

## Abraham, “Hero of the faith”

### How God chooses and crafts his people

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Your Notes

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#### Why it is important to properly understand what it means to call someone a “hero of the faith”

- In Genesis, with the life of Abraham, we have a big shift, where God moves from working with all of humanity to a focus on ONE man, who will become the founder of the Jewish nation.
- Ultimately three major religions in our world today claim him as their founder: the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religions.
- As such, he is held in great veneration by all and in Christianity referred to as one of the first “heroes of the faith.”
- And though we do want to honor him, we also need to clarify that description of him and here is why.

#### In reality, there is only ONE true hero of the faith throughout the Bible

- And it isn’t any human.
- ***The only true hero of the faith in the Bible is our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.***
- It is so important that we understand this so that our admiration and praise is in the right place—directed to our God and not inappropriately to any human.
- It’s God’s grace that saves us and crafts the lives of Biblical characters and ours into what He has planned for us.
- As Ephesians 2:8-10, NLT tells us—
- *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

#### Romans 4 applies this to Abraham

- Romans 4 <sup>1-3 MSG</sup> . . . *If Abraham, by what he did for God, got God to approve him, he could certainly have taken credit for it. But **the story we’re given is a God-story, not an Abraham-story.** What we read in Scripture is, “Abraham entered into what God was doing for him, and that was the turning point. **He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own.**”*
- . . . . <sup>17-18</sup> ***We call Abraham “father” not because he got God’s attention by living like a saint, but because God made something out of Abraham when he was a nobody.*** Isn’t that what we’ve always read in Scripture, God saying to Abraham, “I set you up as father of many peoples”? Abraham was first named “father” and then became a father because he dared to trust God to do what only God could do: raise the dead to life, with a word make something out of nothing. ***When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn’t do but on what God said he would do.***

#### Why I’m going into these verses

- It’s important from the start to remember that ***All we are, All we have been given, All we are in the process of growing into as followers of Jesus, is totally a gift of grace from God.***
- ***Grace means undeserved favor, but we shouldn’t stop basking in the favor.....***
- Dallas Willard in his excellent book on the imperative of discipleship and the lack of it in Christianity today, ***The Great Omission***, reminds us, “Grace is opposed to earning, not effort.”
- ***We’ve been saved by grace (we didn’t earn it), but we still need to take action to grow in grace as a disciple and that takes effort.***

- Look carefully for and be aware of this balance of grace and effort as we study the life of Abraham and after we go over it, I'll have some concluding applications.
- Understanding this balance of grace and effort and acting accordingly is incredibly important for your Christian growth.

#### **With that as background let's start our study of Abraham**

- Abraham's story did not take place in a "galaxy far, far away."
- Our faith and the life of "the father of our faith," Abraham, does not have a mythological foundation.
- It began in an identifiable place you can visit today, Ur of the Chaldees.

#### **Areas where the events of the rest of Genesis (and much of the Old Testament) take place**

- #1—**Ur** of the Chaldees
- #2—**Haran**, stopping place for Terah and Nahor
- #3—**Canaan**, promised land for Abraham and descendants
- #4-**Egypt**
- **\*\*Remember as always, ours is the only Bible with MAPS of REAL PLACES**

#### **About the archeology of Ur**

- Many people have seen pictures of Abraham's birthplace, though they mostly likely didn't know what they were looking at.
- These are the pictures of U.S. soldiers standing on the steps of a reconstructed an ancient temple that was literally standing in Abraham's time. The steps and the form of the temple is built over the original temple itself.
- Though the pictures have been shown across the world in the last few years, the early discoveries and excavations of Ur are one of the great archeological stories, which I'll get to in a minutes.
- That aside, what it fascinating to me is the totally different view I got, and I trust you will also, of what Abraham left behind when God called him from Ur to go to Canaan.
- My idea and that of many others is that Abraham left a middle eastern area and lifestyle that was very similar to the one he was going to—sort of a pastoral wide-open, living in tents area to a similar one we see in all the Bible stories.

