

Osaka International Church

Date: May 18th, 2008

Daniel Ellrick

Series: Patriarchs

Title: Abraham: Father of Nations

Scripture: Genesis 12

Key Verse: Genesis 17:5

I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week, we closed with the question, “*Where are you?*” and we applied this question to the challenge of examining ourselves to see where we are in our faith. Today, we will take a look at the life of Abraham, and through his example, I think we will find new meaning in this same question.

Let’s begin with **Joshua 24:2**, “**Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.'**” In this verse the Lord speaks through Joshua and reminds the people of Israel that their ancestors were idol worshippers before the Lord revealed Himself to Abraham, and, Genesis 11:31 tells us that the city where Terah and his family lived was called Ur.

One hundred years ago, very little was known about Ur and many scholars thought it was a mythical city. However, excavations in southern Iraq begun in 1922 by the British archaeologist Charles Woolley have uncovered the forgotten history of the city of Ur. As has happened many times, further research has proven that the Bible history is reliable. The large ziggurat in the photo was a temple dedicated to worship of the moon god, Nanna. It is interesting that an alternate name for Nanna was, “Sin.”



Acts 7:2 tells us that the Lord spoke to Abraham and called him to move to the promised land while Abraham was still in Ur. And so Abraham’s family left Ur. But they went only halfway to the promised land; when they came to Haran, they stayed there. This Haran has been identified as modern, Harran, in Turkey, a place known for its ancient beehive-shaped mud houses.



After the death of his father, Abraham finally left Haran and continued on to the promised land. Today we will look at Genesis 12, the time when Abraham left Haran, but first let’s preview a few things. I have been saying, “Abraham,” but in these early chapters, his name was actually, “Abram.” It is in **Genesis 17:3-5** that God changes his name. “**Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations."**” The name, “Abram,” meant, “*exalted father.*” But the name, “Abraham,” means, “*father of a multitude.*” In the Bible, God often changes a person’s name as a sign of the role God has given them.

A little over 4,000 years ago, the Lord chose one man to be the, “*father of a multitude.*” The Lord repeated this promise often. The Lord promised that Abraham’s descendents would be, in Genesis 13:16, like the dust of the earth, in Genesis 15:5, as numerous as the stars of the sky, and in Genesis 22:17, as the sand of the seashore. But what about the fulfillment of these prophecies?

First let’s consider Abraham’s physical descendents. Many people know that the twelve tribes of Israel were descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, but sometimes we forget that Jacob’s brother Esau was the father of a people called the Edomites. And Genesis 25 also records that Abraham had another wife, Keturah, who had children who became nations. And, Abraham’s son Ishmael also had twelve sons who became tribal rulers. These other children of Abraham are the ancestors of the Arab nations and others.



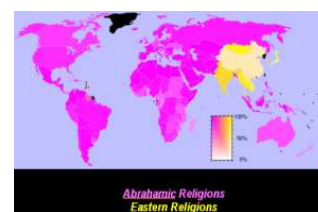
Further Genesis 25:6 tells us that Abraham had children by other women, and the children of these concubines were sent away with gifts. So, the physical descendants of Abraham included not only Israel, but also all of the Arab nations and other nations as well.

I think that here we see the fulfillment of **Genesis 15:18**, “**On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates."** Abraham has many millions of physical descendants. But still, I don't think this is what the stars, sand, and dust prophecies are talking about, because the Scriptures are very clear that Abraham's descendants include spiritual descendants as well as physical descendants.

Romans 4:16 says, “**Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring--not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.**” Paul taught that Christians are also the children of Abraham. Take a look at this map. Shades of red indicate areas where Christianity is the main religion, and shades of green point to areas where Islam is strong. The little yellow dot is Israel.

Jews Christians, and Muslims all claim Abraham as their spiritual father. There are major differences, but at a basic level, all three of these received their faith in a single, all-powerful, Creator God from Abraham. In that sense, all are the children of Abraham. So, what happens to the map when we combine the red, the green, and the yellow?

On this map the three Abrahamic faiths are shown in shades of purple. As you can see, when we talk about Abraham we are talking about someone who has had a big impact on the history of the whole world. But it is not because of Abraham himself, it is because of the Lord's sovereign choice and promise. Four thousand years ago, the Lord said He would make the descendants of Abraham like the stars, sand, and dust in number. Today, we see this prophecy being fulfilled. The Lord revealed Himself to Abraham and since that time faith in the Lord has spread from person to person, from people to people, and from nation to nation. Today, most of the world traces its faith roots to Abraham and calls him father. And, if the Lord Jesus delays His second coming another hundred years, the whole map may turn purple. No human power could do this. It is the hand of God working over the centuries to fulfill His promise to Abraham.



