**Sermon to be preached on Sabbath, January 21, 2023 in the churches of the Interamerican Division (IAD)**

**A Healthy Relationship With the Authorities**

**Introduction**

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church is an organization that does not exist in a void. Its Offices and its many churches and groups are part of the communities in which they are located. In a great measure, the wellbeing of our congregations is made clear by the relationships that exist between our members and their respective community leaders.

Having a good relationships with those that represent the community is not just a sample of the art of cordiality towards them. There are some practical things that every Adventist leader can do, on the local church level as among the different leadership echelons of the Church. In this respect, the Bible has valuable counsels to share with us. The example of Abraham, the Patriarch, is particularly illustrative.

*This Sabbath, we intend to study the ways in which Abraham dealt with the leaders of the communities that surrounded him. Following Abraham's example we will be able not only to facillitate our liberty to worship in our communities, but also to create positive conditions for the fulfillment of our mission through service actions congruent with our believes.*

The book of Genesis registers six different occasions in which Abraham had dealings with authorities in the communities in which he lived. It is proper to point out the fact that Abraham is known through several perceptions. God presents Abraham before Abimelech, King of Gerar, as a Prophet (Genesis 20:7) and the Hitite leaders called him "Prince of God" (Gen. 23:6). We also find Abraham speaking with Berah; King of Sodom, on an level of equality. We also findhim dialoging with the Pharoah of Egypt himself; and also with the King of Salem.

In other words, that is to say that Abraham was a celebrated figure who had access and dealings with important dignataries. From his conversations with these authorities we can gleen several lessons. Here is the first:

**Let us be truthful in our dealings with the authorities.**

As soon as Abraham was called by God, he started marching forward on the triph indicated by God, until he reached Shechem, south of Cannaan. While still in Cannaan, Abram faces a big challenge: "Now there was a famine in the land" (12:10) and Abraham goes into Egypt in search of food. There, later on, another challenge rises: Sarah, Abraham's wife, is taken to Pharaoh's house (v. 15). Later on, whem Abraham was living in the land of Gerar, the King sent for Sarah (v. 15), as Pharaoh had done.

This challenge [seeing hs wifwe being taken from him] has its esplanation. Abraham had decided not to say the complete, whole truth about his real relationship to Sarah. From the perspective of these authorities, they were siblings, but truthfully, they were more than siblings, they were husband and wife (Gen. 12:11-13; 20:2). The fact that he wasn't totally truthful brought in its wake, as a consequence, that Abrtaham's wife was almost lost, and even worse, that God's plan of Redemption through the Child of the Promise was about to be distorted, and unable to be fulfilled. Abraham's lack of faith in God's capacity to deliver us from all difficult circumstances brought Abraham to lie.

In our community, the same thing could very well occur. When some authority requires information from us, which we do not wish to provide becauser we might be afraid that in providing it there may be negative repercussions, the best solution will not be recurring to half-truths, or even worse, to outright lieing. Our Lord, Jehova, is known as the God of Truth (Isaiah 65:16) and His people are to deal always with truth. When a challenge looms ahead, "... the Lord knows how to rescue the godly out of temptations and trials, and how to keep the ungodly under chastisement until the day of judgement and doom" (2 Peter 2:9).

**Let us serve when needs arise in the community**

The social dynamics in the Middle East were of constant struggles and fights. Abraham's times witnessed the confrontation of four kings fron Cannaan against another five kings. The battle involved the city where Lot, Abraham's nephew lived (Gen. 14:11-12). When the news reached Abraham, his response was immediate: "... he armed the 318 trained servants born in his own house and persued the enemy as far as Dan" (v. 14).

It is worth pointing out that no one asked Abraham to do anything, nor to lead a rescue operation. His sense of mercy and of what was right, led him to launch the valient redemption project.

The Lord crowned Abraham's effort with a resounding victory in the recuperation of the captives and their possessions. When they all returned, "... the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons and keep the goods for yourself" (v. 21). This seemed to be the just and fair compensation for the risks taken and the services rendered, but this was not necessary for Abraham. Without thinkng about himself, he only asked for "... what my joung men have eaten and the share of the men [allies] who went with me -Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion" (v. 24).

In our comminunities there will be obvious needs in which we can help. The unselfish spirit and help as Abraham manifested will be a powerful testimony re-enforcing and giving certainty to our messege and credibility to our characters.

**Let us intercede for the communities wherein our people live**

The Bible describes Abraham as an individual that knew how to establish his social distance. Knowing the blinding and influencing capability that the sensual cannaanean cult had, Abraham decided to live at a relative distance from their population centers without compromising his relations with their people. Later on, as "... the shriek [of the sins] of Sodom and Gomorrah" (Gen. 18:20) continued growing more and more, God was obliged to intervene. If their guilt was proven, Dodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed.

In His Love and Goodness, the Lord decides to reveil His plan to His servant, Abraham. As he becomes aware of the dreadful destiny of this nation, Abraham tries to rescue as many as he can. An intercessory dialog ensues between Abraham and the Lord. Abraham's logic is that the city can not so perverted that there are not 50 just people living there (Gen. 18:24). He soon finds out there are not even 50 just people, no! not even ten (**10**)! (v. 32). The cities of the valley will definitely be destroyed.

Abraham knew that his nephew's family did not have fifty persons. This shows that he wasn't thinking only in Lot's wellbeing, but in that of the whole entire community's wellbeing. Please note that the resource that Abraham utilyses to help the whole Sodom and Gomorrah community is prayer. This is an activity in which all beleivers can and should participate, especially in favor of those communities that clearly live in opposition to God's established living plan, the plan established for our happiness and wellbeing.

**Conclussion**

The Bible shows very clearly that the believer's life in the environment in which they live is affected by the nature of the relationships they establish with those that surround them. As we have seen, Abraham created or caused a great impact on the diverse communities in which he lived precisely due to the quality of the relationships he established with them.

The efficiency of the testimony of a Seventh Day Adventist Church leader or member will be noticeable when we treat others truthfully, when we work for others unselfishly, and when we are committed to an intercession ministry for the unbelievers.

This (Abraham's) experience is not registered in the Bible just for histortical effects or purposes, but it is also an invitation to implement the same ministry towards the the governments and towards the leaders of the community in which we live.

The Religious Liberty Department services of the Seventh Day Adventist Church challenge us to:

* schedule courtesy visits to local authorities of the district's headquarters seat.
* share copies of our publications with these authorities, especially **The Great Controversy,** and **The Desire of Ages.**
* extend an invitation to these authorities to visit our churches and its institutions.

By means of these activities and a faithful testimony, our congregations will continue to breathe (and thrive) in liberty. Then, in the event we need their help and/or assistance (like in the case of Abraham, (when he needed a burial place for his wife Sarah, and others later, according to Genesis 23:4) the respective authorities provide will it.

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