

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

Reading Lesson: Gal. 3:1-9

Introduction

Although his life story occupies only 15 of the 929 chapters in the Old Testament, those who have studied the Bible for any length of time know well that the man named Abraham (“father of a multitude”), originally Abram (“high father”), holds a place of great prominence in the scriptures. Founder of the Hebrew people, he is held in high esteem by three of the world’s great religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The objective of this lesson is to gain a greater understanding and appreciation for the real reason for Abraham’s greatness.

Central Study Question:

What was so great about Abraham, and what can we learn from his example?

His Birth?

Unlike the Rockefellers, Vanderbilts and Carnegies, it was not the family into which Abraham was born that made him great. As descendants of Noah’s son Shem, the scripture in Josh. 24:2 tells us that Abraham’s father, Terah, and his sons, were actually worshippers of idol gods. Their home towns of Ur on the Euphrates River (in southeast Iraq), and Haran (in modern day Turkey), were worship centers for the moon god, Sin.

His Wealth?

Even before traveling to Egypt, from which Gen. 13:2 says he left “very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold,” it seems that he was a man of some means, for in leaving Haran, Gen. 12:5 says he took “all their substance that they had gathered.” But after their journey to Egypt, Gen. 13:6 says the mutual holdings of Abraham and Lot were so large that they became a source of conflict: “their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.” And later, when preparing to confront the kings of the east, Abram assembled a rescue team comprised of 318 of “his trained servants, born in his own house.” Yet, it was not his material possessions that made Abraham great.

Other Possible Reasons for Greatness?

Abraham possessed many desirable skills: problem solving, conflict resolution, decision making; and many noble characteristics: courage, integrity and devotion. Yet, none of these are the reasons for Abraham’s greatness. In fact, these were but the outflow, or byproducts, of the real source.

His Faith!

When the life of Abraham is reduced down to that one element that was key to his greatness, it was **his faith in God** that made him great. His was not a wavering, fluctuating, good-times-only kind of faith, but a devout and enduring trust in the Lord, even in the face of strong trials.

• *Faith to Be Saved*

Abraham was saved the same way that people have always been saved: “by grace ...through faith” in Jesus (Eph. 2:8). Verse eight of our reading lesson says that God justifies unbelievers through faith, and that He, the author of the scripture, preached the Gospel to Abraham. Before he ever left Ur, God appeared to Abram and told him the good news: that in him, that is, through a descendant still in his loins (Jesus Christ), all nations would be blessed - including Abraham himself - in salvation! There, God granted to him the gift of faith, enabling him to forsake the false gods of his fathers and place his full trust in God. At that moment, “...Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” and he became a born-again, child of the King.

• *Faith to Face the Unknown*

“The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia [Ur], before he dwelt in Haran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee” (Acts 7:2-3). So, at what seems to us to be the advanced age of 75, and after having traveled 550 miles from Ur to Haran, Abram obeyed God, left Haran, and journeyed another 425 miles to Bethel, taking with him his wife, his nephew, all their earthly belongings and all the servants that had become part of his household. This he did, not knowing their destination, but simply trusting in God’s perfect will, His goodness, His faithfulness, and His promise (yet to be inspired and written by the Apostle Paul), “that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). If ever there was one called according to God’s purpose, it was Abraham!

• *Faith to Do the Right Thing*

When his nephew, Lot, made bad choices and found himself a captive of the enemy, Abram could have said “You made your bed, now lie in it.” Instead, he had faith that God would take care of him and give him success - and He did (Gen. 14:13-16). And when presented with the opportunity to take of the spoils, Abram remained faithful to the promise he had made to God: “I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord ...that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich...” (Gen. 14:21-23). And later, when Ephron offered him free land as a burial site for Sarah, he refused to take advantage of another’s good will, choosing rather to pay him the fair market value of the land (Gen. 23).

- ***Faith to Believe the Impossible***

“And, behold the word of the Lord came unto him [Abram], saying, This [Eliezer, his steward] shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (Gen. 15:4-6). In spite of his age, and Sarai’s barren womb, Abram had faith that God’s promise would come to pass - and it did!

