

Grace Bible Church
Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.

The Tree of Life from the week ending 03/01/09

Bitterness destroys relationships, marriages friendships, and most of all churches.

We have begun to note some of the principles concerning the blessing of God upon Sarah, when the unconditional promise of God is given by the phrase:

Rom 9:9 **For this is a word of promise: “At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.” (Rom 9:9)**

Before we get into this passage in more detail, we have been noting a few things about Sarah. Heb 11:11 **By means of doctrine resident in the soul even Sarah herself.** The combination of beauty and brains in this woman was unbeatable. However, Sarah's main problem was that she reacted to her barrenness and became very jealous and bitter. One of the main manifestations of spiritual growth is a decrease in bitterness.

Every believer who does not have a personal relationship with God is a walking bombshell ready to explode at any moment. One of the great triggers, or buttons to push is bitterness. When you allow the missile of bitterness to explode, you always hurt your own life.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (Heb 12:15)

Bitterness brings on self-induced misery. If you harbor bitterness you have a very serious spiritual problem, in fact, it is a problem which is not correctable apart from personal love for God, and impersonal love for all mankind. Bitterness imprisons life; love releases life. Bitterness paralyzes life; love empowers life.

Bitterness sours life; love sweetens life. Bitterness sickens life; love heals life. Bitterness blinds life; love anoints its eyes. So, every believer who harbors bitterness or jealousy in reality is a walking bombshell waiting to explode. When this happens the life is shattered. Once the believer uses his own volition to allow bitterness, anger and jealousy to control him, he shatters his own life.

Bitterness refers to animosity, jealousy, hostility, and is actually a part of anger and harshness. What does it mean to become bitter? It means to be caustic or sarcastic. It means to have pain in the mind. Bitterness is also an expression of misery and disappointment. Bitterness is severity of temper, biting sarcasm, painful inward affliction, deep distress of mind, and it defiles others as well as self. Bitterness also means inward pressure, or to poison with a painful, piercing and unpleasant irritation.

Bitterness results in hatred, cruelty, antagonism, implacability, vindictiveness, vengefulness, and inordinate ambition and inordinate competition. The causes of bitterness are very interesting in the Bible. For example; in the administration of divine discipline to Israel, especially to the southern kingdom of Judah, it became quite apparent that they were a bitter people. Bitterness was the reaction and demonstrated the weakness, and the failure of the people. What happened first bitterness or the downfall and the destruction of the nation? Actually bitterness occurred first. The people were bitter therefore their spiritual lives were destroyed. The destruction of the spiritual life resulted in very few invisible heroes and therefore the nation was brought into captivity. Bitter people cannot have true peace on any scale, or in any type of relationships

in life.

For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, which was very bitter for there was neither slave nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. (2Ki 14:26)

The Jews brought upon themselves their own destruction which was very bitter, and it was because of their own bitterness. "Bitter people" are self destructive because of the fact that they are a walking bomb waiting to explode. Suffering causes bitterness to people who do not understand the principles behind suffering and who do not give number 1 priority to their relationship with God.

They shall be wasted by famine, and consumed by plague and their destruction will be bitterness. (Deu 32:24)

Bitterness is the cause of their destruction. The economic disasters merely indicate a result of bitterness. Ridicule is a source of bitterness in Lam 3:14 where Jeremiah says "**I have become a laughingstock to all my people, Their {mocking} song all the day.**" The message that Jeremiah gave them, they ridiculed, because they were bitter, they even ridiculed him in songs. They made up songs about Jeremiah and his message. Notice what they said in Lam 3:15, "**He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood.**" In other words, the people rejected his message, and therefore they were bitter toward him.

It is inevitable that when the truth is taught, there is going to be the reaction of bitterness by some. That's why Paul said in "**Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth?**" (Gal 4:16). The greatest source of bitterness is arrogance because arrogance is bitterness, it's simply the other side of the coin. If you're arrogant, you're also bitter. Arrogance is simply preoccupation with self. People who are preoccupied with themselves inevitably become bitter and jealous. For example, in Act 8:23, Peter is speaking to Simon the sorcerer, "**For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.**" Simon the sorcerer passed himself off as a spiritual giant, and a person who could do great things for individuals. Simon the sorcerer saw that Peter's ministry was prospering and Peter said I can see that you are filled with bitterness and jealousy, because people were leaving him and going to the apostles.

When someone leaves you be careful that you do not become bitter. Being rejected is a strong reason for bitterness in the lives of most believers. Degeneracy is also a source of bitterness in Rom 3:14 Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. When people are degenerate, they speak evil of others and curse with their mouth. Eph 4:31 tells us that involvement in the cosmic system is source of bitterness, Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

"The heart or the right lobe, brain function, knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy." (Pro 14:10)

Bitterness is so obvious that even strangers can see it in those who are bitter. Bitterness is so bad among believers that strangers avoid them. Bitterness produces a complaining attitude, and no one likes to be around a complainer. Bitterness is found in the believer who is a walking bombshell who has exploded within, and has times of outward explosion as well. "**Your own wickedness will correct you, and your apostasies will reprove you; know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God**" (Jer 2:19). This verse teaches that bitterness results from backsliding and disrespect toward God. In Jer 4:18, bitterness reaches into the frame of reference, the memory center, the conscience, "**This is your evil. How bitter! And how it has touched your heart.**"

Moses had to deal with bitter people:

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went out into the desert Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, what shall we drink? Then he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. (Exo 15:22-25)

The basic word for bitterness in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word “marah” which we have in this passage. Marah means angry discontentment, angry frustration. So, there were springs of water all over the place, but they could not drink the waters of Marah because the waters were bitter. That's why they called it Marah. Now this is another test. They flunked the "too much water test" at the Red Sea when they freaked out. Now, they are going to flunk the "wrong kind of water test," where they had plenty of water, but the wrong kind. So the waters of bitterness come into the picture.

