

Abraham of Chaldea

Abraham : From the Bible

The following is a narrative description on the life and times of one of the most powerful characters in the Old Testament. Abraham was indeed a man of God in a time where few men believed in the One true God. Through many triumphs and errors, he always returned to God to lead him back to his calling. His dedication resulted in great promises from God that were eventually fulfilled and affect each of our lives today. His story is our story.

Abraham was a native of Chaldea, and a ninth generation descendant of Shem, the son of Noah. He was born on the southern tip of the Tigris and Uuphrates rivers in the city of Ur around 2161BC.¹ Before his name was changed to Abraham, his name was Abram. When Abram was about seventy years of age he moved with his family to live in Haran. The reason he moved was because "The God of glory appeared to our father Abram when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, "Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you." ²

While in Haran, Abram's father died and God spoke to him again saying, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you." ³ He obeyed and left Haran with his brother Nahor's family and his Nephew Lot without really knowing where he was going. At this time, God did not reveal to him he was going to Canaan. God only told him "the land which I will show you." ⁴ When he did arrive in Canaan, he camped in the plains of Moreh, between the mountains of Ebal and Cerizim. It was here he was given the second promise from God that his seed would possess this land. Abram built "an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him" ⁵ He then moved to the mountainous district between Bethel and Ai. Here, he built another altar to Jehovah.

Throughout the story of Abram, he consistently went back to Bethel to make amends with God. All of God's children should have a similar alter they should go to when praising God. This could be the front of your church, but should be in public. ⁶ Archeo logy has since proved that Bethel is the modern village of Baytin. ⁷ When in this area, a famine struck forcing Abram to move southward toward Egypt. God talked to Abram on the mountain East of Bethel where he built an alter unto the Lord. Each person should have their own personal alter to go before God, this should also be done in public.

When he did get to Egypt, Abram told his first recorded lie. Because his wife Sarah was beautiful, he feared she would lusted by after the Egyptians and endanger his life. He also knew the Pharaoh was also concerned of Abram's presence along with other Hyksos in the region. ⁸ Abram persuaded Sarah to pass herself off as his sister. This lie could probably be considered a lighter shade of gray considering Sarah was his half sister, having the same father but a different mother. ⁹ When the Egyptians saw how beautiful she was, they took her to Pharaoh's

harem. As a consequence, God plagued Pharaoh & his house. When the Pharaoh found out Sarah was Abram's wife, he sent him and his clan out of Egypt to fend for themselves in the famished land. Because Abram told this lie, God allowed this to happen. Abram went out of Egypt and returned to Bethel the second time to call on the name of the Lord. While in Bethel, both Lot's and Abram's livestock could not be supported by the land, and strife began between their herdsmen. Abram gave Lot his first choice of where he wanted to settle. Instead of choosing the unknown territory toward Canaan, Lot chose the easy way out and went East to Jordan near the populated city of Sodom. The motif of scripture for this story is simple. Abram gave more than he took. He let Lot take what he wanted and left it to God to bless him with what was left. Lot's mistake was he stopped growing in God's faith and stagnated. He soon found out that everything is not as it seems. If one only takes, but does not give, it soon gets them into trouble. On the other hand, Abram was rewarded with a third blessing for his faith. God reiterated His promise to give him the land of Canaan and a posterity as numerous as the dust of the earth. So Abram moved his clan and camped near Hebron where he built another altar to Jehovah.

In the mean time, Lot got himself in the middle of a war between rivaling Babylonian kings in the area. As a result, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell and their cities were spoiled. Lot and his goods were also carried off. When Abram heard of this, he immediately armed his dependents, 318 men, and some of his neighbors. They overtook and defeated the kings at Dan, near the springs of Jordan. To accomplish this, Abram must have been a military genius. After Abram freed Lot, you would think he would have learnt his lesson, but he returned with his family to live in Sodom.

