11 of Genesis 21, after Sarah says, cast out the bond woman and her son, he's not going to inherit with my son Isaac, the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son. He has an attachment to the son. And this puts us in mind of what we talked about in the first lesson this morning, in our scripture reading in Galatians.

It's not an easy thing to throw over 1400 years of history, and 1400 years of function and relationship with God through the law. And with all of the ups and downs that Israel had, this is their heritage. You talk about Israelites going back to the land now, and going over and living in Israel, and trying to recover their heritage.

Well, these are people that had their experience with the law at first hand. Their father, and grandfather, and great grandfather going all the way back. They can trace their lineage just like Jesus does, all the way back to the 12 sons of Jacob and beyond.

And so this is a part of their heritage, and a part of their culture, and a part of their social fabric. And it's not an easy thing. You can understand the trauma that takes place.

And this is exactly where Abraham finds himself. And the reason this story is recorded,

first and foremost, who received these books? To whom was the Pentateuch delivered? To Israel. It's the word of God for Israel.

It's truth. Like it says over in Hebrews, all these things were written for our instruction. These stories are designed to equip us and prepare us and say, oh, I see, I'm in a situation similar to Abraham.

And sometimes in our lives, even now, we come to a fresh understanding, and it requires a change in the way we function. We mature and we grow in our understanding of God, and we think, but there's so much weight of experience. We've had this growing up in church.

I've had it growing up in the denominational churches, Baptist church and Methodist church before that and Bible churches after that. And you get into a certain way of thinking, and you have the doctrine and the way of functioning delivered from the fathers. And you think, well, I've got great-great-granddad hanging on the wall here.

He was a Baptist. And going all the way back to the first hull that came over to the United States back in 1634, he was a preacher and was breaking away from the Church of England. And you have all this heritage, and then you think, well, but my understanding of Scripture doesn't match my heritage and the tradition and the things that I was trained up in.

Well, here you have Israel in the generation after Jesus Christ facing this same thing. There's a new revelation of the plan of God, and they've got to cope with it. It's a part of understanding calling and inheritance in God's plan.

So Abraham faces this. He says, well, and even though he knew the promise of God that Isaac would come, you have this contrast between, I've got a son in the hand. You know, they had that old thing, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

But you have a son in hand, and you have the promise of a son in the future. But for 14 years, he's got a son. And you get the idea that Abraham probably had a lot of emotional investment in Ishmael.

And so when this crisis comes up and something has to be done, it displeases him greatly. So God steps in, and God gives a special revelation at that point. Much as at the change of dispensation in Israel's experience, God stepped in with supernatural revelation at the point of the change of dispensation.

Why do you have the miracles? Why do you have the apostles raising the dead and healing the sick? Why do you have these miraculous givings of divine revelation at the shift? Our whole New Testament is fresh word of God given at the time that the dispensation changed. Because we need some help. We need a boost.

We need some clarification and some direction from God whether or not this is the right thing. And God says, do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice.

For in Isaac your seed shall be called. And God reminds Abraham of what he had said earlier. This is word for word what God told Abraham in previous chapters.

In Isaac your seed will be called. So he doesn't tell him anything he doesn't already know, but he's reminding him. He says, Sarah, for once has got this right.

Whatever her motives may be, what she's saying is right. You need to listen to her. But look at verse 13.

Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman because he is your seed. This puts us in mind of what God said a couple of chapters back when he says, As for me, behold, my covenant is with you. This is Genesis 17.4. And then he says in Genesis 17.9, as for you, you shall keep my covenant.

He says in verse 15, as for Sarah your wife, this is what will happen with her. And then God says down in verse 19 and 20 of chapter 17 of Genesis, As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Abraham has said in verse 18, O that Ishmael might live before you.

Why can't Ishmael just be my heir? I love him. He's my firstborn son. Why can't we just have Ishmael be the heir? And God says, No.

Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant. And with his descendants after him.

As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I have blessed him. I will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly.