Then he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, (Exo 15:25)

The tree represents to us promises from God, doctrinal rationales, and it represents a divine command. The tree is also a picture of the branch, Jesus Christ. Just as the tree was cast into the bitter water, making it sweet, so the Lord Jesus Christ heals the bitterness in those who invite His presence into their soul through residual doctrine. Bitterness is also a blasphemy, one that was uttered by Job beginning in the last phrase of Job 9:17 where Job was bitter and complaining. Bitter people love to complain.

“He [God] multiplies my wounds without a cause” (Job 9:17b). That was blasphemy. God wasn't multiplying his wounds without a cause. There was a great purpose in Job's wounds. **“God will not allow me to get my breath, but saturates me with bitterness” (Job 9:18)**. This is the attitude that bitterness eventually develops. An attitude which says that it is all God's fault. Why did God let this happen to me? Why is God doing this to me? When a person says, why did God let this happen to me, that person is in a state of bitterness. Bitterness is irrational. Jealousy is irrational, in fact jealousy, as we have noted is insanity. Bitterness will lead a person to the sin unto death, in fact it accompanies the sin unto death. In Job 21:25, Job finally woke up and said, **“while another dies with a bitter soul, never tasting anything good.”** Death is considered to be an experience with bitterness for the unbeliever, or the carnal believer.

So bitterness produces complaining (Job 7:11). Complaining people have a source, it's a sinful source, it becomes an evil source. All people who habitually complain are bitter people. Complaining is simply an outward effect of an inward sin. In Job 10:1, Job said **“I am sick of life; I will give full vent to y complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.”** Of course, inevitably a bitter person is a jealous person, and a bitter and a jealous person is motivated to gossip. They have inordinate competition.

Bitterness destroys relationships, courtships, marriages, friendships, and most of all, it destroys churches. In Psa 64 bitterness is revealed by the sins of the tongue.

“Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, From the tumult of those who do iniquity, Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed bitter speech as their arrow, To shoot from concealment at the blameless; Suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear. They hold fast to themselves an evil purpose; They talk of laying snares secretly; They say, ‘Who can see them?’ They devise injustices, saying, We are ready with a well-conceived plot; For the inward thought and the heart of a man are deep.” (Psa 64:2-6)

In verse 6, all of this comes because their thoughts in their heart are deep or as the Hebrew says “amoq” meaning exceedingly mysterious. For the inward thought and the heart of a man are deep. However, in

verses 7 and 8 they reap what they sow.

“But God will shoot at them with an arrow; Suddenly they will be wounded. So they will make him stumble; Their own tongue is against them; All who see them will shake the head. Then all men will fear, And they will declare the work of God, And will consider what He has done.” (Psa 64:7-9)

There comes a time when God will vindicate His people and when he does it will be realized by those who have enough humility to recognize what God has done. This is why bitterness makes a person stupid and produces self-induced misery.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (Heb 12:15).

Grace orientation and bitterness cannot co-exist. If you're bitter you have no grace orientation, and yet your life demands it. It is a major problem solving device. There's so many ways you can come short of the grace of God. It's not just grace orientation, it's understanding grace in rebound, it's understanding grace in all human relationships. Bitterness is self induced misery as well as chain sinning. Bitterness is misery to others in your periphery. Bitterness means revenge motivation. You must remember that two wrongs do not make a right. But God's grace and God's love still reaches out for us. **“Why is light given to him who suffers, and life to the bitter of soul” (Job 3:20).**

Sarah had to deal with bitterness just like Hannah did in 1Sa 1:10. Sarah's bitterness was also a test to Abraham's faith rest technique, and later on to his super-grace status. This became the means, over the years that made her into a real witch. For her type to break out of this type of reversionism, with bitterness and jealousy, is a very difficult thing to do. However, God the Holy Spirit tells us that she finally attained that status and this speaks volumes for her greatness and for her persistence. In speaks of the fact that she continued day in and day out to take in doctrine, in spite of reverses and failures of all kind.

And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the slaves which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. And Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev. Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. (Gen 12:5-10)

Bethel represents the place of receiving doctrine and growing in God's word. The Negev represents neglect of doctrine. Egypt represents rejection of doctrine. This is a picture of the believer retreating and not advancing.

Abram has rejected doctrine once again and is now trying his own plans, his own schemes, and his resources and they are not working. Sarah will also be affected because of this decision. Abraham is going to Egypt which is the place of human viewpoint, the place of human function without God, the place of sublimation, the place of escape and the place of total failure for the believer. It is there that he only compounds, and intensifies his problems. Going to Egypt which is a type of the devil's world, the cosmic system never solves anything.

This instability in Abram's life also leads to instability in his action and in his marriage with Sarah. When a believer gets into reversionism, he becomes irrational. He does things that he ordinarily would not do. So do

not be shocked at what believers do when they get into reversionism, their entire life-style changes. They change in their thinking. They change in their motivation. Abraham is not quite in Egypt yet, but he is on his way, and what he now proposes is weird.

And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’ and they will kill me, but they will let you live. “Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you.” (Gen 12:11-13)

The closer you get to Egypt the more confused you become in your thinking. Irrationality characterizes the believer in reversionism and the more irrational you become, the more divisive you become in your thinking.