

Abraham: Father of Many Nations

Leaving Ur

It is from far back in the pages of Bible history that a towering figure steps, Abraham (earlier known as Abram), son of Terah, a wealthy man who lived in Ur of the Chaldees. Possibly because of the wickedness of the city where he lived, father Terah became courageous enough to set out for the neighboring country of Haran, taking all his possessions and servants with him. He was accompanied by his son, Abram, daughter-in-law Sarai, and Lot, his grandson, who was son of Nahor, Terah's dead son. Terah then died while the family was in Haran.

Abram wasn't like other people who lived in Haran; he carried on conversations with someone called "God". What was so unusual was that he listened to Him, too, considering God to be his friend, and even went so far as to do what God asked him to do. God spoke to him saying, "Go out of this land; get away from your family and friends, to a country that I will show to you. I will bless you there, and make your people a great nation. Throgs to all the families of the world." Full of confidence and adventure, Abram believed his Friend, packed all his family, his servants, his worldly possessions, and prepared to leave everything that he had known.

A New Land

However, when he reached the area later called the "Land of Promise", Abram found great famine. He continued on to Egypt to live until it was over. In spite of this lack of faith, God saw that His friend came back to the land, along with Lot and his company, who had traveled with him.

Abram was a very rich man by now, and even when he and Lot parted company, he sought and received promise of further blessings from his Friend. God told him to look upward one night, saying to him: "See if you can count the stars. That's how many descendants you'll have some day." Abram believed his Friend, and God loved him, because of his faith in Him.

A Son of Promise

Sarai and Abram waited for a son to inherit their wealth and the promise given to them by God. At times Abram nearly gave up; he must have thought God had forgotten the promise he had made to him under the night sky. It seemed to have been so long. In fact, in a time of weakness, Sarai suggested that Ishmael, a son of Hagar their maid, be considered the son of the promise. But this was not God's plan.

It was when Abram was ninety-nine years old that God again reminded him of His promise. It happened like this:

God came to Abraham that day like friends ordinarily talk together. "Abram, my agreement is with you. I am Almighty God. You shall be the father of many peoples; never have any doubt about that. To help you remember, I am going to change your name from Abram to Abraham, which means father of many nations." God was very understanding of Abraham's doubt, considering how long he had waited to have his son born of Sarai.

Visitors

Because he moved from place to place, Abram lived in tents, with his wife and servants. One warm, sunny day, three strangers walked toward him as he sat in his tent door. They looked hot and weary, so Abraham hurried out to offer them food and water.

"Please, friends," he said, "sit down a while. You can go on your way after you rest."

"Yes", they responded gratefully, as they sat down in the shade, accepting the offer of refreshment.

Abraham went on, "I'll get some water for you--and some food, too." He rushed in to Sarai and instructed her to get the best flour to make some cakes for the guests. He told the servants to kill a calf, and cook some of the veal for them, as well. Of course, some milk would be good, and some cheese, to set before the men.

It wasn't long before the visitors were eating in the shade of Abraham's oak tree, speaking further of their mission. "Where is your wife?" one commented.

"She's in the tent", was the answer.

The stranger went on: "Next year by this time, I will give you and Sarai a son." Sarai laughed harshly, yet still quietly from the tent. Didn't the guests know that both she and her husband were too old to have any children?

"Why did you laugh?" asked the Lord (by now Abraham knew who the stranger really was.)

"Laugh?" she said. "I didn't laugh," she lied, afraid.

"Yes, you did. You can be sure that by a year from now you shall both have a son, the one I promised you before." They rose up and started their journey toward Sodom. Abraham went with them down the dusty road.

A Walk Together

Abraham and the Lord were such good friends that sometimes God shared with him what He planned to do. Abraham didn't always agree, but the two talked about things, anyway. When Abraham heard of God's plan to destroy the wicked city where Lot had gone to live, he bargained with God to spare the city. As evil as it had become, Lot and his family were allowed to leave before destruction fell.

Surely enough, when Abraham was one hundred and Sarah (also renamed) was ninety, Isaac was born. Perhaps they

named him "laughter" because of Sarah's laughter in the tent the day she heard of the coming birth. Or maybe it was because he brought such joy to the couple.

Because Abraham believed God and listened to Him, the Bible calls him the friend of God. In His word, God says that for a person to come to God, he must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6, Living Bible). Although Abraham failed many times, God was able to use him greatly; one day the nation of Israel would be begun in his family, and finally Jesus the Savior would be born to his lineage.