

## ABRAHAM

**“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad”  
(John 8:56)**

As we begin our study let us remember that Abraham saw the day of Christ almost 2,000 years before He was born. Because we believe the Gospel we now know what Abraham knew and now see what Abraham saw. It cannot be denied, however, that Abraham was unique in his generation. We now know that the eternal purpose of God is to unite our fragmented universe through Jesus. There was a time, however, when even the prophets and the angels didn't know this (1 Pet. 1:10 - 12). While the truth of this eternal mystery is repeated many times in the New Testament Scriptures, perhaps these two passages from Ephesians will be sufficient at this time.

**“And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph. 1:9, 10).**

**“And to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Eph. 3:9 - 12).**

Please consider;

- Abraham was an ancestor of Jesus (Matt. 1:2).
- Abraham was the father of the Hebrew nation (Gen. 14:13).
- Abraham is an example of being justified by faith (Gen. 15:6).
- Abraham is an example of being justified by works (Ja. 2:20 - 24).
- Abraham was the friend of God (Ja. 2:23)
- Abraham's wives and sons are allegories of two covenants (Gal. 4:21 - 31).
- It was through Abraham that all the families of earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1 - 3).
- Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26 - 29).
- Paradise is described as Abraham's bosom (Lk. 16:19 - 31).
- Abraham is considered a prophet by Jews, Christians, and also by Muslims.

Jesus reminds us that Abraham rejoiced because he saw the coming of Christ centuries before it came to pass. Perhaps our study of Abraham will help clarify our own vision of Jesus and our own personal responsibility to believe and obey God.

In the mean while, we are in a struggle with the devil and should not be ignorant of his deevices (2 Cor. 2:11) Fortunately, the devil is not omniscient. Even though God had determined

to redeem the world by the blood of Jesus before the creation of the world, the devil didn't know this (1 Pet. 1:17 - 21). Neither did he understand the plan of God to redeem the world, or the plan of God for his own demise. Nobody completely understood this eternal plan until it was revealed. As we have said, even though they searched and inquired diligently, not even the prophets or angels understood this mystery (1 Pet. 1:10 - 12). The devil got his first clue about God's plan when he heard that the "Seed" of woman would crush the serpent's head (Gen.3:15). This was revolutionary information to the devil. It revealed to him that his enemy would be human. One of Adam's descendants would spell his doom. Since he didn't know which human would crush his head, however, he mounted an attack against all of humanity.

### ALL HAVE SINNED

The initial success of the devil is encapsulated in these verses: **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23, 24).**

Paul began his letter to Rome with a survey of history. This confirmed the downward trajectory of the human race. He concluded that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Those without the Law were sinners, and those with the Law were also sinners (Rom. 2:12). Everyone is a sinner! Even when our ancestors knew God, they didn't glorify Him as God and were not thankful. They became vain in their imaginations and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools and changed the glory of our eternal God into idolatrous images (Rom. 1:18 - 32). The world became so bad that the thoughts of man were only evil continually (Gen. 6:5).

The devil, however, was not 100 % successful for Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). Though this one man God kept the Messianic lineage alive. Thus, while the sinful world perished in the flood, by faith Noah built an ark to save his family (Heb. 11:7). As we have said, since our Redeemer was going to come from the human family, the salvation of this man and his family was essential. Remember! Noah was an ancestor of Jesus (Lk. 3:36). Without Noah there would have been no Jesus!

Originally the world was populated from only one man, and after the flood the world would again be populated by one man. Originally the Messianic lineage passed from Adam through his son Seth (Lk. 3:38). Now the Messianic lineage would pass from Noah through his son Shem (Lk. 3:36). Praise God! The devil was not successful in keeping Jesus from being born. For your information, and the complete Messianic lineage is recorded in Luke 3:23 - 38) Noah's family at the time of the flood consisted of only eight people (1 Pet. 3:20). From this one family, however, the whole earth was repopulated (See Gen. 10)

So, at a desperate time in history, Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Years later, at another desperate time, Abram also found favor in the eyes of the Lord. As Noah was surrounded by idolatrous sinners, so was Abram. Joshua reminds us that Terah, Abraham's father, and his

brother Nahor, worshiped other gods (Josh 24:2). It seems that everybody worshiped other gods but Abram. Again, the Messianic lineage was kept alive by one man.

