

The Handwriting Is On The Wall (Part One) (2007)

Fearing and Believing God Like Abraham

John W. Ritenbaugh

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We give our greetings to our brethren in Australia, in the Philippines, in South Africa, the Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago, and up in Victoria, British Columbia, that they will have a very joyous and profitable Feast of Tabernacles.

I was thinking, as I wrote out this note, that someday we are all going to be together at one place and at the same time, and we will be accomplishing the labors our Savior has for us to complete.

We are very pleased, though, that we have the electronic communication available to us so that even though we are not directly in contact with one another, those other areas are able to get the sermons by downloading them from the website—a day late; but at least they get them. So until that time comes when are all together in one place at the same time, we hope that your Feast will be the best one ever for you.

Tonight's message is intended to be a foundation for all of the messages that I am going to be giving at this Feast of Tabernacles. Some of the things I say here tonight will probably feed into other messages that I give at other times during the Feast. I will be speaking seven times; not all sermons, but I will be speaking seven times.

I am asking you, at the beginning of this sermon, why is the Church of the Great God doing what it is doing? The thought of using this as the topic for the opening night came to me over a period of time, beginning actually last spring and into the summer, as I became involved in the sermon series given on Hebrews 11 and faith. It more deeply came to be a subject when I got to Abraham and Sarah and their example. It almost *forcefully* became a subject upon learning the reason that he is named in the Bible as "the father of the faithful," even though our spiritual Father in heaven spiritually begets us.

It is our *human* spiritual father, Abraham, that our spiritual Father in heaven uses as the pattern we are to generally follow throughout a life of faith. This does not mean that our life of faith will have every specific of Abraham's and Sarah's, but the general pattern will be evident in the life of each and every converted child of God. It is because of this that we bear the family conduct resemblance to him. It is as though Abraham's pattern of life is the spiritual handwriting on the wall for every Christian child of God.

Turn with me to Isaiah 51:1-2. God is speaking:

Isaiah 51:1-2 Harken to me, you that follow after righteousness, you that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence you are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

Brethren, I want you to understand that Isaiah 51:1-2 is not a suggestion. It is a command. "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah." Their pattern of life is exemplary of what God wants us to be conformed to. As I said just a moment ago, this does not mean everything that happened to them is destined to happen to us. It is the general pattern that they went through. The picture here is of a rock that is, let us say, molded and shaped by the sculptor, and it comes out looking like Abraham, and all the pieces of rock that are chipped off it, that is us. We too then are molded and shaped into the character-form or the pattern that Abraham had.

As we begin, I want us to consider that Hebrews 11 is one of those chapters that bears similarity to, let us say, I Corinthians 13. The main subject of I Corinthians 13 is love, yet it is one of the best-known chapters in all of the Bible. Right up there with that is Hebrews 11, whose subject-matter is faith.

More words by far in Hebrews 11, which is devoted to faith, are given to the father of the faithful than anybody else. The only other man who comes even close is the great Moses. Thirty percent of this chapter is devoted to one person and his wife. By comparison, Moses is given 17-1/2 percent of the chapter.

What really struck me in all that description of a few events in their lives is the fact that they, despite being very rich, never built a home. This is a keystone to the kind of life that Abraham and Sarah lived. I want to go back to the book of Genesis and confirm this with a couple of scriptures that you probably know, but I want you to see that I am not just blowing hot air up here. God does not lie.

Genesis 13:1-2 And Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south [meaning the south of the land of Canaan]. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

God does not exaggerate. Abraham was **very** rich, by God's judgment. How rich is that?

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It is an exceeding amount of money to impress God to put it in His Book.

Let us go to another place in Genesis. This time the speaker is Abraham's servant.

Genesis 24:35 And the LOORD has blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and he has given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses.

Now how about you? If you had just enough money would you not buy or build the house of *your* dreams? There was something that Abraham considered more important than building a house, and that is important to us. God is not requiring that we not build a house, or buy a house. I am sure that He put that thought in Abraham's mind though, but did not Abraham have free moral agency? Of course he did. He could have built a house, but he did not.

