

I WANT TO KNOW MY BIBLE

What We Learn from Abraham

Reading: Gen. 12-29

Text: Gen. 12:1-3, 15:1-18

INTRODUCTION: As we read through the Old Testament, you may discover people whose stories you find more fascinating, but you will not find anyone whose story is more important than that of Abraham. When God sends His explanation of life, living, and eternity through His chosen master theologian Paul in the New Testament, Abraham becomes Paul's primary example to explain the wondrous mysteries of God.

Abram, Abraham's name before God changed it, was born over 300 years after the flood and over 200 years after the dispersion of the families at the tower of Babel. The world had recovered from the obvious effects of the flood, but the testimony of the great deluge was still well known. Noah did not die until well into Abram's lifetime, and Shem lived past Abraham's death. So the eye witness testimony of the Living God Who judges sin was still very much present in the world.

The families that left the plains of Shinar had long since arrived at their desired destinations and had begun to build their civilizations. Abram was born in Ur of the Chaldeans, a city on the Euphrates River, south of the site of ancient Babel. After God first called Abram, he and his family followed the Euphrates north along the fertile crescent and settled in a place they named Haran, the name of his deceased brother. When his father Terah died, Abram traveled west toward the Mediterranean Sea and then south into Canaan.

What is it about Abraham and what God did in his life that is so important to us today?

I believe we can summarize what we learn from Abraham in three sentences.

I. GOD INITIATES RELATIONSHIP WITH PEOPLE.

When we first meet Abram in the Scriptures, he unquestionably knew about God, but he did not yet know God personally. He did not have a relationship with the Almighty. And that fact is important to us because **we are allowed to see**

- **how Abraham comes into a relationship with his Creator,**
- **how Abraham comes to the place to be called the friend of God,**

- **how Abraham becomes a New Testament example of those who have the certainty of eternal life with God.**

And the first thing we see is that it was God, not Abram, Who initiated that relationship.

A. God initiated a covenant. We call it the Abrahamic Covenant.

Gen. 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

In this covenant God makes seven promises:

- 1) **I will make of you a great nation**
- 2) **I will bless you**
- 3) **and make your name great**
- 4) **so that you will be a blessing**
- 5) **I will bless those who bless you**
- 6) **and him who curses you will I curse**
- 7) **and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed**

1. Notice that there are no "ifs" in this promise made by God. It is an **unconditional** covenant.
2. Let me also point out that this covenant initiated God's relationship with **Israel** which is the nation God made from Abraham and his descendants.
3. It is also very important to know that Jesus Christ came into this world as a descendant of Abraham, and Jesus is the fulfillment of the ultimate promise of the Abrahamic Covenant that by Him (**through Jesus**) all the families of the earth would be blessed.

B. After Abram is living in the land of Canaan, God expands the covenant with him to specifically promise that Abraham's descendants would be given the land that stretched from the Euphrates River to the Nile.

Genesis 15:1–18 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

2 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

4 And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” 5 Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

7 Then He said to him, “I *am* the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”

8 And he said, “Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”

9 So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. 14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete.”

17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. 18 On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—

While in English we say, “make a covenant” in Hebrew the verb is “to cut a covenant.” The covenant was sealed by sacrifice, and it was made between two parties. So the animals, except the birds, were cut in two. Normally, the two parties of the covenant would walk together in a figure 8 in between the halves of the slain animals, and the covenant would be established.

But did you notice that in this case, Abram slept through the making of the covenant, and only God walked between the halves of the sacrificed animals. The significance of this is again that while Abraham was a party to the covenant, the recipient of its blessings, it was not dependent upon him. **The covenant was unconditional. God alone would fulfill it.**

C. The same thing is true of the New Covenant that offers eternal life to all of us.

1. **Jesus said, "This is the New Covenant in my blood."**
2. **God initiated the cross.**
3. **God sent His Son.**
4. **God made a way, and only one way, for our sins to be forgiven so we could live with him forever.**
5. Not by our works.
6. Not by our church.
7. God initiates relationship with people.

The second thing of great significance we learn from Abraham is ...

II. PEOPLE ENTER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH FAITH.

Although God initiated the Abrahamic Covenant, that covenant did not offer salvation to Abraham or to anybody. It offered the One who would bring salvation, but just because you were a descendant of Abraham or later a citizen of Israel, you were not saved simply because you were a party to the Abrahamic Covenant.

- A. But in this passage in **Genesis 15**, we do clearly see how salvation comes to **an individual**. In fact, we already read it.

Gen. 15:6 "And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

This is one of the most significant Scriptures in the Old Testament for an understanding of grace and faith. It is quoted three times in the New Testament, all in passages teaching on the doctrines of grace and faith.

Rom. 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Gal. 3:6 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

James 2:23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

- B. This truth is at the heart of the New Testament message.**

Eph. 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, *not* of works, lest anyone should boast.

C. What a sad situation it is that so many people today still seek to gain entrance to heaven by their good works or by the rituals of their church.

1. I see it all the time in Brazil.
2. I see it all the time in Panama City, FL!

The third important truth we learn from Abraham and his life is ...

III. FAITH IS BELIEF THAT PRODUCES ACTION.

We learn what real faith is.

A. Belief, or mental assent, is a part of faith, but not all of it.

Heb. 11:6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

B. Faith is belief that goes to the core and becomes a part of the person so that it impacts everything they do.

C. Thus, genuine faith always produces action.

James 2:18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

That is why the test of whether a person is really saved is a changed life.

2 Cor. 5:17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

D. Was Abraham’s faith genuine, and did God transform his life? Absolutely!

1. He left his homeland, and marched off the map to the place God showed him.
2. Abraham obeyed God.

- 3. Even when God told Abraham to offer his one and only son Isaac as an offering to the Lord, Abraham traveled to Mt. Moriah to do as commanded, believing that God would raise Isaac from the dead to be the son of the promise.**

CONCLUSION: Do you have faith? Genuine faith? A belief that goes beyond a superficial assent in your mind that produces no impact on your life? Have you truly trusted in Christ in the core of your being so that you obey Him, follow Him, and you are changed by Him?

Friend, if not, you can trust Jesus today!