He shall beget twelve princes. Well, guess what? So is Isaac. Isaac's son Jacob is going to beget twelve princes.

Twelve chieftains. Twelve tribe leaders. And Ishmael is going to have sort of a shadow of the things coming to Isaac and Jacob.

There are going to be twelve Arab princes that are descended from Ishmael. He is going to be a great nation. He is going to be fruitful and multiplied.

But look at verse 21 of 17. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year. The covenant is the channel of promise.

The covenant is the channel of blessing. The covenant is the channel of inheritance. Both men are going to be the progenitors of nations.

Isaac and Ishmael. God says, I will make of Ishmael a great nation. But the covenant will be with Isaac and with his seed.

This is the channel of inheritance. And when you think about the comparison or the analogy that we have been observing with Ishmael representing life under the law. Eternal inheritance does not come through the law.

Eternal inheritance with God comes through Christ. We have understood this in very simplistic terms in our Christian teaching and so forth by seeing that salvation does not come through the law. Salvation comes through Christ.

But relationship with God, life with God, and inheritance, eternal inheritance, the fullness of eternal life, also does not come through the law. It does not come through ritual. It does not come through just obedience.

It comes through relationship with God. And that comes through Christ, not through the law. This is the theme of the book of Galatians.

It's the principle and the doctrine that has its origin here in Genesis. In these chapters, in this illustration of the sons of Abraham. So this is why God tells Abraham in chapter 21, verse 12, Do not let it be displeasing in your sight.

Don't be displeased that Ishmael has got to go. You've got to see that this is necessary. This has to happen.

Whatever Sarah has said, listen to her voice. In Isaac your seed shall be called. Now the problem here is, legally, the firstborn son, it doesn't matter who his mother is, is the heir.

But, there's a special circumstance here. Because Hagar is a bondswoman, because she is a servant, her son also is a servant. And there's, I could cite you all kinds of ancient documents and references from Mesopotamia and from the surrounding cultures.

It was standard practice that there was a transaction that could be accomplished. And this is what Abraham is going to do here. A slave could be granted his freedom.

Especially if he is the firstborn son. In this case, Hagar and Ishmael can be granted their freedom in exchange for relinquishing any claims on the estate. They have a claim on the estate of Abraham.

He has a claim as being the heir. But he also has the standing of a slave. So he has a choice.

He can, technically at least, he could stay a slave, not be free, and be the heir. Or, he can be given his freedom and relinquish the inheritance. And this isn't even necessarily a decision that the slave could make.

The father has the option of saying, I'm going to trade you your freedom for your claim on the estate. And this is a legal transaction. There are many examples outside of the Bible in these ancient days where this took place.

It was not uncommon because of the nature of households and the proliferation of slaves and how it is when people get thrown together. It doesn't matter what their standing is. They wind up getting together and having children.

So this was not uncommon in the ancient world. And this was a standard transaction. I will give you your freedom in exchange for your birthright, your inheritance.

And this is what Sarah demands. She says, cast him out. There are all kinds of word plays going on here that we could examine if we had the time.

I will just tell you briefly that the word for cast out means to drive out. It's the same verb that's used when God drives out Adam and Eve from the garden. And in verse 13, God says, Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed.

He is still a son of Abraham, and God will honor him on that basis alone. So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water, putting it on her shoulder. He gave it to the boy of Hagar and sent her away.

She departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. When it says he sent her away, this is another verb that is used back in the early part of Genesis for God sending Adam and Eve forth from the garden. The sending forth is a milder form.

The cast out is a stronger form, a stronger verb. The stronger form here was also used of divorce. And when Sarah says, cast out this bondwoman, he's basically saying sever the relationship, change the legal standing of Hagar and Ishmael, so that there's no dispute over the inheritance.

So Abraham does do this according to God's command. But even though he is severed from inheritance, he is still going to be a nation just by virtue of a relationship with Abraham. And we think, well, is this just, he has no part, it's not based on his personal relationship with God at all.