That gives us a little perspective about Abraham. Now, let's read Genesis 12:1-10.

II. Scripture: Genesis 12:1-10 (NIV)

[1] 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. [2] "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. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." [4] So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. [5] He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. [6] Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. [7] The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. [8] From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. [9] Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. [10] Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.

III. Teaching

In Genesis 12:1-10, Abraham continues the journey that began in Ur and travels from Haran to Shechem,

Bethel, and the Negev in the land of Canaan, and then on to Egypt. In the rest of chapter 12, while in Egypt, Abraham gets into some serious trouble with the Pharaoh after he lies about his wife, saying she is his sister. We won't go into that today, but suffice it to say that it proves that Abraham is a sinner like all of us. The Bible makes it clear that even great men of faith like Noah, Abraham and Moses are all sinners who need the grace and mercy of the cross of Christ. This map shows the rough outline of Abraham's journeys.



In spiritual terms we might divide Abraham's journey into several parts.

1. There was a leaving; Abraham left the place of idolatry in Ur.
2. There was a hesitation; Abraham stayed in Haran halfway between the place of idolatry and the promised land.
3. There was a new start on the journey to the promised land.
4. There was a time of learning, the tour through the promised land.
5. There was a trial, the famine in the land.
6. There was a turning away from God's promises, a trip to Egypt and sin.
7. And in chapter 13, there will be a return and Abraham will remain in the land.



What about us? Where are we in our own journeys of faith? Where are you? Are you leaving the place of idol worship? Are you hesitating to move on to the place God is calling you? Are you just now making a new start? Are you learning and growing? Is it a time of trial? Have you turned away from the place God has called you to? Do you need to return to your first love and remain in God's promises?

As we read our Bibles, we can benefit from the experiences of the people of faith who have gone before us. As you read, keep **Romans 15:4** in mind, **"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."**

Let's take a closer look at **Genesis 12:2**, **"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."** God promises to bless Abraham, but that is not all, God also promises to make Abraham a source of blessing for others. This is a pattern that appears many times in Scripture. God blesses someone, and then God uses that person to bless others.

Take a look at this photo of the shore of the Dead Sea. The Jordan River is full of fish before it flows into the Dead Sea, but there is nothing alive in the waters of the Dead Sea. Why? Because the Dead Sea has no outlet except evaporation. Good water flows in, but there it stagnates and dies, saturated with salt and minerals. This is a picture of what life is like when blessings flow into your life but you don't pass them on. If God blesses us, we need to pass it on, otherwise we will stagnate and die spiritually. If we just receive, receive, receive, we will become like the Dead Sea.



Now take a look at this photo of the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is full of fish and beautiful trees and flowers grow almost to the very edge of the water. The Dead Sea is dead. But the Sea of Galilee is a full of life. What is the difference? Unlike the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee has an outlet; the Jordan river flows in and then it flows back out again. So the Sea of Galilee is continually renewed and never stagnates. This is what we want as well. We want to receive and give, receive and give; we want to continually pass the blessings that God has given us on to others.



Abraham received many wonderful blessings from God, but he did not try to hold on to everything he received. Instead, like the Sea of Galilee, Abraham was always ready to pass the blessings on to others. This is how we should be also. We should rejoice and give thanks when we are blessed. And then we should pass the blessing on to others. In doing so, we will be renewed and we will become a source of life to many.

Let's look at **Genesis 12:7-8**, **"The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will**

give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord." In these verses we learn another thing about Abraham. Abraham took time for worship and prayer. Abraham made his relationship with the Lord a priority in his life. If we want a close relationship with the Lord, we need to do the same. We need to make an effort to seek God and draw close to Him.

Our efforts are important, but our efforts are not the source of our salvation. We rely on the grace and mercy of God received by faith. It was the same with Abraham, who is our example. **Galatians 3:6-9** teaches us, **"Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."**

Does it surprise you to hear that Abraham knew the gospel? The Good News of Jesus Christ was announced in advance to Abraham, perhaps in far more detail than we imagine. As we continue our study in Genesis, we will learn more about this.

IV. Conclusion

From the beginning, the Scriptures teach that salvation is received through faith in God and through believing His Word. The Good News of the cross of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all nations through the descendants of Abraham, because Jesus Himself was born in the line of Abraham. And ever since the time of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, the Good News of salvation continues to spread throughout the world. As people believe God's Word and trust in Jesus, they are saved. Let's pray.



V. Closing Prayer