#### **But reality is.....**

- VERY DIFFERENT!
- A modern-day equivalent, would be like leaving the big-city excitement of Los Angeles to pitch a tent in the Mojave Desert.
- And the archeology shows us this reality.
- To understand what this means, let me tell you about the fascinating discovery of Ur, which is the story of a very dashing, Indiana Jones type character....

#### **Leonard Woolley, the English archeologist, who excavated UR from 1922-1934**

- Was a fascinating character who had been doing archeological work prior to WW1 in the Middle East, some with his assistant T.E. Lawrence, AKA Lawrence of Arabia.
- The two of them worked for British intelligence during WW1, but a ship Woolley was on was blown up and he spent the remainder of the war in a POW camp.
- After the war, he returned to the Middle East and in 1922 started work on Ur.
- This was about the same time the King Tut excavations were going on in Egypt.
- T.E. Lawrence wasn't the only interesting character involved with the excavation of Ur.

Agatha Christie, the famous mystery writer was another.

- In 1928, Agatha Christie took the Orient Express to Istanbul and then to Baghdad. In Iraq, she became friends with archaeologist Leonard Woolley and

his wife, who invited her to return to their dig in February 1930. On that second trip, she met archaeologist Max Mallowan, 13 years her junior and after about 7 months (described in some places as a “whirlwind romance”) they married. She shared his love of archeology and went on additional digs with him, helped him with his records, and his work inspired several of her novels. They lived happily together until her death at age 86.

Back to Woolley and how National Geographic describes his excavation of Ur

- *“In the 1920s and 1930s, (about the time the King Tut excavations were also going on) British archaeologist Leonard Woolley dug up some 35,000 artifacts from Ur*
- *Including the spectacular remains of a royal cemetery that included more than 2,000 burials and a stunning array of gold helmets, crowns, and jewelry that date to about 2600 B.C. . . .*
- *Although now situated on a flat and dry plain, Ur once was a bustling port on the Euphrates River laced with canals and filled with merchant ships, warehouses, and weaving factories. A massive stepped pyramid, or ziggurat, rose above the city and still dominates the landscape today.*
- *Ur emerged as a settlement more than 6,000 years ago . . . . But the real heyday came around 2000 B.C., when Ur dominated southern Mesopotamia after the fall of the Akkadian Empire. The sprawling city was home to more than 60,000 people and included quarters for foreigners as well as large factories producing wool clothes and carpets exported abroad. Traders from India and the Persian Gulf crowded the busy wharves, and caravans arrived regularly from what is now northern Iraq and Turkey.*
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/article/160311-ur-iraq-trade-royal-cemetery-woolley-archaeology>
- ***One of the 60,000 people of that time of the “real heyday” of the city was Abraham.***
- ***Now for more about it....***

#### **A large city, dominated by the temple**

As you can see from an aerial view of the site, the city was dominated by the large temple structure, the same one reconstructed and that many soldiers and tourists pose on.

#### **In addition to the area of the homes**

#### **A harp with bullhead and gold and stone statues**

#### **Artifacts of life including everyday pottery, household items and games**

#### **One of the most famous, headdress of Queen Puabi**

- Gold headdress, a diadem, huge gold earrings styled exactly like they are made today

#### **But not everything was beautiful**

- Woolley’s journals describe the royal tombs.
- In the tombs, along with the king and queen many were buried—warriors, attendants, male and female all richly dressed with gold and weapons presumably to serve their royalty in the afterlife.
- Animals hitched to carts were also found.
- What struck Woolley as unusual and he documented it in detailed drawings, was the orderly arrangement of bodies.
- It suggested they walked into caves voluntarily and died where they stood possibly poisoned (each held a little cup in their hands).
- Though some were found with their heads bashed in (perhaps those not willing to drink the poison).

#### **A later artist’s recreation of the last royal cemetery caves**

#### **A summary of the society of Ur**

- A rich, sophisticated, urban society. Haran, the city that he and his father next

went to was very much like it.

