

You're of no earthly value unless you're...

Heavenly Minded

Vol 6 Iss 3



Still Life with Grapes by Espinosa

In this issue...

Fastened by Forgiveness

First Fruit

Principle People of the Scripture – Part 3 Awaiting the Coming Apocalypse

See www.heavenlyminded.com for this issue and much more!

Dear Friends,

"We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which Divine love may rest "well pleased." To ask that God's love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God: because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labour to make us lovable." – C.S. Lewis

We can rest in this truth – God's love is unshakeable in Christ. The dear apostle Paul wrote emphatically that nothing in the created order can separate us from it. His love initiates our relationship with Him, it guides, nurtures and adjusts us in order to bear His fruit, and it is as limitless as God Himself.

May each of you be fruitful and pleasing to Him, enjoying this love and responding to it forever.

In Christ's Love,

John and Darlene



I'm trusting, only trusting
In Jesus day by day:
I feel His presence nearer,
While pressing on my way;
My soul is full of glory,
And this my song shall be:
I love my blessed Saviour,
Because He first loved me.

I'm trusting, only trusting
In Jesus ev'ry hour,
Who saves me by His mercy,
And keeps me by His power;
I'll publish His salvation
Wherever I may be;
With all my heart I love Him,
Because He first loved me.

I'm trusting, only trusting
My Saviour's hand to guide;
I know His grace sufficient,
And ask for naught beside;
My soul is on the mountain,
My home beyond the sea:
O bless the Lord! I love Him,
Because He first loved me.

Fanny Crosby

Heavenly Minded is distributed free of charge. To add a name to our distribution list for either the hardcopy or electronic PDF version, simply contact us at : jdickey@heavenlyminded.com.

The goal of HM is to encourage our readers to "Set your affection on things above..." and thereby to be the greater and more effective witness to Christ. Articles may be shared freely and reproduced but only in their entirety. Comments and suggestions are always welcome. GBY!

Fastened by Forgiveness

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

So he said, "Teacher, say it."

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased

to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." (Luke 7:36 – 50)

The word the Holy Spirit chose with which to describe this woman means one "dedicated to sin or especially sinful". Yet when she approached Jesus, she "fastened" to Him. That's what the word "touching" really means in the verse. Now, this offended the Pharisee, Simon, because the whole premise of the Law of Moses is that sinful man cannot approach a Holy God let alone cling or fasten to Him. 'One must be clean and pure to come before God.' In their minds, the same would be true of a prophet, rabbi or anyone strongly adhering to the Levitical system.

But I can relate to this woman. I often wonder why in world God gave me a ministry of encouraging people to be spiritually or heavenly minded. I rejoice in it but just shake my head at the irony. And I am blessed just wonderfully by this story because in it Jesus directly fastens love to forgiveness. The way Jesus said it, her love led to his forgiveness; and implied in the next part, "But to whom little is forgiven, the same

loves little. ", is the counter-point that His forgiveness also leads to love on our part. That is, it's a two way deal – His forgiveness → our love → His forgiveness → our love...

And to boot, this passage also shows that the degree of such love is directly related to the degree of forgiveness. Now, this is awesome because that explains to me why the people I know who clearly love God very dearly are the ones who have been faced with the reality of their own human frailty and sinfulness. And they have acknowledged it in sincerity.

You see, God can (and does) tell us we are sinful creatures, but unless we truly believe Him, we don't really see the need to accept His forgiveness. Obviously, this is fundamental to salvation but it is equally relevant to our lives as believers as well. At times, there may be an intellectual response or assent but we know that that is quite different from a sincere acknowledgement.

