

Even though it's been almost 30 years since a friend asked me that question, I still remember the time and place. It brought me up short. I had been an active church member since my baptism as a teenager. My husband and I had done missionary work as lay ministers for more than three years. I was very active in teaching my children about God and about the Bible. Why did this question stop me cold? When I really thought about it, I had to honestly respond: "sometimes".

Do you love God enough to leave your home and family? Do you love God enough to give up your

beloved child? Do you love God enough to trust him with your life and your future?

Many years ago there lived a man name Abraham. His legacy lives on in both the Old and New Testaments because he did one very simple thing: he loved God enough to trust and obey him. God told him to leave his country. So he left. God told him to leave his family. So he did. God told him he would have a son. He did. God told him to take that son and offer him as a sacrifice. Abraham took his son to an altar to sacrifice him. All of these things attested to Abraham's leg-

endary belief in God. In the Bible God tells Abraham that his belief was credited to him as righteousness. And that pronouncement by God in the book of Genesis is repeated five times in the New Testament.

Abraham is mentioned more than 70 times in the New Testament. There are several important reasons for his prominence in the New Testament. One reason, of course, is his example of faith that led to obedience. Another reason is that Abraham is an important person in the plan and purpose of God. The history of
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Thoughts on the Daily Readings

"This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word."

Isaiah 66:2

Readings during this Quarter include many of the Old Testament prophecies, several books of history during the period of the Israeli kings, the Gospel of Jesus Christ as written by John the Apostle and many of Paul's letters to the churches in the New Testament.

Isaiah is the longest book of prophecy in the Bible. Isaiah was sent to the southern kingdom of Judah about 730 years before the time of Jesus. During this time the Assyrian Empire was expanding and threatening the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The book is filled with warnings, calls to repentance, prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, messages of comfort, and declarations of God's purpose and plan. There are many well-known passages in Isaiah and it is quoted many times in the New Testament.

1 & 2 Kings and 1 Chronicles

are books of the history of Israel and Judah. 1 Kings continues the history of King David taking up where 2 Samuel ends. The story of Solomon and all his glory, the building of the temple in Jerusalem, and the split up of the kingdom after Solomon's death are all recorded in this book. The ministry of the prophet Elijah is also found here. 2 Kings continues with the history until the southern Kingdom of Judah is taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. 1 Chronicles repeats much of the same history of Israel.

The **Gospel of John** is the fourth recounting of the life and ministry of Jesus while he lived on the earth. In many ways it is written from a different perspective than the other three. It has many beautiful passages concerning the Messiah sent by God. There are several chapters that tell of a special time that Jesus spent with his

disciples preparing them for his departure. Chapter 17 recounts in detail the prayer of Jesus just before his betrayal and arrest.

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy are all letters written by Paul the Apostle to the first century churches and to Timothy, his fellow helper. As a father with his children, Paul cared for the new believers that were just coming to believe in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. Many of the new believers came from a background that knew little about the one true God. Paul's letters are filled with instructions on living as a disciple of Jesus, his concerns about the churches maintaining the teachings that they had received from the apostles, and many encouragements. These letters are full of help for any disciple of Jesus in any age.

You are Abraham's Children and Inheritors of Eternal Promises

From the beginning God has been revealing his plan and purpose for his creation. Through the Bible we can see the key to the future because God wants us to know what he has planned. God works his plan through individuals. Starting in Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, we meet a man named Abram, also known as Abraham. Two thousand years before the time of Jesus, Abraham lived in the land of Ur near the Euphrates River. God spoke to Abraham and told him to leave his land and his family. He was to go to a land that God would show him. Because Abraham believed God, he obeyed him and left his home and his father's family. He traveled to the land that we now know as Israel or the "Promised Land".

After Abraham arrived in the land God made him several promises:

"The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"

Gen 12:1-3 NIV

"The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, 'Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go,

walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.'"

Gen 13:14-17 NIV

"The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, 'I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.'"

Gen 22:15-18 NIV

Notice that these are eternal promises. They are not conditional promises. Abraham had already believed and obeyed and so had received the promises. In fact we have the testimony in Genesis 15:6: "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Notice again what these promises are:

1. Abraham would become a great nation. His descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the sky.
2. Through his offspring all nations of the earth would be blessed.
3. God would bless those who bless Abraham and his family and God would curse those who curse Abraham and his family.
4. God would give the land that Abraham could see and walk on to Abraham and his offspring forever.