When Abram was returning, the king of Sodom came out to meet him at the King's Valley along with Melchizedek, king of Salem and "priest of the most high God." 10 Melchizedek brought him bread and wine, and blessed him by saying, "Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand." 11 Hebrew tradition says that Melchizedek was Shem, son of Noah and survivor of the flood. This tradition believes he was still alive at the time and the earth's oldest living man. Others think that Melchizedek was an Angel or the Messiah himself. 12 In return, Abram presented Melchizedek a tenth of all he had. This is the first mention of tithing, and is still used as a guideline today. The king of Sodom attempted to give Abram the spoils of the war, but he refused. Abram told the king, "I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or your, lest you should say, "I have made Abram rich." I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten." 13

After this episode, The Lord rewarded Abram for his faithfulness and came to him in a vision. God said, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." 14 In response, Abram asked how this could be since he did not have any children. God proceeded to encourage Abram through a distinct and detailed repetition of former promises He had made and by a solemn covenant contracted between himself and God. God told him his

seed should be as numerous as the stars of heaven, that his posterity should grow up into a nation under foreign bondage, and that after four hundred years they should come up and possess the land in which he sojourned.

After living in Canaan for ten years, Sarai went to Abram and said, "The Lord has prevented me from bearing children." 15 As she was seventy-five years of age, she followed contemporary custom and allowed Abram to impregnate Hagar, 16 her Egyptian handmaid. After this, Sarai got jealous of Hagar and told Abram that Hagar was looking at her with contempt. Abram told Sarai that Hagar was under her authority, and she could do with her as she pleased. Sarai subsequently dealt so harshly with Hagar that she fled. But an angel of the Lord appeared to her in the wilderness and convinced her to return to Sarai and submit herself to her. The angel told her she was pregnant and would give birth to a son who would greatly multiply her descendants. The angel told her to call the name of this child Ishmael.

Thirteen years later, when Abram was 99 years old, God appeared to him and changed his name from Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. In a token to consummate the covenant, God commanded that Abraham, all males of his tribe and male descendants of his be circumcised. God also renewed his covenant to Abraham through the angles by assured him that Sarah, then ninety years old, would bear a child from his loins. Abraham laughed at this and questioned how an old man like himself could impregnate a 90 year old woman. Abraham said, "O that Ishmael might live in thy sight!" 17 God assured him Ishmael would make him fruitful also and make a great nation of him. But God told him that Sarah would indeed bear him a son and he should call his name Isaac. God said he would establish a covenant with Isaac and all his descendants. After this meeting with conversation with God, Abraham obeyed him and all males were circumcised.

After this covenant, Abraham was visited by three travelers. One of these travelers was the "Angel of Jehovah" and two others were attending angels. 18 These angels proceeded to reiterate to Abraham the promise of a son by Sarah. Sarah was listening at the tent door and laughed to herself thinking of how preposterous it was for a woman and man of their age to actually have sex, let alone for her to conceive a child. The angels knew of this laughter and asked why she had done so. Sarah denied it, but the Lord said through the angels "No, but you did laugh." 19 These angels then left and set out toward Sodom. As Abraham was walking with them for a part of the way, God chose to disclose to him the destruction he had in mind for Sodom and Gomorrah. At this time, God allowed Abraham to negotiate with Him over destroying the cities if any righteous people were found living there. As it was, no righteous people lived in these cities, not even Lot and his family. The next morning, Abraham got up early in the morning and saw the fate of the cities as smoke rose "up as the smoke of a furnace." 20 When Abraham was one hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, Isaac was born. Abraham circumcised Isaac when he was eight days old as commanded. Subsequently, during a feast on the day Isaac was weaned, Sarah saw Ishmael and Hagar mocking her. This infuriated her so much that she insisted to Abraham they be sent away. Abraham reluctantly consented after

God told him that not only would his descendants be numerous through Isaac, but also Ishmael. Abraham gave Hagar bread and water and sent her off. God subsequently kept Hagar from leaving Ishmael to die when all food and water was gone. An angel of God called to her from heaven and told her a great nation would rise from Ishmael. This great nation would be the Arabs. God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water and gave her son a drink. Ishmael eventually grew up in the wilderness of Paran, and became an expert archer. The dispute of who received the promise of Canaan, Isaac or Ishmael, still broils the hatred between the Jews and Arabs today. The Jews believe Isaac was given the promise of Canaan, and the Arabs believe Ishmael inherited this promise.

