

Cindy Bassett

# The Bible Corner



## Abraham: Father of nations

My name is Abraham. I lived a long, long time ago, but my story has been preserved by my descendants, who passed it down through many generations. All God's followers throughout the ages are part of my family — that adds up to many nations of people! And it all happened because I put my faith in God.

I grew up in the land of Ur, which today is known as Iraq. My father, Terah, chose the name Abram for me. He taught my brothers and me all about the one true God. The other people of Ur worshipped any number of false gods, including the moon and the stars.

When I grew up, I married Sarai. Many years later, while I was speaking to God in prayer one day, He made a very special promise to me. "Leave your own country and go and make your home in a new land that I will show you," the Lord told me. "For I am going to make you the father of a great nation."

That seemed like a strange thing to do, especially since I was 90 years old at the time! But in my youth I had learned to trust God even when I didn't understand His commands. So I left Ur with Sarai to find our new home.

Together we traveled across a desert, and we had little to eat during the long, hard journey. But sometimes God makes the way rough to test just how much we have believed in His promises. Sure enough, one day we arrived in Canaan, a beautiful land, which you know as Israel today. The Lord told us this was the land that He was giving us. Then He changed my name to Abraham, which means "father of nations," and my wife's name became Sara, which means "princess."

One day as I tended my sheep, I spoke to God. "Lord, I am 99 years old now, and Sara is much too old to have children. Where shall all these descendants come from?" I asked.

"See all the stars in the sky? I promise that your descendants shall be more numerous than the stars in heaven or the sands on the seashore. And all because you have believed!" the Lord answered.

A short time later, Sara and I did have a son, and we named him Isaac, which means "laughter." Sara said we really had something to smile about after waiting for a child for so many years. But Isaac's birth

wouldn't have been so big a miracle if Sara borne him when she was still young.

I was so happy to be a father to Isaac that sometimes I thought of nothing else. I must have hurt God very much when I didn't take a few minutes of each day to talk to Him in prayer as I had in the past.

One day, God asked me, "Abraham, do you love me?"

"Of course I do, Lord!" I replied. "More than anything or anybody in the entire world?"

"Yes, Lord, I do." "Then as a proof of this love, I want you to sacrifice your son, Isaac," the Lord commanded.

I was stunned, but the very next day, I set out for Mount Moriah with Isaac and two of our servants. I had built an altar to the Lord on the mountain, but I had told no one, not even Sara, what the Lord had asked of me. As we neared the place on the mountain, I asked the servants to wait while Isaac and I went up to worship.

Finally, Isaac asked, "Father, we have everything for the sacrifice, but the lamb. Where shall we find one up here?"

"God will see to it, my son," I replied with a heart that was breaking. Just as I lifted my hand to slay my own son, I heard someone call my name, and immediately I knew who it was. "Yes, Lord," I replied.

"I know now that you love me above all else in your life, even above your own son. Do not hurt the boy," the Lord said.

The next sound I heard was the crying of a ram caught in the bushes. "Father," Isaac called, "here is our sacrifice." Together my son and I made a sacrifice to the Lord in thanksgiving. I decided to call that spot on the mountain "The Lord will Provide," and it still goes by this name today.

I told my story to my family, and a whole nation of people became both my descendants and the special people of God. They kept repeating my story, because God never changes. Today, He will provide for your every need, as long as you remember to give Him the first place in your life. Even if your faith is as small sometimes as a tiny grain of sand, God is ready to pour out His many blessings upon you.

Scripture reference: Genesis chapters 12 through 22.

Father Albert Shamon

# A Word for Sunday



## The keys to the kingdom

**Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 16:13-20; (R1) Isaiah 22:15, 19-23; (R2) Romans 11:33-36.**

Sunday's Gospel answers two questions: 1) Who is Jesus? 2) Who is Peter?

Jesus asks, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" He then rejects the answers of the people as inadequate, and asks His disciples, "And you, who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter blurts out, "You are the Messiah!" Matthew adds here Peter's later confession at the Easter apparition, namely, "Son of the living God." In doing this, he shows Peter is not just the spokesman for the rest, expressing the faith of all; but that he is unique because he is the recipient of a personal revelation from God.