Frankly, the 'better' we do in keeping whatever moral code we personally believe in, the less we think we need His forgiveness and thus the less we find ourselves enraptured with love for Him. This is NOT a justification for immoral behavior by the way. For the love that is engendered by forgiveness leads us up the high road of repentance. "We don't need to go and sin more in order to be forgiven more, thus loving God more - all we must do is become more sensitive to our current state of sinfulness." (D Guzik)

Simon may have had fewer outward sins to forgive than the woman but the result was a coldness

of heart. He did not even grant Jesus the customary courtesies of water to wash His feet or anointing oil. I've known people like that; maybe you have too. "Good people". In fact, they are fastened to being good (notice I didn't say doing good) to the exclusion of faith, love and humility.

"Simon was a rude host. And in that culture hospitality was something that was treasured highly. When you invited guests to your home, they would leave their sandals at the door, but immediately there would be a servant there with a towel and with a basin of water, and the host would provide that servant to wash your feet in order that you might come into the house to dine. Of course, they wore open sandals; they had dirt pathways that they walked on, and it was just a common, accepted courtesy that the guests that were invited would have their feet washed by the servant when they entered the door of the house. And then it was customary to greet your friends with a kiss. Usually it was a kiss on each cheek. This was just common. And, in fact, in some of those areas it is still practiced today. Italy, the men in the church when they come up and greet you, kiss you on both cheeks. And it's a sort of a beautiful, loving thing. But it was common in that culture. And then also it was common to anoint with oil. To pour oil on the head of the guest. Which was a symbol of the joy that you'd hoped to share together that evening. And they would then serve you your first cup of coffee, no sugar, strong Turkish type coffee, bitter. The idea being that you are washing away now all of the bitter

experiences that you've had. The second cup they offer you is very sweet. Symbolic of that sweet time that we can now share together, that all of the bitterness was taken away." (Chuck Smith)

Now, this woman, whom in contrast we do not know by name, was washing His feet with her tears. I don't think it was intentional. You see, she had brought perfume to anoint Him, but finding Him willing to let her 'fasten' to Him if you would, she broke into tears at His acceptance. It must have just boggled her mind and heart for in that society and especially in that house she was virtually untouchable, religiously filthy. She probably wiped them off His feet with her hair in absolute humility perhaps concerned that she'd unintentionally gotten His feet wet. Her hair may have been cleaner than anything else she had at hand. Using her hair was a very intimate thing. She didn't come to wash His feet, but it happened that way because God wanted to expose her love. Are you willing to be exposed?

And she kissed His feet; kissed His dusty feet. What a humbling thing. Simon had not given Him water to wash which was customary in that culture where most people wore sandals. Jesus' feet were undoubtedly soiled.

Humiliation, indeed, is a 'dirty' experience, but on the other hand, it can lead to a clean heart. Unfortunately, we really know precious little of this in our prideful, self-oriented culture.

Of note is that this woman, the one who was 'especially sinful', had to enter the 'house of hypocrisy', Simon's house, in order to reach

Jesus and display her affection. She probably could have found Him somewhere else, but she exposed herself in front of the very audience that would have condemned her. In doing this, she faced her accusers and her Lord at the same time, and often times so will we. As we approach our Holy God, say in prayer or worship, we can be sure that we'll recognize also the drivel and whine of the 'accuser of the saints', Satan. If we listen to his diatribes, we may back away.

But deep love beckons onward, into the intimate presence of the One who's feet have been dusty. The One who walked on earth will not turn you away. If you approach in love and faith, you may proceed. If you will allow the love He's planted in your heart to humble you, you'll be exposed. In that, you'll very possibly kindle rage from the religious but raves from your Redeemer.

And like this woman, it may be you'll have no 'name'. You may never be asked to speak at the next conference or huddle with the 'honchos'. But, you see, that's really the essence of this new life. It's your love and faith that identifies you with Jesus; it's a humbling love and that's your ticket, not your standing in the congregation or the ministry or the movement. When you're breathing the heavenly air of humble love, your life, your works, and your display are all unto Him and that's what matters.

The Christian culture of today, especially in the West has fostered many 'Simons' if you would – people seeking a name for themselves and their ministries. Once humble ministers, lovers of God, have

increasingly been convinced that they deserve more spotlight. As a consequence, they are embracing positions of ministerial power or celebrity more and people less.