- A poly-theistic religion, where the huge temple dominated the skyline and life of the city.
- It was a religion one based on servitude and fear, where one had duties and obligations, but little record of a personal relationship with the deities.
- They believed in an afterlife, but one of dust and darkness—little hope or joy.
- **This is what Abraham was called out of.**

#### **In addition to a new place, God called him into a new kind of relationship**

- As I was reading about the religion of Ur and the overwhelming sense of fear and dread in it, I remembered that in James 2:23 it tells us Abraham was called ***“the friend of God.”***
- He also is referred to in this way in other places that talk about him.
- And remember Jesus, when he was about to leave his disciples in John 15:15 says, *I no longer call you servants, . . . . Instead, I have called you friends.*
- What an extraordinary privilege—how different than any other images of a relationship with God in the ancient world, and with many religions today where religion is defined primarily by fear.
- Abraham was called to a friendship with God.

#### **We have the location, now back to the main plot line of the Bible story**

- We are introduced to Abraham following the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. After God confuses the language of humanity and scatters the people, v.11 transitions from the broad story of many peoples into “this is the account of Shem.”
- Shem was one of the three sons of Noah and his lineage of begots goes through to
- <sup>24-25</sup> *Nahor was twenty-nine years old at the birth of his son Terah. He lived 119 years afterwards and had sons and daughters.*
- <sup>26</sup> *By the time Terah was seventy years old, he had three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran.*

• *Let's SKIP ahead to the next mention of Abraham*

#### **Abraham's story picks up here**

- Note: the names here are Abram and Sarai at this time, God will change them later.
- *God had told Abram, “Leave your own country behind you, and your own people, and go to the land I will guide you to. <sup>2</sup> If you do, I will cause you to become the father of a great nation; I will bless you and make your name famous, and you will be a blessing to many others.<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you; and the entire world will be blessed because of you.”*
- *<sup>4</sup> So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed him, and Lot went too; Abram was seventy-five years old at that time. <sup>5</sup> He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—the cattle and slaves he had gotten in Haran—and finally arrived in Canaan. . . .*
- *<sup>7</sup> Then Jehovah appeared to Abram and said, “I am going to give this land to your descendants.”*
- *Genesis 12:1-7*

#### **Before the promise is fulfilled years of life would pass**

- Abram gets to Canaan and not long after, there is a famine in the land. And as will be a pattern of Israel, they go to Egypt when there is trouble.
- The Sphinx, the Great Pyramids, and much of the greatness of Egypt is in place at this time.
- Abram heads down there, perhaps excited about a familiar urban area with many of the luxuries he hadn't seen since Ur.
- And here we have a truly ugly incident in Abram's life, where he asks Sarai to say she is his sister and not his wife and so in Genesis 12--

- <sup>4</sup> When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. <sup>15</sup> And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. <sup>16</sup> He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.
- Abram may have forsaken his wife, but God did not.
- God severely judges Pharaoh for taking her. Pharaoh confronts Abram and sends him back to Canaan.

#### **Back home in Canaan**

- Abram has a dream and great fear. God appears and Abram challenges God who has promised him a son and he doesn't have one. God repeats the promise that he will. But God also tells him his descendants will be enslaved for 400 years in Egypt.
- **"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Gen.15:6**
- But that didn't last. Abram and Sarai get impatient..... **They decide to help God out**
- Sarai comes up with the idea for her maidservant, Hagar, to provide Abram with a son.
- Hagar becomes and Ismael is born when Abraham was 86—life was not peaceful for the family.
- And the descendants of Ismael are still fighting the descendants of the promised son of Abraham, Isaac even today.
- Obvious challenge here is the danger of not waiting on God; of deciding to help God out if we don't think He's acting fast enough—we can make a very big mess.