Does he acknowledge God? Is he just a wild rebellious man and he doesn't care anything about God, but he's going to be blessed anyway just because of Abraham? The following section of this chapter answers that question. Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water. This was usually a goat skin.

You can imagine if you skin a goat out properly, you can tie off the legs and seal up the other openings and make a bag that will hold, say, three gallons of water. And if you know how much a gallon weighs, this could be between 25 and 30 pounds of water. This

is as much as can be carried by a person for any distance at all.

If you think about getting a 25-pound bag of dog food or something, most of us have lifted a 25-pound bag, you think, well, how far are you going to be able to travel carrying that? There are no camels, there are no servants, there are no donkeys or anything going with it. Abraham has plenty of these things, but what's the agreement? Your freedom in exchange for your claim on the estate. So there is no part of the estate that goes with Hagar and Ishmael.

You think, well, couldn't he spare a donkey? This is a legal transaction, and this is why it seems sort of harsh that all they get is bread and water. But this was the minimum that you would extend to anyone by way of hospitality. Anybody that came by, you would extend nourishment and water to.

And so they are treated as though they were passers-by. Here's some bread, here's some water. And that's all they take with them from the estate of Abraham.

Not an animal, not a servant. And this is as much as they can carry. So Abraham is being as generous as he can within practical limits.

He can't give them any more than what they can carry. So he gives them the maximum. So he's not being unkind.

And you can imagine, based on verse 11, that he is not unkindly disposed toward them. He wants to do as much as he can. But these are the legalities.

They're being set free. Hagar and Ishmael are no longer slaves. But they no longer have any possession in the household of Abraham either.

And depending on the English translation you have here, in fact, this got messed up in the Greek. If you read the Septuagint translation of this, it sounds like Abraham put the skin of water and Ishmael on Hagar's shoulder. And you get the idea that Ishmael may have been a toddler or something, that he's sending out this very small child.

But remembering the chronology, Ishmael is at least 14 years old. He was 14 when Isaac was born. And depending on what the length of time was until Isaac was weaned, he's probably 15-ish at this point.

Children could be weaned anywhere from one to three years in the ancient world. It was not uncommon. So he's in his mid-teens here.

He's not incapable. He's probably alternating with his mother and carrying this bag of water. So Abraham obviously is not going to put our 15-, 16-year-old young man on his mother's shoulder, and the Hebrew doesn't require us to believe that.

He puts the skin of water and bread on Hagar's shoulder. He gives it and the boy to

Hagar. And this is the transfer of responsibility.

Abraham has been the mentor, and the father figure and the provider has had this relationship. But in the same way that in a marriage, and you've heard my spiel on this before, in a wedding ceremony it's proper for that portion where the preacher says, Who giveth this woman? And the father stands up and says, I do. It's not her mother and I do.

The father has responsibility for the daughter, and responsibility for her is transferred from the father to the husband. The father is responsible. He transfers it to the husband so that the woman is shielded under the umbrella of provision and responsibility as well as authority that the father and later the husband have.

That's God's design. Here, Ishmael. Normally you wouldn't be transferring responsibility for a son, but in this case because of the transaction taking place, Abraham is transferring responsibility for Ishmael to Hagar.

So he gives the stuff, and the last thing he gives, you can see how reluctant he is, he gives him the provision, he's sending him on the way, and the very last thing he does, you can imagine he might be taking Ishmael's hand, he probably hugged him and so forth, and then he hands Ishmael to Hagar. You can imagine the turmoil that must have been going on in Abraham's soul at this point. It's a very difficult thing, but it's absolutely necessary in the plan of God that there not be this claim of heirship, because God has said, In Isaac your seed will be called.

However difficult or traumatic or whatever else, this is the will of God. It's right, it's proper. The only reason there is an Ishmael is because of human failure.

The only reason there was a law of Moses is because of human failure. It was a necessary thing. It had to exist for that period of time to bring Israel to the point of recognition.