David L. McKenna writes, *"Of all the traits that parents instill in their children by example, forgiveness is the most difficult. Early in my career... a sophomore appeared before me as court of last resort to appeal his dismissal from school. Violation after violation of residence hall rules had exhausted the patience of directors, deans, and disciplinary committees. His hostility knew no bounds. Whatever awe may seem to pervade a president's office had no effect on him. Anger and hatred exposed a vicious rebellion against anyone in authority. As I listened to him vent his spleen, a contradiction posed itself in my mind. His father enjoyed the reputation as one of the most powerful and effective evangelists in the church. The inconsistency snagged my thoughts. When he had finished and waited for my response, I caught him completely off guard with the unofficial question, "Have you ever been forgiven?" A slap in the face would not have been more shocking. His eyes emptied of fire, his head dropped, and he choked out a barely audible, "No."*

"Would you like to be forgiven?" I asked. His answer taught me a lesson of a lifetime. Sobbing now, he lifted the lid that covered his resentment, "I have heard my father invite thousands of people to come

to Christ . . . but he has never asked me if I wanted to be forgiven."

When I was younger, I was focused on encouraging those to

whom I ministered to invite Jesus into their heart. Surely, that's important, conceptually. But, the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. We've often heard sermons that highlight the fact that the Laodicean church in Revelation chapter three has left Jesus outside. He says, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."* (Rev 3:20)

But opening the door is just the step in the right direction. The question remains, what will you do when Jesus enters? You indeed may 'dine with Him', yet what kind of relationship will emerge? This is critical not just as a new born babe in Christ but throughout your Christian life. Having encountered Jesus, having invited Him into your 'home', what attitude will you embrace?

I submit that there is the human tendency to 'simonize' – to ask Jesus in to our home but to come to treat Him quite casually. The religious and the righteous are not necessarily one in the same. Oh, may God give us a fresh glimpse of how desperately we need Him and as a consequence, may our hearts be fastened to Him by forgiveness – our recognition of the need for it, our humble, trusting petition, and our honest acceptance.

Have you invited Him in? Dined with Him? Do you love Him? How much?

First Fruit

Fruit. It seems like a lot of focus in scripture is upon it. God plants, He prunes, He provides nutrients, He waits, and He reaps. From the opening pages of the Bible to its closure, His word is resplendent with meaningful agricultural depictions. Israel has been pictured as a vine and as an olive tree. The righteous are pictured as fruitful palms, as wheat and as good seed. Jesus spoke of God as the owner of a vineyard, a farmer whose crop has been infested with bad seed and as a harvester.

At the beginning of man's relationship with his Creator, fruit was the instrument of both life and death. In disobedience to God, man ate the deadly fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. At the end of the age, in the book of Revelation, the angels of God are instructed to harvest the world.

It's quite evident that God's a farmer, a "husbandman" in the old King James lingo. It's a fundamental aspect of His being that bears consideration. The New Testament word for this simply means someone who works the land, and for our Father in heaven, this is true both physically as well as spiritually. Actually, Jesus described Him this way; He said, "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman." (John 15:1)

In fact, His first act on behalf of man was to plant Eden, a magnificent garden, and man's first job was to mimic God, if you would, in tending this paradise. His first command to man was to be fruitful. Now this isn't merely a nice word picture but basic to our understanding of His ways and

applicable to our walk in these last days.

James wrote, *"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer (husbandman) waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain."* (James 5:7) Yes, God is indeed a farmer and He's into fruit. In these last days, He is patiently waiting for it to mature. So let's look into His husbandman techniques, consider the fruit that He's expecting and examine our role in it all.