There is more to this story. Abraham was not an uneducated clod-busting farmer from some backwater community that no one ever heard of before. There are stories and histories from the past about Abraham. How much is mythical or legend I do not know, but these stories indicate Abraham was a scientist. More specifically, these historians, these researchers who look into these things say that Abraham was very likely what we today would call an astronomer.

Even before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, he was already established in a life that was probably paying him pretty well, but with God blessing him he had become *exceedingly* rich. So Abraham and Sarah did not build a house despite the fact that the city of their birth and cultural background were among the most highly developed in the entire ancient world. The "living in tents" aptly illustrates the intensely devoted focus for 100 years of their lives as they sojourned in the land of Canaan.

They believed, right down to the very root of their being, despite their living in the land of promise, that they were heirs of that land. We are heirs *with* Jesus Christ. In one sense, we are living in that which we are going to inherit. I want you to see what it says in Genesis 17.

Genesis 17:6-8 And I will make you exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you. And I will give unto you, and to your seed after you, the land wherein

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you are a stranger [or a foreigner, or an alien], all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Despite living in this land and believing in God's promise, that it was so sure that it was as though they already owned it, they still did not build a house. They still did not put down roots, as we might say. They still continued to live as aliens in their own land. Are you beginning to see parallels with your life? They are all over the place. We are aliens in the United States of America. It is the land of our birth for almost every one of us here, and so it is our land. It is our nation. We are going to inherit it. Are we living as *aliens* in this land, or is our heart here where we live?

The pattern for their life was based on a vision—a vividly-held perception and anticipation that gave them foresight to make provision for their future their highest priority. Hebrews 11:10 tells us: "For he looked for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The foundation in that city indicates a stable anchored permanence that he never possessed in his life. Abraham and Sarah, to the very hilt, lived their lives by faith in that vision, and faith in the One who gave them that vision.

Now let us read about Abraham and Sarah:

Hebrews 11:8-19 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [tents] with Isaac, and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers [aliens] and pilgrims [people on the move] on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. [That option is still open to any one of us.] But now they desire a better country; that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he has prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham,

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when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall your seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

So Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their wives as well, lived in tents. None of them ever put down roots, which would signify stability. Is your life at least somewhat like this? I think we would all love to have a stable life, but if my perception is worth anything, I think the closer we get to the return of Jesus Christ it is going to seem more and more unstable because of circumstances going on around us. As those things take place, there is a wearying stress that is created from the tensions that are building in this world. Do you know why? Because we do not know the answer to everything. We have an overall answer. We know that Christ is going to return and He is going to set things right, but until then we have to live in a world which is out of kilter in every direction, and constantly moving and changing in the hopes that we are upset by that kind of living.

Abraham sought a city. That is, he had a great goal before him, and he envisioned that goal, and he drove himself toward it. In a way, having a goal is not unusual at all. Most people live life with some goal in mind, but hardly anybody lives a life with a goal like Abraham had, and even those who do, and I hope you are among them, do not live it as consistently and as faithfully, or as long as he did.

So we must ask the question. Are we, as a work, and individually, living by faith, because what Abraham and Sarah did as their overall pattern of life *is* the handwriting on the wall that provides overall guidance for their spiritual children to follow? This is why God said, "Look to Abraham. Look to Sarah." We will know in an overall sense what they had, and what they did, and realize that these things in principle are going to come to us.

Let us illustrate the foundation of what this means in a more practical matter of daily life. What I am going to turn to in Genesis is not something that happens often. In fact, as far as I know, it only happened once in history; but again, the principle involved here.

Remember, it said in Hebrews 11 about the sacrificing of Isaac that Abraham had to go through.

Genesis 22:12 And he said, Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do you anything unto him: **for now I know that you fear God.**

Anybody who has been to the Feast of Tabernacles ought to know full well that we are to keep the Feast of Tabernacles to learn to **fear God**. God told Abraham, "Now I know that you fear **Me**." That is the important word. We all fear things. That is, we have respect for things. Some of them scare us half to death, and we do everything in our power to protect ourselves from that which we fear. I am not talking about that. Do we fear **God** in the same way that Abraham did?