5. Abraham's descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies.

These are powerful and far-reaching promises. We are told in the New Testament that Abraham had not received the fulfillment of these promises during his lifetime. Speaking of Abraham and several other faithful people, the writer of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament tells us this: "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." Hebrews 11:39-40 NIV

There is a future fulfillment of these promises. It's all part of God's plan. We do see the beginnings of the fulfillment of the promises in the many peoples descended from Abraham. We are told in the New Testament that the gospel of Jesus was preached to Abraham: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." Galatians 3:8-9 NIV

Yes, the promises made to Abraham are important to the followers of Jesus. In fact, those who follow Jesus have an inheritance in the promises made to Abraham:

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The message that Jesus brought to the Jewish people 2,000 years ago was not a new message. In fact, it was the same message that God had revealed to all the prophets that had gone before. When Jesus started his ministry in Galilee, he read from the scroll of Isaiah in the Old Testament: "The Spirit of

the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." Jesus knew the scriptures well and based many of his parables and his preaching on the word of God that we know as the Old Testament. He started the "Sermon on the Mount" with a series of pronouncements that are called

the Beatitudes. For those people who were looking for a militant messiah, the Beatitudes were useless. But for Jesus, these words from the Old Testament, taught the message of God. Compare the Beatitudes to these Old Testament passages:

| Jesus said: Matt 5:3-10 | Old Testament |
|--|---|
| 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. | Isaiah 61:1 because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. |
| 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. | Isaiah 61:2-3 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty... |
| 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. | Psalms 37:11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace |
| 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. | Isaiah 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. |
| 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. | Psalms 18:25-27 With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; |
| 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. | Psalms 24:3-4 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. |
| 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. | Isaiah 32:17-18 The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, |
| 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. | Psalms 119:86-88 All your commands are trustworthy; help me, for men persecute me without cause. They almost wiped me from the earth, but I have not forsaken your precepts. Preserve my life according to your love, and I will obey the statutes of your mouth. |

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It is Written.....

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The phrase "it is written" appears over and over again in the New Testament. Each time it is referring to the Old Testament or as is otherwise known "the law and the prophets". It is important to read and study both the Old and

New Testaments. Both parts are part of the whole and tell the same message of God's love and his plan and purpose.

The Scripture (the Old Testament) foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and an-

nounced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Galatians 3:8-9

Book Review

"When Jesus Became God" by Richard E. Rubenstein, Professor of Conflict Resolution and Public Affairs, George Mason University

The year is 325. Emperor Constantine the First rules a Roman Empire where the official religion has recently been changed from paganism to Christianity. But a visitor to the Empire might be forgiven for asking "which Christianity"? Christianity in the Roman Empire at that time was wracked by many disputes, but none of these was greater than the questions about the nature of Christ. These questions revolved around the issue of the relationship between Jesus and God, of how Christ could be both divine and human. Constantine was tired of the constant bickering, and calls the church leaders together into a Council, and lets them know that the issues need to be settled. He feared that the arguments, which sometimes even erupted into violence, would split the Roman Empire.

There were two primary sides in the struggle. Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria (in Egypt), led a party that believed that Jesus was "God Incarnate" (ie that God took on human form as Jesus), and that Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit formed a "trinity", three entities that were at the same time unified, but also distinct. Athana-

sius and his supporters believed that all three (Son, Father and Holy Spirit) were God, that Jesus had always existed (even before his birth on Earth), and that Jesus was both 100% human and 100% divine at the same time.

Arius, a Christian priest from Alexandria, Egypt, led an opposing party who did not believe that Jesus was God. They believed that Jesus was the Son of God, a being who had been created by God at a particular point in time, instead of having existed from eternity as the Athanasians believed. Jesus was not God, but rather the Word of God. He was not divine, at least not in the way God was. While he was a created being, he had been created before the world began, and the world was made through him.

"When Jesus Became God" recounts the story of the struggle between Athanasius and Arius, and their respective followers, both at the Council and in the years afterwards, for the struggle would continue for more than 60 years. The book is quite readable for the lay person, at times seeming like a novel. Rubenstein does an excellent job of minimizing the

technical jargon associated with the disputes. This is a good thing, since the arguments were often very technical, and hard to follow even by many at the time. The typical churchgoer today is in the same situation, and many do not fully understand the creed they may recite every week at church.