First of all, God plants. He planted Eden (Gen 2:8). He planted Israel in the Promised Land (Psa 80:8,15; Jer 2:21; 11:17; Mark 12:1). His Son plants seed in the heart of man. (Mat 13, Lu 8) Thus, His plantings are physical, typical and/or spiritual. Like a farmer, He is very practical in it all; none of His efforts are wasted. There are divine purposes and outcomes all according to His will. Though He scatters seed freely, it only produces a crop in the good, weed-free soil. Thus, it is very important for us to understand that, spiritually speaking, it is not the seed that God is looking for in our lives but that which the seed has produced to fruition.

Next, God tends His planting. Jesus spoke of His pruning or cleaning the vines and even allowing for fertilization and aeration. He sends the rain in its season as well as the sunshine. Each of these has spiritual application for us. Pruning speaks of taking away those things that rob the plant of strength but produce nothing in return. Cleaning speaks

of removing the earthly coverings that impede the effective working of His light. Fertilization and aeration speak of improving the condition of His plants' environment. The rain speaks of His blessing and His Word while the sunlight speaks of His life and love. All of this, He does patiently but with an expectation in mind.

And with it, God waits. Most of us know we have so much to be thankful for, but we rarely consider how thankful we should be that God waits. Our society conditions us to rush everything, but one thing that simply cannot be accelerated is the bearing of good fruit. Why God waits as long as He does is a matter of His divine sovereignty and foreknowledge and certainly one of the greatest mysteries of His creation. Yet, no farmer in his right mind gets upset when he plants his crop in say April and finds no fruit in May. That's because he knows it will not come until August or September. God knows the soil, knows the plant, knows the seasons, knows the fruit... and thus, He waits.

But when He knows His fruit should be ready, His waiting is over. Then He harvests. Now, some fruit comes from shaking, some from cutting, some is plucked up. In any case, God is looking for fruit, lots of good fruit. Jesus said, *"He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit..."* and *"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."* and, *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain..."* (John 15:5,8,16) He also illustrated this in His parables saying, *"A certain man*

had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it..." (Luke 13:6) and *"Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard."* (Luke 20:10)

So what exactly is good fruit in God's eyes? The Bible speaks of many types of fruit – the fruit of the tree(s), the ground, the womb, the land, your body, your labors, your vineyard, your works, their own way, their thoughts; there is also the fruit of the righteous, the fruit of his mouth, of her hands, of the lips, of lies, and of course, the fruit of the Spirit.

Fundamentally, fruit has two characteristics; first, it is something that is produced for use or consumption by another. Second, it identifies the fruitbearer. (Luke 6:44)

To the latter point, Jesus said, *"Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."* (Mat 7:16,17) Righteous men and women are good trees in a spiritual sense. For instance:

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season whose leaf also shall not wither and whatever he does shall prosper." (Psa 1:1-3)

"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall

flourish in the courts of our God.
They shall still bear fruit in old age;
they shall be fresh and flourishing, to
declare that the LORD is upright; He
is my rock, and there is no
unrighteousness in Him.”
(Psa 92:12 – 15)

The righteous will bear good fruit in
its season. The life of the sap will
always flow but fruit comes ‘when it
comes’. Oh, how we want McFruit!
But, it doesn’t work that way.

So, when He comes, what will the
heavenly Husbandman be seeking.
What is the fruit that pleases Him?
Surely the fruit of the Spirit is on His
mind – “love, joy, peace,
longsuffering, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”
(Gal 5:22,23). However...

Paul wrote to the Colossian
church, “...*Epaphras, our dear fellow
servant, ...declared to us your love in
the Spirit. For this reason we also,
since the day we heard it, do not
cease to pray for you, and to ask that
you may be filled with the knowledge
of His will in all wisdom and spiritual
understanding; that you may walk
worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing
Him, being fruitful in every good
work...” (Col 1:7-10)*

You see, there is one thing that the
Bible tells us is required in order to
please Him and it says He will come
seeking it.

“But without faith it is impossible to
please Him, for he who comes to
God must believe that He is, and that
He is a rewarder of those who
diligently seek Him.” (Heb 11:6)

And...