Abraham respected what God said enough that in his mind's eye Isaac was already dead. Let me add something to that. He also respected God enough, and believed Him so thoroughly within himself, that even if he had to kill Isaac, he knew that God would have to resurrect Isaac in order to keep His promise. That is a faith—that is a respect—that I find very difficult to come to grips with. Again, this is why God says, "Look to Abraham." He set a pattern for us, that I dare say that none of us in this room will ever live up to, but the pattern is there.

Genesis 22:12-14 And he said, Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do you anything unto him: for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Yahweh-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LOORD it shall be seen.

Do we show by our life, that like Abraham, we trust God to provide for our needs? "Yahweh-jireh—in the mount of the LOORD it shall be seen," or "in the mount of the LOORD it shall be provided." I want you to hang onto that phrase, because two or three sermons down the road the "it" in that phrase is going to become very important. Now *your* "it" may be different, and it probably is, but *that* "it" He is talking about is going to become very important to the sermons down the road.

To live by faith absolutely requires—and I repeat "absolutely"—that one not merely believes God exists, but that He is sovereign over His creation, and that He monitors the activities and exercises authority constantly over it. Nothing escapes His penetrating, all-encompassing scrutiny of what is going on, because each aspect of it is important to Him and the outcome of His creative works.

God is not asleep at the switch where you are concerned anymore than He was asleep

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at the switch whenever Abraham was ready to slay his son. God saw it. God took action, and God commended Abraham by saying, "Now I know." I hope that someday He will be able to say that to us as well.

Let us look at a confirming scripture in Hebrews 4.

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature [or creation] that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Do we believe that? He knows *exactly* what is going on. Again, these are abilities that I cannot comprehend in a logical manner. My mind is just too limited to be able to comprehend how some Being can keep track of billions and billions of people, **and their thoughts**, all at the same time. I cannot keep track of what is going on in a 9 x 12 room. You have to give Abraham credit. He believed God enough to go so far that in his own mind Isaac was dead. What a man!

What is God doing? He is up there reading minds. Do you ever worry about that? I worry about it. I am sure glad He is merciful. It tells us a bit about what God is doing up there. Just remember what Abraham did. "In the mount of the LOORD, it shall be seen [or it shall be provided]."

John 5:17 But Jesus answered them, My Father works hitherto, and I work.

The Sovereign Creator God is a supreme ruler and judge. God is not merely a figure-head ruler, absent-mindedly sitting on a throne. Now being sovereign means that He is not subject to any external force, power, or decision outside of Himself.

Jesus' declaration that the Father is, and has been working, is not blurted without context. He just did not come out with this as though nothing had led into it and nothing followed. If we would examine the entirety of the chapter we would find that the overall subject that is woven through this chapter concerns judging. God is judging His creation. He is reading our thoughts. He is watching the activities that are going on, and He is judging.

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Understand this about judging: Judging is *not* always about condemnation, but it *always* involves **evaluation**. Jesus declared that the Father is constantly evaluating, directing, and tweaking activity within His creation in order that events continue in the direction of *His* purpose. Ultimately, judging has to do with managing one's affairs. Is that not why you judge? You evaluate, and then you adjust what you are going to do. You evaluate in order to manipulate, tweak, reach decisions, and then act on them. That is what God is doing as well.

This does not mean that because God is doing this that He predetermines every decision people make, but He is aware, and He adjusts as He deems necessary to His purpose. If a believer does not grasp this and use it as the foundation of his own life, it means that one is always going to lack overall direction and stability, because in his life he is operating without a positive godly focus. The substance of this is that we know that God is always watching us. He is not out to get us. He is not out to punish us. He is not out to condemn us. He is out to **save** us, so He will tweak, and when He tweaks, that may be painful. It may hurt. Are we close enough to God to understand that when He does tweak, and it hurts a little bit, that He is doing it for our good? That is the way He is. It is always for our good, and the good of His purpose even though it may, in His chastening of us, be somewhat painful.