Remember! **“The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (2 Chron. 16:9).** That’s how God found Noah.

Remember God’s promise to Abram: **“All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3).** God found Abram in the same way He found Noah.

Just as God found Noah in a world of sinners, and just as he found Abram in a world of sinners, he can also find you and me in a world of sinners if our heart is fully committed to Him.

### ABRAM’S BIRTH

Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen. 6:10). As we have said, after the flood these three sons scattered and replenished the earth (Gen. 10:32). Also, as we have already said, the Messiah would come through Shem, the son of Noah. Genesis 11:10 - 32 records the genealogy of Abram starting from two years after the flood and continuing to the time of his birth many generations later.

“Abram” means “exalted father”. God later changed his name to “Abraham” which means “father of multitudes” (Gen. 17:5). We will deal with this in greater detail later.

The first reference to Abram in the Bible is Gen. 11:26: **“After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran”** This same order of children is repeated in vs. 27. This leads to the assumption that Abram was the oldest of the three sons. Since Haran, however, was old enough to have a daughter named Milcah who married Nahor, some have assumed that Haran was the oldest (Gen. 11:29). At any rate, Haran was the first of the brothers to die. He died in Ur of the Chaldeans where he was also born (Gen. 11:28).

In addition to these three sons, Terah also had a daughter named Sarai who was the sister of Abram by a different mother and became his wife (Gen. 20:12).

### UR OF CHALDEA

Ur of the Chaldeans represented the pinnacle of civilization in Abram’s day. They had cold and hot running water, a sewer system, high rise buildings, paved roads, and metal tools. They set the standard for us with 24 hours in a day, 60 minutes in an hour, and 60 seconds in a minute. They also divided a circle into 360 degrees. They even had a standardized system of weights and measures and an elaborate system of canals for flood control irrigation and commerce. They were also world leaders in medicine and music.

As we have mentioned before, however, in spite of their apparently advanced civilization, they were still idolatrous pagans. They had lost contact with the One True God and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator.. Abram’s family, as a part of that society, also worshiped other gods (Josh. 24:2). As I have said, it is my personal opinion that Abram, like Noah, had a heart that was totally committed to God even though he was surrounded by idolatrous pagans.

The first city on earth was built by Cain. He was, at the time, perhaps the most sinful man alive (Gen. 4:17). Since God condemned Cain to be a wanderer (Gen. 4:12), building a city and staying in one place was an act of rebellion. At any rate, God called Abram away from the city of Ur to dwell in tents (Heb. 11:9). It seems that easy living is not conducive to spiritual growth. Years later when Abram and Lot parted ways, Lot chose city life. He saw the fertile Jordan Valley and pitched his tents toward Sodom. Abram was therefor forced to live an austere life in the uninviting hill country (Gen. 13:10 - 18). In the short term Lot found prosperity, but eventually his decision to live in Sodom cost him all of his earthly possessions as well as his wife (Gen. 19:1 - 29). She, incidentally, is the only woman in the Bible we are commanded to remember (Lk. 17:32).

The book of Hebrews reminds us that even though Abram was living in tents he was seeking for a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:10).

## THE CALL OF ABRAM

**“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’” (Gen. 12:1 - 3).**

We can summarize this call by association with these three great promises.

- The “Promised Land”. Abram was to leave his country and his kindred and God promised to show him a new land. When Abram arrived in the Promised Land God promised to give it to him and to his descendants forever (Gen. 13:14 - 17). This promise came true, as all of God’s promises do, but not during Abram’s life. During his life Abram did not inherit even a foot of ground in the Promised Land (Acts 7:5).
- God also promised Abram that he would become a great nation. At the time, as you know, he was 75 years old and childless. God promised him, however, that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens (Gen. 15:5). Abram and Sarah did have a miraculous son named Isaac, but they didn’t live to see Isaac’s children become a great nation with multitudes of people like the stars of the heavens.

- Next God promised Abram that all the peoples on earth would be blessed through him. This, of course, referred to coming of Christ Who would not be born for almost 2,000 years. Yet, Abram saw Christ by faith and rejoiced in what God would do through Him.

Note that Abram walked by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). He believed God even though he never saw any of these three promises come true. All of God's promises ultimately did come true, of course, as Abram believed they would. There is a reason why this man is described as the father of the faithful.