Here, Ishmael was in the household for a time, but he's got to go. It's a part of God's plan. This is what Israel should have understood at the point that Christ came.

You have Pentecost, and you have the beginning of this age, the church age. There has to be a relinquishing of that relationship of the law and the place of the law in life. It may be traumatic, it may be a hard thing, but it's necessary if you're going to move into the place of inheritance.

So, he gives the boy to Hagar and sends her away. Then she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. This verb means to wander aimlessly.

It's used sometimes of people that are drunk. It's the verb that Abraham used in the last chapter when he was trying to make his excuses to Abimelech, the king of Gerar. He said, when God pulled me from my homeland and caused me to wander, to just go to

and fro.

There's been some talk that Abraham didn't really give them very much by way of provisions. In fact, John Calvin, in his commentary on Genesis, he says, well, Abraham didn't really want them to go too far. He just gave them enough provision to go a little way, and he figured when they ran out, they'd come back.

He couldn't really turn loose. But the idea here is they're in civilization. There are wells and wayside.

There are towns and things that they should travel to, and this is more than enough provision to get Hagar and Ishmael from where they are. Three gallons of water and an appropriate amount of bread. They ought to be able to get down the road quite a ways.

They can refill the skin. They can buy some bread. They can move on.

But she gets lost in the wilderness and is wandering aimlessly around, and they run out of water, and they're not near any civilization. Apparently, they didn't stick to the roads. Maybe they tried to take a shortcut.

Who knows? But she's wandering in the wilderness of Beersheba. The water and the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. This word for placed is real interesting because any time it's used, it often means to cast something.

Once again, people had the idea that Ishmael was small, and she just kind of tossed him into the bushes because she thought he was dead or dying. But any time this verb is used in the Bible with a human being or a human body as its object, it's often used of lowering a body into a grave. Apparently, Ishmael didn't have the stamina.

She's still able to function more so than Ishmael. You think, well, she must be in her 20s or 30s or so, and he's a strapping young man and 14, 15, 16 years old. But for whatever reason, he's collapsing and dehydrating, and she is still able to function.

So she basically figures he's about to die, and so she lays him down under a bush to get some shade. But this is the verb that's used of laying a dead body in a grave. She deposits him there, and then she's going to go off.

And she sat down across from him at a distance of about a bow shot. You can imagine a bow and arrow, about how far could you shoot an arrow? 100, 120 yards, something like that. For she said to herself, let me not see the death of the boy.

So she sat opposite him and lifted her voice and wept. If you think about this, this is probably close enough to see but not close enough to hear. Apparently Ishmael is groaning and is in quite a bit of distress.

Maybe he's got heat exhaustion or heat stroke and is on the verge of... And this is

something you can understand. A lot of times people who are strong, maybe he was shouldering the water and going along, and he gave himself heat stroke, and he didn't really pace himself or heat exhaustion, and now he's in extremis. So she goes about a bow shot away.

She is still close enough to see, but she's gotten far enough away to where his cries do not distress her quite so much. She lifted her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad.

Now Hagar lifts her voice and weeps, but it says God heard the voice of the lad. What do you think has happened here? This goes beyond cries of distress. Apparently Ishmael has reached the point of crying out to God.

And in extremis and at the point of death, now he's not derisive of Isaac and he doesn't have this pride or whatever it is. At the point of death, he turns to God. You think about Israel under the law.

What did it usually take to bring Israel around to pay any attention to God? It was at the point where they were just about to go out, where they were just about to be destroyed by their enemies. And under the law, the only thing that would break their pride and get them to turn away from idolatry and turn back to God was extremis, just near the point of death. And this is what Ishmael does.

As the last, with his dying gasp, he cries out to God. And it says God heard his voice. This is what God was waiting for.

He hears the voice of the lad. So Ishmael recognizes God. He acknowledges God.

He cries out to God and God hears his voice. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven and said to her, What ails you, Hagar? Well, this is a rhetorical question. Obviously, God knows exactly what's going on.