- ***Faith to Obey - Even Sacrifice***

At age 99, at the command of God, Abram became Abraham in name, entered into His covenant, and observed the token ritual of circumcision for himself, his 13 year old son Ishmael, and every male under his control (Gen. 17). Later, he obeyed God and sadly sent away his only son, Ishmael, and Hagar into the wilderness, thus acknowledging God’s will for Isaac, the son of promise, to be his true heir (Gen. 21:1-14). Finally, having already given up one son, Abraham passed the ultimate test of faith by obeying God’s command to kill Isaac for an offering on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:1-14). When asked about the sacrifice, he explained to the lad that “God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” Heb. 11:17-19 tells us that Abraham truly believed in his heart that if he had to go through with this terrible task, the Lord would raise Isaac back to life. His obedience also resulted in blessings for his children (Gen. 26:3-5).

- ***Faith to Provide Godly Parenting***

Knowing perfectly the mind and heart of Abraham, God made this statement concerning him: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19). Later, when the time came for Isaac to be married, it was a major concern to Abraham that his son have a suitable wife, with the right background and upbringing. God promptly honored this desire by revealing Rebekah to Abraham’s servant, as the chosen one (Gen. 24).

- ***Faith to Intercede Boldly and Persistently in Prayer***

Concerned about the slaying of the righteous with the wicked in cities marked for destruction, Abraham interceded in prayer to God, asking in repeated scenarios of 50, 45, 40, 30, 20 and 10. Six times he asked for the righteous to be delivered (Gen. 18:22-33). Later, Abraham prayed for Abimelech who was facing death, and for the barren women of his house, and God healed them (Gen. 20). No doubt, at many times throughout his life, Abraham prayed to know God’s will, to receive direction and guidance. And, as “the friend of God,” he enjoyed fellowship so pure that God confided in him concerning His future plans for Sodom & Gomorrah (Gen. 18:17-18).

Relevance for Us Today

In the preceding material, we identified seven critical dimensions of faith exhibited by Abraham. Lest anyone should think that those were only pertinent in his day, let us close this study by looking at how these are still relevant today.

Faith to be Saved -- The unsaved world still stands in need of saving faith in Jesus. If you have not trusted him for salvation, call upon Him today with all of your heart, and He will save you!

Faith to Face the Unknown -- This life is so uncertain and there is so much we cannot see or understand; yet God sees and knows all. Let us depend on His strong arm from day to day.

Faith to Do the Right Thing -- As followers of Jesus, our lives are being quietly scrutinized every day. God's enemies would love to seize upon our failings and quickly dismiss us as hypocrites. Let us walk in integrity, and trust that if we do what's right, even when it's not convenient or popular, God will take care of the rest.

Faith to Believe the Impossible -- God asked in Gen. 18:14, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Jesus provided the answer in Mt. 19:26: "with God all things are possible." Believing is the key.

Faith to Obey - Even Sacrifice -- I Sam. 15:22 tells us that to obey is better than sacrifice, but sometimes the former involves the latter (Lu. 14:33). When it does, we must have faith that God will repay our sacrifice with blessings many times over (Mt. 19:27-29).

Faith to Provide Godly Parenting -- In a day when children are often left to their own choices, may we as parents "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). May we have faith to believe God's promise: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

Faith to Intercede Boldly and Persistently in Prayer -- "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Ja. 5:16). "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

Conclusion

The Bible is filled with scripture about faith, especially in Hebrews chapter 11: its definition in verse 1; its necessity in verse 6; and the many wonderful results of it throughout the rest of the chapter. Perhaps in reading these great feats, we might feel spiritually dwarfed by these "giants of faith." Instead, let us take courage and inspiration from them, especially from Abraham, whose mention fills 12 verses (8-19), more than any other single person in the chapter. Returning to verse 7 of our reading lesson, we who have exercised faith in Christ are the spiritual children of this great patriarch. Let us not be content to only have saving faith, but may our prayer continually be like that of the apostles in Lu. 17:5, "Lord, increase our faith." "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17).