There is something both challenging and audacious about Abram's faith. To the world he was a nameless and faceless vagabond, but he made the headlines in heaven's hall of fame! Can you imagine the audacity of this obscure nomad believing that God would bless all the earth through him? It is obvious that during his generation there was no one on earth like Abram!

### ABRAM AND MELCHIZEDEK

When Sodom and Gomorrah were attacked by four kings from the East, Lot and his family were taken hostage. Abram, together with some allies, rescued Lot, his family, and all his possessions in a daring night attack (Gen. 14:1 - 24).

Returning with the hostages and spoils Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek. He was the King of Salem and Priest of the Most High God (Gen. 14:20). As we have said before, Abram's life was used by God to help prepare for the coming of Christ. This incident with Melchizedek was no accident. It was used by God to illustrate that the priesthood of Jesus was superior to that of Aaron. Since Jesus did not come from the tribe of Levi he could not be a priest according to the Law (Heb. 7:11 - 17). Instead, Jesus was a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21). Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek generations before Levi was born. Since Levi was in the loins of Abram when he paid tithes to Melchizedek the Scriptures teach that the priesthood of Melchizedek and Christ is superior to the priesthood of Levi and Aaron.

### ABRAM WAS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

(Gen. 15:1 - 21)

When Abram was 75 years old God promised that he would become a great nation (Gen. 12:4). Our text in Genesis 15 occurred ten years later (Gen. 16:3). A discouraged Abram still did not have a son and concluded that his servant Eliezer would become his heir (Gen. 15:3).

Then the word of the Lord came to Abram assuring him that he would indeed have an heir that came from his own body. To stimulate his faith, God took him outside and told him to look up

into the heavens and count the stars if he was able. Abram was 85 years old and had seen these same stars literally thousands of times. On that night, however, he saw them differently. On that night he came to believe that nothing was too hard for God. At that moment we are told that **“Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6)**. This fact is so significant that it is repeated in Rom. 4:3, 22; Gal. 3:6; and Ja. 2:23.

At the same time Abram was justified by faith God reminded him again that He brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans to take possession of the Promised Land (Gen. 15:7).

When Abram wanted assurance that he would inherit the land God told him to take a heifer, a goat, and a ram that were each three years old. He was also to bring a dove and a young pigeon. The animals were cut in two and the halves were arranged opposite from one another. The birds were sacrificed but not divided. This was the standard way covenants were made in those days. The idea is that if either party fails to keep his part of the covenant, then he was to be cut in pieces just like those animals were cut in pieces (Jer. 34:18).

On that night, however, Abram was asleep and did not pass between the animals. It was a one way covenant. God caused a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch to appear and pass between the pieces (Gen. 15:17). Thus God was responsible for keeping the covenant, not Abram. God Himself would guarantee that Abram’s descendants would inherit the land!

Further, Abram was informed that his descendants would be strangers in a land not their own and would be enslaved and mistreated for 400 years. Afterward they would come out of slavery with great possessions and God would punish the nation that enslaved them (Gen. 15:13 - 16). Abraham died at 175 years of age but this promise of God did come true 400years later in the days of Moses. We repeat! All the promises of God ultimately come true!

## THE BIRTH OF ISHMAEL

- Abraham was 75 years old when God promised to make of him a great nation (Gen. 12:4). Since he was already an old man at the time his anxiety about having a son must have increased with each passing day.
- Abram was around 85 when God renewed the promise that he would have an heir that would come out of his own body (Gen. 15:4; 16:3).
- Thus far the promise only involved Abram and not Sarai. He was definitely going to have a son, but by whom?
- Since Sarai had borne him no children she told Abram to sleep with her maidservant, Hagar, and perhaps she could build a family through her (Gen. 16:1, 2). In doing this Abram was

obeying his wife, not God!

- When Hagar became pregnant she despised Sarai. As a result of this Hagar, was mistreated and fled from her mistress. (Gen. 16:6).
- The angel of the Lord found Hagar in the desert and told her to return to Sarai and submit to her (Gen. 16:9).
  - The angel promised Hagar that her descendants would be too numerous to count (Gen. 16:10).
  - Her son would be named Ishmael (Gen. 16:11). This name means “God hears”
  - God also promised that her son would be like a wild donkey and would live in hostility toward all his brothers (Gen. 16:12).
  - Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born (Gen. 16:16).

### THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

When Abram was 99 years old God appeared to him again and promised to confirm His covenant about the coming of the Messiah with the covenant of circumcision. Note also that the covenant of circumcision was given in association with the changing of names.

- Abram and his descendants, as well as everyone born in his household or bought with money from a foreigner, had to be circumcised or be cut off from his people (Gen. 17:9 - 14).
- The name “Abram” which means “exalted father” was changed to “Abraham” which means “father of multitudes” (Gen. 17:5).
- The name “Sarai” which is not complimentary, was changed to “Sarah” which means “Princess”.

While the full depth of God’s wisdom and knowledge is past finding out (Rom. 11:33), one reason for the covenant of circumcision seems obvious. The destruction of the devil, as we have pointed out, involved the “Seed” of the woman. God was not going to destroy the devil by Himself, but was going to allow mankind to be involved. Throughout all of history God’s people have been laborers together with God (1 Cor. 3:9).

While scholars debate the health benefits of circumcision, the male sexual organ is obviously involved in procreation. Thus commanding circumcision would provide a constant reminder that the promised Messiah would be born of a woman. While the Hebrews were very modest about exposing their nakedness (Ex. 20:25, 26) every husband and wife would certainly find circumcision an appropriate reminder that someday their long awaited Messiah would be born of a woman.

Neither should we forget that when Abraham wanted to find a godly wife for his son Isaac, he told his chief servant: **“Put your hand under my thigh. I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac” (Gen. 24:2 - 4).** Again, the placement of the servant’s hand cannot be divorced from the promise that Abraham expected his Seed to be born of a woman and bless the whole earth.

Circumcision also assumed prominence in the conquest of Canaan. The men of military age had been circumcised when they came out of Egypt, but they died in the wilderness. The men born in the wilderness had not been circumcised (Josh. 5:5). Therefore Joshua had all these men circumcised at Gilgal before the conquest of Canaan began. Again we stress the association between this fleshly covenant and the Messiah who would be born of a woman. It is both interesting and significant that Rahab the Harlot, who was spared by Joshua, gained eternal fame by giving birth to Boaz who was an ancestor of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).

### CALLING THINGS THAT ARE NOT AS THOUGH THEY WERE

While explaining how Abraham would be the father of many nations Paul pointed out that God **“Calls things that are not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17).** Changing Abram’s name to “Father of multitudes” is but one of many examples. The new name indicating that Abraham would be the father of multitudes was given before Isaac was born. What we “say” influences our faith!

The promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a son later became very specific when the Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre (Gen 18:1). Three men, who were obviously divine messengers, promised that Sarah would have a son about that time in the next year. Since Sarah was advanced in years and past the age of childbearing, she laughed. Then the Lord reminded them that nothing was too hard for the Lord (Gen. 18:14). Her baby was named “Isaac” which means “laughter”.

Calling things that are not as though they were seems to be a common practice for God. During creation, for example, the words of God preceded reality. On the first day God said “Let there be light” and then light came to be. Note that God spoke first, then light became a reality (Gen. 1:3). This same pattern was true in all the six days of creation. On day three and day six God spoke twice. These two days are special because on those days God created life. On day 3 His words preceded plant life, and on day 6 His words preceded the life of animals and man.

Since we are not God, we must be careful about promising things in advance. For example, we shouldn’t say we are going to a certain city and stay there a year. Since we don’t know what tomorrow will bring, we should always say “If it is the Lord’s will, we will do this or that” (Ja. 4:13 -



17).

## FAITH AND WORKS

**“You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness’ and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (Ja. 2:20 - 24).**

Paul wrote that we are saved by grace through faith and that not by works so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8- 10). Wicked King Herod boasted and God killed him for doing so (Acts 12:19 - 23).

Obedience to God, however, is nothing to boast about! When we do what God commands us to do it is not a dead work, it is a “work of faith” (1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11). When Abraham offered his son Isaac upon the altar he was doing precisely what God commanded him to do. Obeying God does not in any way detract from God’s glory!

Throughout this article we have stressed that God’s eternal plan involves humanity. Abraham certainly illustrates this truth in a great many ways. Isaac, for example, was not virgin born. Abraham believed that God would give him a son, but Sarah did not get pregnant merely by what Abraham believed. She got pregnant by what he did! At the risk of being indiscrete please consider again these inspired words:

**“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’. Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness’” (Rom. 4:18 - 22).**

**“You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (Ja. 2:24).**

So, even though we are laborers together with God, we have no right to boast about our obedience!