“... shall God not avenge His own
elect who cry out day and night to
Him, though He bears long with
them? I tell you that He will avenge
them speedily. Nevertheless, when

the Son of Man comes, will He really
find faith on the earth?”
(Luke 18:7,8)

Quite simply, the Husbandman will
come seeking loving faith in Jesus
Christ both in our life and in the lives
of those we’ve influenced. Many
other types of good fruit will be
gathered into His barn as well but
without this first fruit, the rest will not
matter.

Strip away the shibboleths,
remove the myriad doctrines that
rise and fall, set aside the efforts of
both the well intentioned and the
self glorifying, still every mouth and
quiet every heart. If we lose the
lyrics and empty the edifices, all of
Christianity comes down to one and
only one fundamental fruit – loving
faith in Jesus Christ.

Obvious? Not so. We are
tremendously distracted by things
we are convinced are essential to
our Christian life and culture but are
really more a part of some other
agenda be it political, social and/or
otherwise. We have been brilliantly
side-tracked by an astute enemy.
As a result, the fundamental fruit
has been buried in the race for
attendance, celebrity and the sirens
of the morally/politically offended.

Righteousness is never legislated
– it is the delightful flavor of the fruit
of a healthy tree. If the church
corporate would turn the tide, we
must first focus on the fundamental
fruit – loving faith in Jesus. May we
never take it for granted.
(Psa 126:6)

***Awaiting the Coming
Apocalypse***

Jack Kinsella - Excerpted from Omega
Letter Daily Intelligence Digest, Vol 52, Iss 16
In November, Iranian president
Ahmed Ahmadinejad startled the world
when he announced that felt 'the hand
of Allah' entrancing world leaders as he
delivered a speech to the UN General
Assembly last September.

According to Ahmadinejad, during his
UN address, he suddenly felt himself
surrounded by light. It wasn't the stage
lighting, he said -- it was light from
heaven. Ahmadinejad related his
otherworldly experience in a
videotaped meeting with a prominent
ayatollah in Tehran.

According to the transcript,
Ahmadinejad said a member of his
entourage at the UN meeting first told
him of the light. "When you began with
the words 'In the name of God', I saw a
light coming, surrounding you and
protecting you to the end (of the
speech)," the member said.

Ahmadinejad confirmed sensing a
similar presence. "I felt it myself, too,
that suddenly the atmosphere changed
and for 27-28 minutes the leaders
could not blink ... They had their eyes
and ears open for the message from
the Islamic Republic," he told Ayatollah
Javadi-Amoli.

Ahmadinejad's "vision" at the UN
could be dismissed as political
posturing if it weren't for a string of
similar statements and actions that
suggest he believes he is destined to
bring about the "End Times" -- the end
of the world -- by paving the way for
the return of the Shia Muslim messiah.

In a November 16 speech in Tehran
to senior clerics who had come from all
over Iran to hear him, the new
President said the main mission of his
Government was to "pave the path for
the glorious reappearance of Imam
Mahdi ...").

The mystical 12th Imam of Shia
Islam disappeared as a child in 941AD,

and Shia Muslims have awaited his
reappearance ever since, believing
that when he returns, he will reign on
earth for seven years, before bringing
about the Last Judgment and the end
of the world.

In order to prepare for the Mahdi,
Ahmadinejad said, "Iran should turn
into a mighty, advanced, and model
Islamic society". Iranians should
"refrain from leaning toward any
Western school of thought" and
abstain from "luxurious lives" and
other excesses.

Scared yet? It gets worse.
Ahmadinejad is rumored to have
ordered his cabinet to sign a loyalty
pact with the 12th Imam and throw it
down a well near the holy city of Qom,
(where they believe the imam is
hiding).

In a December article called
"Waiting for the Rapture in Iran," the
Christian Science Monitor's Scott
Peterson wrote that Ahmadinejad has
earmarked \$17 million for the
Jamkaran mosque, supposedly built
on the Mahdi's orders.

