

How to Do Expository Bible Teaching (Part 7 of 9: First Practical Example - Genesis 18)

Historic Faith Series on Expository Teaching

XVI. Pulling It All Together – Review from Prior Lessons

- a. Before we give our first practical example of how to put together an expository message from a Bible text, let us review of the preparatory steps, as discussed in the prior lessons:
- b. Read the Bible, New Testament and Old Testament, extensively and regularly (daily) so you can more easily recognize the connections between the passage you are teaching on and other, related passages throughout Scripture.
 - i. Read *any other passages* that quote or reference the text you are doing the expository preaching on.
- c. Deal with your own life. Do not be a hypocrite or an unholy vessel.
- d. Pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit, the spirit of “wisdom, understanding, power...knowledge...” (**Isaiah 11:1-3**)
- e. Goal is first to understand what the author intended, and then make appropriate applications.
- f. Become an excellent, active reader.
 - i. Ask tough questions of the text for which you will then need to do the work to seek the answers.
 - ii. If there is something disturbing in the text, or something that might seem to contradict what you think another part of Scripture is saying, do not ignore it.
 1. Wrestle with it and strive to understand how the pieces fit together.
- g. If there are any key words, see how they are used elsewhere in Scripture to get a sense of what the words mean in this context.
- h. Do not just stop at **Level 1** (the basic storyline). Look for the potential for there being three levels of the story (for Old Testament)
 - i. **Level 2** - Moral lessons and applications for us
 - ii. **Level 3** - Foreshadowings, allegorical-type prophecies

- i. Be skeptical of any novel ideas you come up with along the way. Put them to the test; and strive to be objective.
- i. Only the ones that stand up to the test will see the light of day.

XVII. **Example No. 1: Three Guests for Lunch (Genesis 18)**

- a. Read **Genesis 18:1-15**, the text for this practice lesson.
- b. **Question:** Are there any other places in Scripture where this incident is mentioned or alluded to?
 - i. “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, *because she judged Him faithful who had promised.*” (**Hebrews 11:11**, NKJV)
 - ii. “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, *calling him lord*, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.” (**1 Peter 3:1-6**, NKJV)
 - 1. Note that in **Genesis 18:12** Sarah refers to Abraham as “lord”. This is the only place I am aware of where Sarah uses that term when referring to her husband.
- c. **Question:** Are there any questions, including difficult ones, you have regarding this text? Do you see in this story any *apparent contradictions* with other things in Scripture?
 - i. **My first question:** Who are the “three men” who have lunch with Abraham?
 - 1. Read **Genesis 18:22-25** and **19:1**.
 - a. Two of the “men” are angels. They continue on to Sodom, where they encounter Lot and his family.
 - b. The third “man” is referred to as “the Lord”. Abraham refers to him as “the Judge of all the earth” (**Genesis 18:25**). This would appear to be God. However, that raised other questions...

ii. **My next question:** How can Abraham have lunch with, walk along the road with, and *see God*?

1. Scriptures that say no one can see God:

- a. When Moses asks to see the face of God, he is told “You cannot see My face, for no man can see My face and live.” (**Exodus 33:20**)
- b. “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (**John 1:18**, NKJV)
- c. “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” (**1 John 4:12**, NKJV)
- d. Paul, speaking of God (the Father): “...He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.” (**1 Timothy 6:15–16**, NKJV)

2. **The apparent problem:** The Scriptures teach clearly elsewhere that no one can see God (the Father). No one has ever seen Him! He dwells in unapproachable light.

3. Early Christians weigh in on this and other instances of men “seeing” God in the Old Testament. The quotes that follow are taken from *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot. These quotes are taken from the article on *Theophany* (= Appearances of God) that begins on page 643 of that reference work.

- a. “The Son of God is implanted everywhere throughout Moses’ writings. At one time, indeed, He spoke with Abraham, when about to eat with him. At another time, He was with Noah, giving to him the dimensions [of the ark]. At another time, He inquired after Adam. At another time, He brought down judgment upon the Sodomites. And again, He became visible and directed Jacob on his journey and spoke with Moses from the bush.”

- i. (Source: Irenaeus [c. 180 AD, Eastern/Western writer], *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 1, p. 473)

- b. “This was He who appeared to Abraham and said to him, ‘I am your God, be accepted before Me.’ ... Furthermore, Jacob is said to have wrestled with Him... Jacob called the name of the place, ‘Face of God.’ He says, ‘For I have seen God face to face; and my life is preserved.’ The ‘face of God’ is the Word by whom God is manifested and made known. Then also was Jacob given the name Israel, because he saw God the Lord. It was God, the Word.”
 - i. (Source: Clement of Alexandria [c. 195, Eastern writer], Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 223-224)
 - c. “Moses everywhere introduces God the Father as infinite and without end. He is not enclosed in any place.... So, with reason, He can neither descend nor ascend, because He Himself both contains and fills all things. However, Moses speaks of God descending to consider the tower that the sons of men were building... Whom do they pretend here to have been the God who descended to that tower?... God the Father? But then He is enclosed in a place. So how does He embrace all things?... Accordingly, neither did the Father descend ... nor did an angel command these things... Then it remains that He must have descended, of whom the apostle Paul says, ‘He who descended is the same who ascended above all the heavens, that He might fill all things,’—that is, the Son of God, the Word of God. Yet, the Word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us. This must be Christ. Therefore, Christ must be declared to be God.”
 - i. (Source: Novatian [c. 235, Western writer], Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 627)
 - 4. Early Christians understood that where someone “saw God” in the Old Testament, it had to be the Son of God (could not have been the Father, who cannot be contained in any one space).
 - a. Therefore, there is no contradiction here.
 - b. It was the Son of God, the Word of God (who indeed is the Lord, the Judge of all the earth) who met with Abraham.
 - c. The Son of God existed before all things and the universe was made through Him. He also appeared in

human form throughout human history before his incarnation in the body of Jesus of Nazareth.

- d. Early Christians used Old Testament stories like this one to prove the divinity of Christ. There is no contradiction in Scripture. In this case, their explanation *fits with all of the Scriptures*.

d. **Level 2:** Moral lessons from this story, for us.

- i. While many might disparage Sarah for laughing at the idea of God granting her a son, keep in mind that she was childless and 90 years old (**Genesis 17:17**).
 - 1. Abraham also had laughed at this outrageous idea.
 - 2. Let's not be hard on Sarah here.
 - 3. The New Testament holds her up as an example for all of us.
 - a. First, she conceived a child by faith. She made it into the "hall of heroes (and heroines) of faith" in **Hebrews 11**.
 - b. Second, she showed great respect for her husband Abraham, who was a man of faith but also very imperfect. She is held up by Peter as the example of a godly wife, for all Christian women to imitate (**1 Peter 3:1-6**).

e. **Level 3:** Foreshadowings.

- i. In **Galatians 4**, Paul points to the story of Sarah (the free woman who had the son of the promise, by faith) in contrast with that of Hagar (the slave woman who had a son who was born according to the flesh).
- ii. Paul says we (Christians) are the descendants of Abraham by the free woman, by faith. On the other hand, the Jews were foreshadowed by the child of the bondwoman.
 - 1. Read **Galatians 4:21-5:6**.
 - 2. We are called to be the descendants of Abraham who live by faith, not the descendants under slavery (of the Law of Moses, required to be circumcised).