- Abel didn't boast when he offered a better sacrifice than Cain (Heb. 11:4)
- Enoch didn't boast when he pleased God (Heb. 11:5).
- Noah did boast when he built an ark to save his family (Heb. 11:7).
- Abraham didn't boast when he left Ur of Chaldea (Heb. 11:8).
- Jacob didn't boast when he blessed the sons of Joseph (Heb. 11:21).
- Moses didn't boast when he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Heb. 11:24).
- Joshua didn't boast when the walls of Jericho fell down (Heb. 11:30).
- Naaman didn't boast when he dipped in the Jordan River and was healed of leprosy (2 Ki. 5:14).
- The blind man didn't boast when he washed in the Pool of Siloam and could see (Jn. 9:7).
- Paul didn't boast when he was baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).
- THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH OBEYING GOD!
- THERE IS NOTHING RIGHT ABOUT NOT OBEYING GOD! Those who fail to obey God are like people who build a house on sand. Further, those who do not obey Christ have no right to call Him Lord (Matt.7:21 - 27).

#### SOME DOUBTED

**“Then the eleven disciples sent to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted” (Matt. 28:16, 17).**

As we have stressed repeatedly, God has chosen to involve sinful man in accomplishing His work on earth. When God calls us to some great challenge, however, it is common for some to “doubt”.

- When God called Moses to deliver the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage he doubted. Since Moses was of a slow speech and a slow tongue he wanted God to send Aaron (Ex. 4:1 - 17).
- When God called Gideon he questioned that call because his clan was the weakest in Manasseh, and he was the least in his family (Ju. 6:15).
- When God called Mary to be the mother of Jesus she questioned how this could be since she was a virgin (Lk. 1:34). When she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit her spirit rejoiced that God had been mindful of her humble estate and realized that by accepting God's call all generations would call her blessed (Lk. 1:48).
- When God called Ananias to heal Saul he questioned that call because he had heard reports of all the harm Saul had done to the saints in Jerusalem (Acts 9:13).

- Isaiah expressed it beautifully: **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is. 55:8, 9).**
  - Who would have dreamed that God would use something as fragile as a baby to destroy the works of the devil?
  - Who would believe that a tender shoot out of dry ground would triumph over the “god this world”?

There is no question that on that mountain many years ago some of the apostles “doubted”. The question is: “what did they doubt”? They certainly didn’t doubt that Jesus existed or that he was raised from the dead as He was standing in their midst with nail prints in His hands.

Perhaps, like many others, they doubted their ability to measure up to the magnitude of their responsibility. They needn’t have worried for the power behind them was greater than the task before them. They were not going to do this on their own, that’s why Jesus commanded them to wait for power from on high (Acts 1:4 - 8).

- Noah didn’t do it on his own for God was with him every step of the way.
- Abraham didn’t do it on his own for God was with him every step of the way.
- The Apostles were not to do it on their own for Jesus promised to be with them until the end of the age (Matt. 28:18 - 20).
- Now that the Apostles are dead, they have passed the torch to us. As always, God does not expect us to make disciples on our own for He has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).
- Abraham was justified by faith, and so are we. Please do not doubt!

Whether we like it or not, God has chosen to involve sinful people like you and me to carry the Good News to the ends of the earth. When God wants someone to preach in Macedonia he can no longer call Paul, he has to call us. Angels were not permitted to build the ark and Jesus was not born of an angel. Such critical tasks have been given to us and we dare not fail! While angels are not permitted to preach, however, they are specifically assigned by God to minister to us who are the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). As we have said, when we obey God the power behind us is always greater than the task before us.

Try, if you can, to go back 4,000 years and imagine that you live in the world’s most modern city. You enjoy luxury and conveniences that others can only dream about. Then God gives you a call to abandon all that wealth, luxury, and security and commit your life to a journey of faith without even knowing where you are going. If God has given you such a call He will be with you to the end.

He will guide you step by step. He will protect you until you have finished the course. Because you belong to Christ the Judge of the Universe will consider that you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29). That's why, when you die the angels will carry you to the bosom of Abraham and together with him you will enjoy your eternal reward and forever be with the Lord!

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