"Officials deny rumors," Peterson
said, that when Ahmadinejad was
mayor of Tehran, he "secretly tasked
the city council... to prepare a suitable
route for the Mahdi's return."

That the leader of Iran believes that
these are the last days is one thing --
for him to base national nuclear policy
on that belief is another. Ahmadinejad
not only believes the 12th Imam's
appearance is imminent, he believes
that it is his mission to bring about the
apocalypse in order to force his early
return.

Most pagan religions share a vision
of a coming apocalypse with
Christianity. The Buddhists are
awaiting the appearance of the 'Lord'
Matreya.

The Hindus await the 'natural
ending of the world' during the 'Kali'
Age.

In Israel, Jews are preparing for the coming of the Jewish Messiah. Secular Israelis call it 'Messianic fever' but the so-called 'fever' is mainstream enough for Israel to reconstitute its Sanhedrin after a 1600-year absence. (Only the Sanhedrin can officially announce the Messiah's return)

The 'end of the world' is a recurring theme throughout the world's religions, including Baha'i, the New Age, Omega, 2012 Unlimited, Hale-Bopp, the Raelians, and so on.

In addition, there are secular think-tanks like the "Millennium Institute" which claims to take a 'holistic' approach to the coming apocalypse. The Millennium Institute is an NGO, or "non-governmental organization" with Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Among the MI's clients are; General Motors Corporation, Action Aid, World Bank, UN Development Program, The Carter Center, developing country governments, and so on.

The expectation of a coming apocalypse is deeply ingrained in the human psyche; it isn't merely religious, although most religions have some expectation of it. It isn't merely cultural, although most cultures are looking for some kind of world-ending cataclysm.

It isn't merely scientific, although most scientists agree that the world faces existential threats from pollution, global warming, an expanding or contracting universe, solar flares, meteor strikes and the like.

More importantly, it is unique to this generation. Previous generations, particularly in the religious world, expected the world to end 'someday'.

In this generation, it seems everybody is looking for some kind of messiah, whether it is Jesus, the 12th iman, Matreya, the Jewish Messiah, the Kali Age, or Arnold Schwarzenegger doing direct combat

with the antichrist, or Hollyweird's obsession with 666.

The point is this. All humanity, whether it wants to admit it or not, knows instinctively that God exists. They know instinctively of sin and righteousness, and they know instinctively that mankind has fallen short of God's righteousness.

That gives rise to the instinctive knowledge of Divine accountability -- even the lost recognize a world as sin-sick as this one cannot evade judgment much longer -- even as they deny the existence of the One to whom they know mankind is accountable.

The whole world knows that Jesus is coming, whether or not they want to admit His identity to themselves. The recognition of a Divine standard of righteousness is universal, as is the universal recognition of mankind's inability to attain it.

Not only that, but the whole world also recognizes that He is coming soon.

"And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

This was a fairly direct and specific question, and Jesus' reply was equally direct and specific. He outlined the events that would identify the generation of the end, but notice the very FIRST thing He said in reply:

"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My Name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." (Matthew 24:3-5)

The Lord IS coming. He is coming soon. The Bible says so.

So do the newspapers.

Principle Men of the Bible

Part 3 – Abraham (1 of 2) Ref: Genesis 11:26 – 25:8

Gen 11:26 – 32

Abram's younger brother Haran died and left behind a son named Lot. Isa 51:2 says Abram was the only one called by God. Act 7:2 says God appeared to him there in Mesopotamia. And Heb 11:8 says Abram obeyed the call, not knowing where God was leading him.

1. This passage shows that Terah took the family out of Ur. What's going on?
2. It was evidently a close family – Terah apparently named both Abram and Nahor after his own father. Nahor married his niece the daughter of Haran, Abram married his half sister, Sarai and took his nephew Lot under his wing. It was definitely a family that was family oriented.
3. Have you ever been called to go out, following the Lord, but not knowing where He's leading you?