And it doesn't even record a response from Hagar. In fact, in this entire chapter, Hagar only speaks once. We only have one quote from Hagar, and it's sort of indirect.

She says to herself, Let me not see the death of the boy. This is four words in Hebrew. That's all she says.

But God says, What ails you, Hagar? Do not fear. God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation.

And so God reiterates the promise that he made to Abraham concerning Ishmael to Hagar. I will make him a great nation. God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.

And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink. God was with the

lad. Abraham, he grew and dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman.

Hagar withdraws about a bow shot. Well, Ishmael is going to grow up and become a bowman. The bow shot and bowman are the same word group in Hebrew.

He dwelt in the wilderness of Paran. This is right where they are, this wilderness of Beersheba. If you think about the Sinai Peninsula, it's in the northern and eastern parts of that wilderness area to the south of the land of Israel, south and a little bit east.

This is where they dwell. His mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. Unlike Isaac and some of the others later on who get their spouses from the same stock from which Abraham comes, in other words, Ishmael's children are three-fourths Egyptian.

He's half Egyptian. He has an Egyptian wife. So they're partaking of the land of Egypt and everything that that signifies.

But he is a believer, and God says, I will make of him a great nation. So we have this issue here because do you want to be a nation only or do you want to be a nation and inherit, be the nation that is the chosen people of God? This is what Isaac's heritage will be. The son of the bondwoman will not inherit with the son of the free woman.

He has a lot of the same things that pertain to Isaac. He's going to have 12 princes come from him. He's going to be a great nation.

He has a territory down here in the wilderness of Paran that's going to belong to him. The deserts of Arabia is the land of Ishmael. But that's not a fruitful land flowing with milk and honey, is it? That's not the land of the vine and the fig tree and the milk and honey that are promised to Isaac.

He's a nation. He has 12 princes, but he doesn't have the inheritance. He doesn't have the fruitfulness.

And this is the symbolic outcome of the choice that Israel is going to make between pursuing the inheritance that comes through Christ, seeing that living faith, that our daily walk with God is based on faith, not on works. It's based on what we think and what God does in our soul, not on our observance of rituals or feast days or sacrifices and the things that were a part of the earlier part of God's plan to show us the need for Christ. Now that Christ has come, we've got to seize and lay hold of that.

And we have to abandon the earlier things. And Jesus tries to teach this to Israel. He says sometimes you have to part with things in an almost violent way.

If your hand offends you, cut it off. If your eye offends you, pluck it out. If your foot causes you to offend, cut it off.

It's better to enter into life without those things than retain them and have the fruit of

your life go into the trash pit. And he says than having two eyes to enter Gehenna. And Gehenna was the big trash pit.

It was the city dump outside the walls of Jerusalem. And do you want the fruit of your life to be meaningless? Do you want it all to go up like a bonfire of wood, hay, and stubble? This is the choice that Israel has to face. This is what the Apostle Paul points out.

This is what Peter and John and the other apostles try to teach Israel. John the Baptist and Jesus tried to prepare Israel for the coming of the kingdom of God and to rise above an earthly view conditioned by the law alone. And this is the choice that we face today.

And when you look around at Christianity at large and what our churches are teaching and so forth, sometimes we give great lip service to the things of God, but when it all falls out, we're not actually in the place of inheritance. Patty and I were watching here. You hear the bad things that I see on TV almost every week, Christian TV.

But there was a guy that was teaching out of the Bible, quoting all kinds of scripture and making all kinds of points and talking about how you've got to sow into the kingdom of God. You've got to sow into it. And he's quoting scripture, Seek ye first the kingdom of God and so forth.

You've got to sow your seed into the soil. Of course, he was talking about financial seed. And he assumes that his ministry and his church are the kingdom of God.

And you write a check and send it off to this guy. And he said, you know, the people of God are in bondage. We're in bondage to circumstances.

You're in bondage to poverty. And you people that are poor, it's because you haven't learned how to sow into the kingdom of God. So what's he doing? He's saying, you poor people, take the little bit of money you have left and send it to me.