Peter had said who Jesus is; now Jesus confesses who Peter is. First, He says Peter is blessed, for he alone has been the recipient of a special revelation.

Secondly, He confers a new title on Peter — Rock, the foundation stone of Jesus' Church. We must realize that "Peter" was never a personal name before this time; it simply meant "rock" and nothing more. Jesus was not changing one first name for another. He was conferring a new title on Simon: "the Rock." His words translate into Aramaic as follows: "You are the Rock (Kepha), and upon this Rock I will build my Church." The Aramaic makes it clear that "this Rock" refers to the person Simon, and not to his faith or to Jesus.

The significance of rock is that it is firm, offering a solid foundation for building (Matthew 7:24-25). Peter will be the firm foundation stone of the new people of God.

Thirdly, Jesus confers a new power on Peter: the power of the keys of the kingdom. "I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." What this meant can be deduced from the first reading, about the removal of Shebna from office.

Shebna was the prime minister, the major-domo of King Hezekiah and second only to the King himself. To get to the king, one had first to get to Shebna; he determined who would or could not get in. On his shoulders, like military epaulets, he carried the keys to the palace doors and the treasury. He was the "key man" *par excellence*.

Isaiah was angry with Shebna, because

Shebna dictated Israel's foreign policy regarding Assyria. This policy was folly to Isaiah and contrary to God's will. So Isaiah foretold that God would remove Shebna from office and give his keys to Eliakim.

The Church built on a rock is conceived as a palace. The "key man" — the prime minister, second only to Jesus — is Peter. Perhaps overzealous Jewish Christians were still demanding that Gentile converts be circumcised. Matthew here reminds them that the power of admitting people to the Church and excluding them from it was given solely to Peter, who favored the entrance of Gentiles into the Church without circumcision (Acts 15:7). Matthew was implying that Jesus' words ought to settle the matter.

However, the power of the keys refers in particular to the teaching authority of Peter, for that is the context of this passage (Matthew 16:1-12). In Matthew 18:18, the power of the keys is given to no other disciple but Peter. Matthew 16:18 stresses the power of Peter to make decisions for the universal Church ("my Church"); whereas 18:18 envisions only a disciplinary action by the local community.

Of late, controversies have arisen regarding public dissent against the teaching authority of Peter. I think confusion has arisen because the focus has been on infallible and non-infallible teaching.

The question of dissent is not a question of infallibility, but of the teaching authority of Peter. Who has the keys to the kingdom? Who has the power to teach in the Church? That's the question. Can Peter teach authoritatively, even non-infallibly? Can Peter demand assent as in *Humanae Vitae* (#28)? If he who walks in the shoes of the fisherman cannot, then who can? For whom did Jesus pray for strength to confirm his brethren (Luke 22:32)?

Public dissent is not a question of infallibility; it is a question of obedience to the teaching authority of Peter.

Public dissent sets up a parallel magisterium to that set up by Christ Himself. It attacks the foundation stone of unity, denying the power of the keys to Peter and his successors.

To fulfill its God-given mission, the Church needs three, not two, properties: infallibility, indefectibility and authority!

## Youth pro-life group slates conference in Niagara Falls

The International Youth Pro-Life Organization will hold its annual conference September 4 through 6 at the Loretto Retreat Center in Niagara Falls, Canada.

The conference offers youths from around the world an opportunity to share their experiences and ideas about protecting the life of the unborn. Such topics as alternatives to abortion, euthanasia and how to form a teen pro-life group will be addressed. The conference will include a series of workshops and talks by nationally known speakers.

This gathering will be the fourth conference sponsored by the International Youth Pro-Life Group and the first to be presented outside of Europe. Previous conferences have taken place in Spain, Ireland and Italy.

The three-day educational conference is open to young people between the ages of 13 and 26. Registration can be made by contacting Tim Bagley, c/o National Right to Life, 419 7th St. N.W., Suite 402, Washington, D.C. 20004. The conference fee is \$90, which includes the cost of food and lodging.

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