Athanasius eventually won the battle, and his Creed, sometimes called the Nicene Creed is the standard formulation of the belief about who Jesus is:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;

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Book Review, When Jesus Became God

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The problem with both the Athanasian and Arian theories was that they were trying to figure how Jesus could be both divine and human, both God and man, from a Greek mindset and using terms from Greek philosophy. Christianity at that time had long ago lost touch with its Hebrew roots, and absorbed much of the Hellenistic (Greek) thinking around it. In the Greek way of thinking “divinity” and “humanity” were two “substances” or “essences” which could not inhabit the same “space” at the same time. In the Hellenized Christianity of that time, the question of how Jesus could be both divine and human, was like asking how oil and water could somehow occupy the same space. The result was a great deal of speculation and argument, using Greek terms and from Greek ways of thinking about divinity and humanity.

To the Hebrews, this way of thinking was foreign. Divinity and humanity were “psychological” and not “metaphysical”. Jesus was di-

vine, not because of some sort of consubstantiality of substance or essence with God, but because he perfectly reflected God in all his thoughts, words and actions. Jesus was clearly a human being. He was born from a woman (though with God as his father), he grew up and “grew in wisdom”. He walked the Earth, subject to all of the things that humans are subject to, like hunger, thirst, pain and sorrow, as well as joy and comfort. Though he had God as his father, we should not think that this somehow meant he was both God and man. He was the Son of God, and not God the Son. Jesus was divine, because he thought, spoke and acted divinely, like God, not because he was (partly?) composed of some sort of divine substance.

Rubenstein has done a great service to Christianity today, by reminding us that what we think of as eternal Christian doctrine, was actually developed over a long period of sometimes acrimonious disputes between what may have been sincere Christians. Once the church began to lose touch with its Hebraic beginnings, the

issues of the relationship between Jesus and God, and the nature of Christ came to be thought about in Greek ways, and the result was hundreds of years of (unnecessary) argument. The current official understanding of these questions did not exist in the first century of the Christian church, but instead developed over a period of more than 200 years after that. This alone should inspire us to take a closer look at the Athanasian (Trinitarian) view that is so commonly held by so many Christians. With Bible in hand, they might discover the truth about who Jesus is and his relationship to God. The 12 disciples of Jesus, the first Christians (mostly Jewish), these would have found the Athanasian Creed incomprehensible and very foreign from their own way of understanding Jesus and God. We owe it to ourselves, and to them, to attempt to understand how they understood Jesus and God. We don’t have to go very far, just pick up your Bible and read, both the New Testament and the Old, because you need both to understand Jesus.

Portrait of a Saint, Do You Love God?

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Abraham (also known as Abram) and the beginnings of his family are found in the Bible in the book of Genesis starting in chapter 11 verse 27 and continue on until chapter 25. It is in these chapters that we can learn about this amazing man who received everlasting promises from God, who was given a promised son, who is the father of many nations, and through whom God has brought blessings to the whole world. Beyond these chapters in Genesis,

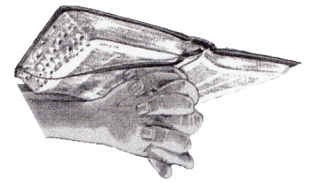
the Bible has much more to say about Abraham:

- God called him “my servant Abraham”. Genesis 26:24
- He was known as the “friend of God”. Isaiah 41:8, James 2:23
- He is the father of all who believe. Romans 4
- He awaits the resurrection. Hebrews 11

So, then, as Paul the Apostle wrote to the Galatian believers:

“Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” Galatians 3:6-9 NIV

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| | JULY | | | AUGUST | | | SEPTEMBER | |
|-----|---------------|---------------|-----|-----------------|--------------|-----|------------------|----------------|
| DAY | Old Test | NewTest/Psa | DAY | Old Test | NewTest/Psa | DAY | Old Test | NewTest/Psa |
| 1 | II Sam 15, 16 | II Corinth 13 | 1 | Isaiah 49, 50 | John 1 | 1 | II King 14,15 | Psalm 97 |
| 2 | II Sam 17, 18 | Psalm 74 | 2 | Isaiah 51, 52 | John 2 | 2 | II King 16,17 | I Thess 1 |
| 3 | II Sam 19,20 | Galatians 1 | 3 | Isaiah 53, 54 | John 3 | 3 | II King 18,19 | i Thess 2 |
| 4 | II Sam 21, 22 | Galatians 2 | 4 | Isaiah 55, 56 | John 4 | 4 | II King 20, 21 | I Thess 3 |
| 5 | II Sam 23, 24 | Galatians 3 | 5 | Isaiah 57,58 | Psalm 85 | 5 | II King 22, 23 | I Thess 4 |
| 6 | Song Sol 1-3 | Galatians 4 | 6 | Isaiah 59, 60 | Psalm 86 | 6 | II King 24, 25 | I Thess 5 |
| 7 | Song Sai 4-6 | Galatians 5 | 7 | Isaiah 61, 62 | John 5 | 7 | Jonah 1-4 | Psalm 98 |
| 8 | Song Sol 7, 8 | Galatians 6 | 8 | Isaiah 63, 64 | John 6 | 8 | Micah 1-3 | Psalm 99 |
| 9 | Isaiah 1, 2 | Psalm 75 | 9 | Isaiah 65, 66 | John 7 | 9 | Micah 4,5 | Psalm 100, 101 |
| 10 | Isaiah 3, 4 | Psalm 76 | 10 | I King 1,2 | Psalm 87, 88 | 10 | Micah 6, 7 | II Thess 1 |
| 11 | Isaiah 5, 6 | Ephesians 1 | 11 | I King 3, 4 | John 8 | 11 | Nahum 1-3 | II Thess 2 |
| 12 | Isaiah 7,8 | Ephesians 2 | 12 | I King 5, 6 | John 9 | 12 | I Chron 1,2 | II Thess 3 |
| 13 | Isaiah 9,10 | Ephesians 3 | 13 | I King 7, 8 | Psalm 89 | 13 | I Chron 3,4 | Psalm 102 |
| 14 | Isaiah 11, 12 | Ephesians 4 | 14 | I King 9,10 | John 10 | 14 | I Chron 5,6 | Psalm 103 |
| 15 | Isaiah 13, 14 | Ephesians 5 | 15 | I King 11,12 | John 11 | 15 | I Chron 7, 8 | Psalm 104 |
| 16 | Isaiah 15-17 | Ephesians 6 | 16 | I King 13, 14 | John 12 | 16 | I Chron 9,10 | I Timothy 1 |
| 17 | Isaiah 18-20 | Psalm 77 | 17 | I King 15, 16 | Psalm 90 | 17 | I Chron 11,12 | I Timothy 2 |
| 18 | Isaiah 21,22 | Psalm 78 | 18 | I King 17,18 | John 13 | 18 | I Chron 13,14 | I Timothy 3 |
| 19 | Isaiah 23, 24 | Psalm 79 | 19 | I King 19,20 | John 14 | 19 | I Chron 15, 16 | I Timothy 4 |
| 20 | Isaiah 25, 26 | Philippians 1 | 20 | I King 21, 22 | Psalm 91 | 20 | I Chron 17, 18 | I Timothy 5 |
| 21 | Isaiah 27, 28 | Philippians 2 | 21 | Joel 1, 2, 3 | John 15 | 21 | I Chron 19,20 | I Timothy 6 |
| 22 | Isaiah 29, 30 | Philippians 3 | 22 | Amos 1-3 | John 16 | 22 | I Chron 21, 22 | Psalm 105 |
| 23 | Isaiah 31, 32 | Philippians 4 | 23 | Amos 4-6 | John 17 | 23 | I Chron 23, 24 | Psalm 106 |
| 24 | Isaiah 33, 34 | Psalm 80 | 24 | Amos 7-9 | Psalm 92 | 24 | I Chron 25, 26 | Psalm 107 |
| 25 | Isaiah 35, 36 | Colossians 1 | 25 | Obad, II King 1 | John 18 | 25 | I Chron 27, 28 | II Timothy 1 |
| 26 | Isaiah 37,38 | Colossians 2 | 26 | I King 2, 3 | John 19 | 26 | I Chron 29 Hos I | II Timothy 2 |
| 27 | Isaiah 39, 40 | Colossians 3 | 27 | II King 4, 5 | Psalm 93, 94 | 27 | Hosea 2-4 | II Timothy 3 |
| 28 | Isaiah 41,42 | Colossians 4 | 28 | II King 6, 7 | John 20 | 28 | Hosea 5,6 | II Timothy 4 |
| 29 | Isaiah 43, 44 | Psalm 81 | 29 | II King 8,9 | John 21 | 29 | Hosea 7,8 | Psalm 108 |
| 30 | Isaiah 45, 46 | Psalm 82, 83 | 30 | II King 10, 11 | Psalm 95 | 30 | Hosea 9,10 | Psalm 109 |
| 31 | Isaiah 47, 48 | Psalm 84 | 31 | II King 12, 13 | Psalm 96 | 31 | | |

See page 1 for some thoughts on the daily readings.

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