And I promise you, God will make you rich. And you talk about taking advantage of the poor. His pitch was all to people.

He says, you know, God's trying to tell you something. If you're in dire straits, if you don't have very much money and your finances are bad, it's because you haven't given that up to God. You've got to learn to just not care about money anymore.

Take the little bit you have left, send it to me. The windows of heaven will open and you'll be blessed. You'll be sowing a seed.

You'll take that last little bit. You've just got one seed left. You don't have a crock full of oats anymore.

You've just got a couple of oat seeds. Well, send those to me and God will refill your crock with an abundance of grain. Well, what is this? In many ways, there are many

different illustrations, and I'm sure you can fill these in for yourself.

It is either explicit or implicit in a lot of our Christianity today that God will bless based on what you do. If you just find the right formula of things to do, if you just get into the right ministries or you just attend the right functions or you just get involved yourself in certain practices, you've just got to try to find the right combination. If you push the buttons in the right order, the door will open and blessing will flow and God will be pleased.

This age is designed to bring us past the point of recognizing the problem and to the point of exploiting the victory of the cross, taking advantage of the solution, what Jesus Christ has done. It's a life of faith. Jesus Christ says, I'm the way to the Father.

There's no other way but me. He has come. He has opened that way.

He's split the temple veil in twain so that we can walk boldly into the Holy of Holies. We can come boldly before the throne of grace. Our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience, our bodies having been washed with pure water, we are sanctified, we are justified, we are qualified to go directly to God and to engage in our own personal relationship with him, to be a son and to be an heir, an heir according to promise.

The promise is we've got to act like grown sons and not be constantly running back to the shelter of the law, the shelter of the guardians and the youth and the early things that were under the law. And it takes a step of faith in it. Sometimes it can be traumatic, just like Abraham's parting with Ishmael is traumatic.

It's not an easy thing for him. But he sees the word of God. God says this is necessary.

Ishmael will be a nation, but he's not going to be an heir. Ishmael will have twelve princes, but it's not through him that all the nations of the earth will be blessed. There are many of us who are believers, and we are saved, and we have provision from God.

We have the bread and the water, but we can wind up wandering in the wilderness and establishing our territory out there in Paran. It's not bringing up fruit. It's not taking hold of inheritance.

It's something. We have a relationship with God, just as Ishmael has a relationship with Abraham, and he's going to be a nation on that basis. But it's not what God wants for us.

God wants us to inherit. God wants us to be fruitful. God wants us to not only be blessed ourselves, but to be a blessing to others.

In Isaac shall thy seed be called. In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Jesus Christ is going to be a descendant of Isaac, not of Ishmael.

And that's the choice that we face. We have to constantly remind ourselves, since we're

immersed in a culture and a Christianity that constantly wants to go back to a cause and effect sort of relationship with God, that those days are past. These are the days of coming before God and living a life that is pleasing in His sight because of Jesus Christ and everything that we have in Him.

The opportunity for inheritance, both in this life and in the next, depends on us seeing that difference, and we have it illustrated for us very wonderfully in this chapter. When we resume next time, we're going to see the reappearance of Abimelech, the king of Gerar, and there's going to be a dispute about a well. And there's going to be an interesting conversation take place.

I think at first glance it's sort of inscrutable, but we'll see if we can extract the meaning of that next time and move on into chapter 22, which is probably the most well-known episode in Abraham's life, and that is the offering of Isaac on the mountaintop. This is a good place for us to close this morning, so let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you for the wonderful place that we occupy in your plan, and because we are sons and heirs through Jesus Christ, we have the opportunities that were not available to believers in the Old Testament age.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will remind us of this and that we will see clearly the means and the opportunity to exploit the grace that is ours through Jesus Christ, that we are enabled to stand, we are declared righteous by faith, we are motivated by hope, and we operate in love, and that in so doing we produce that fruit that is pleasing in your sight and that will eternally reflect your glory. We thank you for these things and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.