Gen 12:1-3

Here is the Abrahamic call. God said, 'Leave your land, your kindred and the things your father established.' As Abram did this, God said that He would make of him a great nation and that all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Abram had to forsake his own family to bless all other families. How did this calling relate to (2) above?

1. Did this blessing come? How?
2. Is there any relationship here to what Jesus said in Luke 14:33 and Mat 19:29?
3. Did God Himself do something similar? (Mat 27:46?) How about Jesus?

Gen 12:4 – 6

Abram left Haran and came into Canaan.

1. Did Abram fully obey the Lord?

Gen 12:7 - 8

Again God appears to Abram and the promise is given to bestow the land to his offspring.

1. Why would this be something to Abram that motivated worship? In today's 'name it and claim it' mentality, Abram might have been bummed but instead he was blessed. He led a nomad's existence in this life but what was it that stirred him? (Heb 11:9,10)

Gen 12:9 – 15

1. Did Abram seek God's guidance in going to Egypt? Was it the land "that I will show you" (v1)?
2. Do you think Abram 'leaned to his own understanding' regarding the famine?
3. Was he exhibiting cowardice in effectively 'offering up' Sarai to local powers?
4. Was he desperate?

Gen 12:16

1. Were these material blessings from God?
2. How will these new possessions plague Abram?

Gen 12:17

God protects Sarai and exposes Abram's deceit.

1. Is a half truth a lie?
2. We might think that Pharaoh's gifts were a blessing to Abram. In verse three, God made a promise. Has He broken it?

3. How are we in our affluent society conditioned to regard wealth? Does the source of prosperity matter to God?

Gen 12:18 – 13:2

1. What kind of testimony did Abram leave in Egypt?

Gen 13: 3,4

1. Why do you suppose Abram went back to this place?
2. Why did he wait to call upon the Lord until arriving at Bethel? What does Bethel mean?
3. Do we ever need to go back to 'Bethel'?

Gen 13:5 – 9

Here is the first fallout of their newfound riches.

1. Do you think it was easy for Abram to encourage Lot to leave?
2. Was there an alternative they failed to consider?
3. Was this perhaps a part of God's ultimate plan to cause Abram to fully obey God's command in verse 12:1?
4. Why is it significant that it says "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land"? (See Gen 12:6; 13:7; 15:21; Ex 3:8, Ezra 9:1 and Zech 14:21)

Gen 13:10 – 13

Lot chose the lush land of the Jordan valley between the hills east of Bethel and the town of Zoar.

1. What occupies this area now?
2. Why did Lot choose this land? How did his decision affect his family? Why camp out "toward Sodom"? Did he remain camped out?

3. What was the problem with the men of Sodom? What led to their wicked condition? (See Eze 16:49)

Gen 13: 14 – 17

1. Is it significant that after Lot leaves God speaks to Abram? Do you think Abram was downcast?
2. How is this promise different from the first? Why do you suppose God mentions his seed and its future size?
3. Why do you think God told Abram to "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it..."? How do we establish a vision for the things God has promised us in Christ?

Gen 13:18

1. Abram moves but does he obey the Lord? Why not? Is he perhaps struggling to believe?
2. What does Hebron mean? Bearing in mind that this is the place where God will call Abram His friend, do you think growing in fellowship with God effects our faith in Him?
3. Does God ever 'deal' with Abram for not walking the length and breadth of the land? Abram built an altar but there's no mention of him calling on the name of the Lord as before.
1. Have you ever built an altar so to speak yet failed to call on the Lord? Do we ever just go through the motions? Why?

Gen 14:1 – 13

A large conflict between many kings arises and Lot is taken as a captive.

1. Do you think Abram feels any sense of responsibility?

Gen 14: 14 - 16

1. If you thought Abram was cowardly concerning Sarai earlier, what does he look like now?
2. Do you suppose this victory increased Abram's faith? Has God ever brought adversity into your life and developed your faith as a result?
3. Would Abram expect retribution?