After this, God tested Abraham by commanding him to go to Mt. Moriah and offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. This was a great test of Abraham's faith, because Isaac's death would nullify all the promises God gave to Abraham concerning Isaac. Abraham probably decided to obey, because "he considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead." 21 Abraham rose early in the morning, cut wood for the burnt offering, and set off for the mountains near Moriah with two of his servants and Isaac. On the third day of their journey, Abraham saw the place God told him to go to. He told his servants he and his son would go on without them to worship and then return. When Isaac asked Abraham where was the lamb for the burnt offering, Abraham told him that God would provide the lamb Himself. Abraham proceeded to build the altar and secured on top of it. As he was about to slay Isaac with a knife, the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the lad, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son from me." 22 Abraham stopped, looked up, and saw a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. He took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. This test of Abraham's faith is a Type of Christ. This is because Abraham can be considered like God when he was willing to sacrifice his only son on the cross. Also, Isaac was a young man as was Jesus and adult Ram was offered in Isaac's place. Abraham called the name of this sacrificial place "The Lord Will Provide." 23 After this, the angel of the Lord called Abraham a second time and said, "Because you have done this, I will indeed bless you. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the seashore. They shall possess the gate of their enemies, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed by them, because you have obeyed my voice." After this event, Abraham returned to his servants and with them went to Beer-sheba where Abraham dwelt. 24

The next event recorded in Abraham's life is the death of Sarah at 127 years of age. She died near Hebron in the land of Canaan. Abraham buried her in a cave he cleverly purchased from the Hittites in the field of Machpelah.

The next significant act of Abraham was to procure a suitable wife for Isaac. He commanded his eldest servant to go to Haran, where Abraham's brother Nahor lived to get Isaac's wife. The servant went to Haran with many camels and gifts. When he got to Haran, he made the camels kneel down by a well during the evening. He did this because he knew the women of the city would

come out at that time to get water from the well. He then prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today, I pray thee, and show steadfast love to my master, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the maiden to whom I shall say, "Pray let down your jar that I may drink, "and who shall say, "Drink, and I will water your camels"--let her be the one whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac". 25 Before he had finished this prayer, Rebekah, a beautiful virgin, and granddaughter of Nahor, came out with her water jar upon her shoulder. When she had filled her jar with water, the servant ran to meet her and asked her for a drink. Rebekah quickly let down her jar and told him she would draw water for his camels also. After the camels finished drinking, the servant gave her gold ring and two bracelets and asked her who her father was. Rebekah said she was the daughter of Nahor and ran to show her family the jewelry. After some convincing by the servant who told the family it was God's will for Rebekah to return with him, they let her go. She returned with the servant and married Isaac.

Abraham died when he was 175 years old and was buried by Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah around 1986 BC with his wife Sarah. After Abraham's death, God blessed Isaac as promised.

SUMMARY

Abraham was truly a man of God. Although he still had his human frailties, he ultimately trusted in God and always came back to Him for forgiveness and guidance. His spiritual experience with God was indicative of four specific areas in which his faith was tested. First, he gave up his country and kindred; second, he broke off with his nephew, Lot; thirdly, he abandoned his plans for Ishmael to be his hope for his ultimate heritage, and fourth, he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. 26 In the end, God rewarded Abraham by fulfilling the four great promises He made to him: 1) Great nations would come from him. 2) God would bless and prosper him. 3) Sarah would give him a child named Isaac. 4) His generations would produce the savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

Praise God for the lessons he has given us through the life of Abraham. I stand in awe thinking that not only will I be able to meet Abraham in heaven, but also our Lord who guided him throughout.

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