

Abraham: The Man of Faith

The close of the account of Noah brings us to the beginning of the account of Abraham (originally named Abram). In the opening chapters of Genesis we have seen a world left to the corrupting influence of sin move helplessly, with the exception of Noah, to certain destruction. From the time Noah exited the ark, we have also seen the "re-created" world set out on the same path to corruption and disaster. This time certain destruction is replaced with hope because God will now take a pro-active role in the salvation of man.

Abram enters the biblical account at the end of Genesis, chapter 11, and will embody in his relationship to God that characteristic which will be the human response to God's offer of grace through His Son, Jesus Christ. His life will become a demonstration of faith in God. In the New Testament, the covenant of grace, we are told that "without faith it is impossible to please [God] (Hebrews 11:6)." In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus we read, "For by grace you have been saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8)." Paul writes again to the church in Rome that "the gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes... 'The just shall live by faith' (Romans 1:16-17)." Abraham's life will represent the quintessential human response to God: Faith!

What was there about Abraham that God found so pleasing that He made great promises to and through this man? Abraham lived as Abram in Ur of the Chaldeans. Nothing is recorded, either in the biblical account or secular history, about Abram's early life. Suddenly in the biblical text this man appears when God calls him out of the home of his fathers to a strange and distant land. In return God promises to bless Abram and his descendants, growing them into a great nation. God foretells that Abram's name will become great and, more significantly, all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him, indicating that the Christ will be brought into the world through a nation sired by Abram. Abram, having nothing to assure him but the word of God that came to Him, takes his wife Sarai (later Sarah) and begins a nomadic journey that will continue for the balance of his life. Although he was already seventy-five years of age and his wife was sixty-five, both well beyond the normal procreative years, the text records that Abram "believed in the Lord and He [God] accounted it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6)." Abram pleased God because he trusted God.

While Abram occasionally faltered in his life's journey, he was unwavering in his faith. Once in Egypt for fear of his life he passed his wife off as his sister (Genesis 12:10-20). On another occasion, ten years after the promise and still without a son, (Abram and his wife are now eighty-five and seventy-five respectively) Abram and Sarai attempt to hasten the arrival of a son for Abram through Sarai's handmaiden, Hagar. Hagar provides a son, Ishmael. Their impatience, which may not seem like impatience to us, did not hasten God's promise, for Ishmael was not the intended heir. They would have to wait another fifteen years for the promised son. In spite of these momentary lapses, Abram remained true to his God. After twenty-five years, at ages one hundred and ninety

respectively, Abram and Sarai (now Abraham and Sarah) are given the promised son, Isaac, the next of the great patriarchs who will inherit the great promises made to Abraham.

The ultimate test to Abraham's faith comes in chapter 22. God says to Abraham, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love... and offer him... as a burnt offering... (Genesis 22:2)." Abraham, recognizing that he had a son only as a blessing bestowed from God, understood that God had the authority to take his son back. Submitting to Divine direction, Abraham proceeded unhesitatingly to take Isaac to the appointed place, build an altar, place wood for the fire upon the altar, bind his son, and lay him on the wood of the altar (vs. 9). Verse 10 records, that, "Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son." He would have killed his only and long-awaited son as God commanded except that God stopped him. God then says to Abraham, "... for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me. (Genesis 22:16)."

Thus, we witness the character of the man of whom God said, "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice... (Genesis 18:17-19)." Abraham embodies the quality by which men must come to God: Faith!

[Read: Genesis Chapters 21-26. For a shorter reading: Genesis 21:1-7; 22:4-9; 24:1-4, 24: 10-18; 24:28-33; 24:50-67; 26:1-5]