#### **The years pass—Abram is now 99**

- **In Gen. 17:1, God says to him, "Walk before me and be perfect. (complete)"**
- Just because we mess up, get impatient, do stupid things, these actions do not cancel God's love or His plan for us.
- Abram is then given covenant of circumcision and both of their names are changed.
- Abram "exalted father" becomes **Abraham "father of multitudes"**
- Sarai "contentious" becomes **Sarah "princess"**
- Isaac is finally born; Ishmael is cast out but promised a legacy and many of the peoples who will cause problems for Israel are the result.
- One might assume now a time of peace and rest in life for Abraham.

#### **But then—Gen. 22:1 "After all this, God tested Abraham"**

- *Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."*
- He obeys, but at the last minute, God stops him and provides a ram Gen. 22:2
- WHY????
- **God knew, but Abraham did not—how deep his trust in God truly was.**
- And we see his faith expressed.
- **As one commentator said—the purpose of much testing is so we see our own hearts.**
- **You can't say God is all to you until God is all you have.**
- **We also cannot forget the witness of heaven (as with Job).**
- You are never too old for God's testing, never a place where you can coast until you meet Jesus.
- **NEVER the concept of retirement in the Bible.**

#### **After this test, God shares a new name of His with Abraham—Jehovah Jirah**

- **Jehovah Jireh means "The Lord will provide."** It doesn't mean goodies in life (though God graciously gives many to us).

- God first provided the Ram as a substitute sacrifice for Isaac but also as a picture of the coming sacrifice of Jesus
- Based on Abraham's actions, God again promises to bless him with many descendants, and not only him, but
- ***" . . . . through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."* Gen. 22:15**
- The ultimate fulfillment of that blessing will be with Abraham's offspring many years from then, Jesus.
- And Bible commentators have consistently said that this is an important principle for the entire Jewish race and for all of us—that we are always blessed, not just for ourselves, but to be a blessing.

**And that takes us back to the reason God Saves us by His grace, and why we go through, what we go through--remember Eph. 2:10**

- ***(by grace saved.....)For we are God's handiwork (poiēma), created in Christ Jesus to do (peripateō) good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***
- C.S. Lewis puts it this way in *The Problem of Pain*:
- *"We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again we come up against what I have called the "intolerable compliment." Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be.*
- *But over the great picture of his life—the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child—he will take endless trouble—and would doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and re-commenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumb-nail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less."*

**God's grace and his choosing has these implications**

- Sometimes God's calling may not seem like an honor—many people have more problems as a Christian than before.
- You may receive a calling you couldn't imagine
- The Christ-centered demands of everyday life and work (be kind, just, humble) might seem excessive—we truly are called to 24/7 discipleship.
- There are many things in life you may be called to say "no" to that those around you will tell you that you deserve, that YOU are the most important person around, demands that sound so true to today's world but that you cannot listen to if Jesus is truly your Lord, and you are his disciple.
- We are called to the Christian life based on grace, but this verse and Abraham's life reminds us to remember that grace is not based on what we do to be saved, but we need to put effort into what we do after we are saved to cooperate with God's purposes in our salvation.

**What Abraham's life teaches on this topic**

- ***James 2:14-17 Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?***

- .....<sup>21-24</sup> *Wasn't our ancestor Abraham "made right with God by works" when he placed his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar? Isn't it obvious that faith and works are yoked partners, that faith expresses itself in works? That the works are "works of faith"?*
- *The full meaning of "believe" in the Scripture sentence, "Abraham believed God and was set right with God," includes his action. **It's that weave of believing and acting that got Abraham named "God's friend."** Is it not evident that a person is made right with God not by a barren faith but by faith fruitful in works?*

**To finally answer the question of what makes a Hero of the faith**

- ***It is the "weaving together of faith and actions"***
- The actions we need to take will be different for each of us—
- Chances are however that they will involve disciplines in our lives, sacrifice of some sort, times of believing God when we can't see the outcome, and waiting far longer than we want for His promises to come true.
- There will be tangible actions to be done as well as difficult things to believe.
- But keep weaving together believing and acting—
- That is how to become a hero of the faith.
- And even more significant and precious, how to be and be called a friend of God.

**Check out the notes from this lesson, Bible reading schedules, related resources, and helpful links at [www.bible805.com](http://www.bible805.com)**