In these operations, God is always providing. "In the mount of the LOORD it will be seen." Are we seeing it? Abraham did. I do not mean just on this one occasion. It determined the direction of his life. It determined what his goals were. It determined that he did not put down roots in a solid structure that you would call a house. His thoughts of God were like that.

We are going to go to the book of Daniel. Here we have an important instruction from God. In this case it was given to Nebuchadnezzar, and to all others who rule, or who are under the authority of those who rule, and therefore everybody comes within its scope.

Daniel 4:17 This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will, and sets up over it the basest of men.

That begins the explanation of a principle that is very important to the lives of everyone who is attempting to live by faith.

Daniel 4:32-33 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall

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be with the beasts of the field: they shall make you to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over you until you know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

Now compare him to Abraham. Nebuchadnezzar was a hard man to convince that **God rules**, that He is sovereign over His creation. This is the very thought that drove and motivated Abraham's life. "**God rules**, and He is watching me, and He has good things in mind for me and my wife and my children, and my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren. I do not want to be the one that ruins things for them, so I am going to trust God and what He said."

Nebuchadnezzar had to be turned into an animal and be humbled, apparently with some measure of ability to think even while he was in that state. He could not get himself out of it. God kept him in bondage to it, but yet I am sure that there was a measure of thought going on in his mind, because the man repented at the end of seven years.

Daniel 4:37 Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

The specific warning that was given through Daniel came to pass in Nebuchadnezzar's life. What did Nebuchadnezzar learn? In a sentence, he learned that he had been **given** the throne of Babylon and his area of rulership at God's pleasure. He would not have been there if God had not put him there. He learned that God is manipulating events, and it took the wind out of his sails.

I bring this up about Nebuchadnezzar because we all have to learn the same lesson, that God rules. We are going to add to this by going to the New Testament. Paul picks up on this thought because the Romans undoubtedly had questions regarding this.

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers [or the governing authorities]. For there is no power [no authority] but of God: the powers [authorities] that be are ordained [appointed] of God.

Paul leaves no wiggle-room in the way that is written. "For there is **no** authority but of God." If we are to understand this properly we have to somehow get the idea, and come to believe it, that God appoints everybody all the way down the chain—the head of the nation, the head of the state, the head of the borough, all the way down. He is sovereign over **everything**. That is what He is doing. He is judging. He is evaluating, making decisions about the way things are going because He has in His mind ideas, thoughts, concepts, and goals for everybody who lives.

What a mind! Abraham believed that, and he was willing to give all. He did not do it perfectly, but he did a good job, the quality of which makes God say, "Look to Abraham, your father. Try to live up to what he did." That is pretty hard. This instruction can and should be understood that God's appointments go all the way down to the lowest level.

Is your life reflecting that you believe God is sovereign over His creation? Brethren, this is *the* central issue regarding salvation, and from this flows our responsibility to control ourselves within this larger framework, seeing that God, as ruler over our lives, is ever watchful in a good and merciful way of the path that our life is following.

Let me say it again. Abraham and Sarah believed God. By this I do not mean that they believed in the existence of a God. They believed the word of the Creator God who actively rules His creation and is working out His purpose, and they trusted Him and that purpose. In short, they believed the gospel to the depth that it ordered and set the course of their entire life from the time that God called them.

Let us bring this principle up to our time. I do not believe for one moment that it was anybody but God Himself who blew the Worldwide Church of God apart. That was God-ordained. He did it for His purposes, and He mercifully did it for **our** good—for those of you sitting out there. He certainly used Satan, and Satan in turn used men and women subject to him to carry out what he undoubtedly rejoiced in doing, and thus now we see remnants of the church of God scattered all over the place.