Gen 14: 17 – 20

Upon returning from the victory, Abram is met by the King of Sodom and the King of Salem. The former will urge him to keep the spoils; the latter reminds him that it was God who delivered the victory to Abram.

1. Does this pose a picture of the spiritual choices we face? When things go well in our walk, we can also find the ensuing choice to listen to the 'King of Sodom' or the 'King of Salem'.
2. What do they say to us? Why? Melchizedek brings forth bread and wine and receives a tithe from Abram. Whoever Melchizedek is, at the very least, He is a type of Christ.
1. Why do you think Abram encounters Him at this point in his life?
2. How is Abram's spiritual walk changing?

Gen 14: 21 – 24

The King of Sodom appears magnanimous but Abram turns him down.

1. How does this contrast to his behavior when Pharaoh made him rich?
2. Do you think Lot was observing? Learning anything? Abram's friends went with him into battle.
1. What does this say about how Abram lived among them?
2. Do you have friends that would do this?

Gen 15:1

Abram is given a vision.

1. Why did God start with, "Do not be afraid."?
2. Why does God tell him of an exceedingly great reward?

Gen 15:2,3

Abram is childless and it's clearly an 'issue' for him.

1. In light of what God said in 13:15, 16 is Abram right in his 'complaint'?
2. Is Abram weak in faith here? In patience? See Tit 2:2, Heb 6:12, James 1:3

Gen 15:4 – 6

Abram believed God.

1. Does God have to tell you some things multiple times before you believe? Previously Abram had the faith to obey God and to step out.
1. What's different now?
2. What kind of faith is God teaching him?
3. Why is it that this is the point of obtaining righteousness versus where he left Ur or Haran or in chasing down the kings or in giving tithes? See John 6:29, Romans 4:1 – 5

Gen 15:7, 8

Abram believes concerning his descendants but still needs a sign concerning the land.

1. Why do you think this was more difficult for him to believe?
2. What's difficult for you to believe? Why?

Gen 15:9 – 21

God gives Abram a covenant sign. Abram brings five animals.

1. Of what is the heifer representative?
2. Of what is the she-goat representative?
3. Of what is the ram representative?
4. Of what is the dove representative?
5. Of what is the nestling representative?

Abram understood that God was telling him to get a contract ready for signing. In those days, contracts would be made by the sacrificial cutting of animals, with the split carcasses of the animals lying on the ground. Then, both parties to the covenant would walk through the animal parts together, repeating the terms of the covenant. *The Lord made a covenant* is literally, "the Lord cut a covenant."

1. Whose idea was the 'contract'?
2. Has God made a 'contract' with you?

As Abram waits for the Lord to appear and walk through the carcasses with him (to sign the covenant), God doesn't come right away, but the vultures do. At the end of the day, God has still not appeared to walk through the animal parts with Abram. Instead, God causes a *deep sleep* to fall upon Abram. Apparently, at least part of

what follows came to Abram in a dream while he was under this deep sleep. As God, represented by the smoking oven and the burning torch, passed through the animal parts by Himself, as Abram watched, He showed that this was a *unilateral* covenant; Abram never "signed" the covenant, because God "signed" it for both of them.

1. Why do you suppose God made Abram wait?
2. Why did He cause the deep sleep to come over Abram?
3. Do God's promises for eternal life follow the same pattern?

Gen 16:1 – 4

Here's Abram facing a major decision.

1. Who did he listen to?
2. Was he being rebellious or impatient or was he guessing this was God's plan?
3. Where did Hagar come from? Abram was 75 when he left Haran so he was 85 at this point.
 1. How long did he wait until God acted in providing him an heir?
 2. Why the wait?
 3. Have you waited for the Lord to fulfill a promise He made to you?
 4. Have you ever taken the 'logical' or 'flesh-fulfilling' way and assumed it was God way?
 5. Does God ever condemn or even rebuke Abram for this act? What does this indicate about how God leads us?



Forgiven by Greg Olsen

Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. Luke 7:47