In a major way I have absolutely no problem with the scattering, because it was God-intended in the first place. So I trust, and therefore accept His judgment and go on trying to make the best use of what He has given us to work with. But at the same time, brethren, I am dismayed and disgusted, because some people, led by their ministers in those groups, proclaim that they are the only church. It dismays me because it is so short-sighted and self-serving, putting God as being subject to, and forced to accept the power of forces beyond Himself. It is as though there was nothing He could do about it.

Brethren, they say such things as, "We are the only ones preaching the gospel." That,

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brethren, is an outright lie. Others are simply using a different method—the method or the way God has made available to them and the means to do it in that way. In other words, what I am saying is that each has to work within the gifts God has given them, and sanctified them to do.

They may proclaim that they have the most big names among the hierarchy that left the Worldwide Church of God, or that they are hewing most closely to the way HWA established. The leader may proclaim that he is the one chosen to do a special work, and that he is one of the two witnesses, or Elijah, or Elisha, or even "that Prophet."

They may even go to the extent that they forbid their membership to have contact with other churches of God, or even individuals within their own family. It is as if contact with them is somehow going to defile their spiritual purity. Oh yes, they can have contact with the world but not with other elements of the church! Is that truly godly? Is that living by faith? I will tell you, if that is not Pharisaical nitpicking and fear-mongering, I do not know what is.

My concern is what kind of spiritual growth is that isolating defensiveness going to produce in the brethren? I will tell you what it is going to produce. It will produce a separating fear of other elements of the church. What it will produce is fear of the ministry, and fear of the church, rather than a holy fear of Jesus Christ and God the Father. It will place the ministry smack-dab between the people and our High Priest because the emphasis on authority is in the wrong place.

Are we somehow or other being taught that God cannot run His own church? I do not know. But I will tell you, I think that is a very dangerous position to put oneself in. God said to Abraham, "Now I know you fear **ME**." This matter of respect is very, very important to the direction in which our life is going to go. Abraham feared *God*. He respected what God thought of him so much he did not want to disappoint the Father in any way by failing to represent Him in a way that upheld His name.

Here we are, once the large and proud Worldwide Church of God. Where is it? It has been debased and scattered. I am drawing on the metaphor of Nebuchadnezzar. Where is our faith? The church is going through its collective debasing, so how is it going to come out?

Please understand me. It is not that the ministry nor the church has no authority whatever, because it does, but it is always the ministry's responsibility to point people to the *real* authorities to help make them ever more aware of the Father and the Son. **Do you see God?** That is the issue.

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Turn to John 17:3 and we will see a pattern Jesus sets for all the ministry here in His final prayer that is recorded for us. This verse ought to help make it understandable to us as to why the ministry has been appointed by God to help the people **see God**.

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know **You** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

It is the ministry's responsibility to show the people **God** and His Son.

John 17:6 I have manifested your name unto the men which you gave me out of the world: yours they were, and you gave them me; and they have kept your word [because Jesus was faithful in helping them to see God].

This is what guided Abraham's life. He saw God, and he feared—respected—with deep reverence that God to the extent that he would not even build a house. He kept living in something that was temporary, thus showing that he knew he was only here for a short time, and that he was going to make the most of that time to glorify God and honor Him in everything that he did. He put no roots down in the world whatever.

If God and His Word are not at the forefront of the central reality of what each individual does with his life, the whole program becomes comprised for those people. It makes their world exceedingly more narrow in terms of where the future is going to be spent. This is because the major issue in salvation is: Who is each called individual going to allow to be the one whose word is going to govern his life? To govern means to rule, direct, manage, operate. Government is the person, body, or system that rules, controls, directs, manages, and operates. Is your government God? Is He managing *your* life? He wants to.

Under whose government will a person live? As long as one remains uncalled, that person has no choice in the matter. They will live their life under Satan's government because this is what God has ordained; but once called, the choices must be deliberately made by faith to choose to live under Jesus Christ and the Father. Brethren, Abraham and Sarah did that. They lived by the vision derived from God's Word, and humanly it is they we follow.

That is all for tonight. I think I have laid a foundation, and God willing we will get back on this subject again tomorrow.