

Abraham: The Hero of the Faith

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[0 : 00] So we're coming this evening to the giant of the faith, Abraham.

! In the Arabic language, Abraham is referred to as Ibrahim, considered one of Allah's messengers in the Koran.

I remember when Anwar Sadat, the president of Egypt, after he forged a peace treaty with Israel, went over and visited that nation.

And when he arrived, he went up to a microphone that was set up on the tarmac. And I always remembered this.

He said, I have come in the name of our common father, Abraham. I thought that was kind of moving. He was later assassinated for signing that peace treaty.

[1 : 20] But this is what the scriptures say. I'm going to be reading Hebrews chapter 11, verses 8 to 19. By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.

And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith, he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Therefore, from one man and him as good as dead were born descendants, as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand in the seashore.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

[2 : 59] For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they'd been thinking of that land from which they'd gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his own son, of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Well, there's two ways to live out your life on this planet. You can live out your life by exercising genuine faith. And we all know that that's the faith that saves you and brings you into an eternal relationship with God through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

[4 : 26] The alternative is to live a life that is without true saving faith. And there are various descriptions of this type of life, but most would describe it as living by sight.

For most people, seeing is believing. If they cannot see it, then it must not be true. The vast majority of people throughout history and living today do so by sight and not by faith.

But the Christian way of life is the faith way of life. We've never seen God or Jesus or heaven or hell. Certainly haven't seen the Holy Spirit.

We never have met a single author of the Old or New Testament. But in spite of these truths, the genuine Christian lives his or her life by faith.

God has said it. Therefore, it must be true. And we will live by what God has said. Yet, we have placed our eternal destiny on those things we have never seen.

[5 : 47] That is the way God's people live. I remember years ago, there was a bumper sticker that said, God said it, and I believe it, and that settles it.

Well, actually, the better one is God said it, and that settled whether I believe it or not. You know, this type of living was beautifully reflected in the life of Abraham. In all respects, he reveals the totality of true faith. It doesn't mean he didn't have lapses. He did. But he is the father of the Jews.

But more than that, he is the father of the faithful. Abraham is the father of those who live by faith. This surely is what God meant when he told Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars.

There are a lot of stars. By the way, if you go out at night, out in the country where I live and look up, you can see about 5,000 stars. You think you're looking at infinity, but without a powerful telescope.

[7 : 00] The Jewish concept of Abraham's faith was quite different than what the Word of God teaches. They believed and taught that his works justified Abraham before God.

Theirs was a works righteousness. They went so far as to teach that God selected Abraham based upon his goodness. And because of that goodness, Abraham was chosen to be the founder of the chosen people.

Well, this view of Abraham is false. Sorry to say. The Hebrews maintained an unhealthy and unbiblical concept of Father Abraham.

That is where the writer of the book of Hebrews comes in. Writing to a Jewish audience, most of whom were probably unsaved.

They were searching. He's going to correct their mistaken beliefs concerning Abraham. He will show that Abraham was not righteous in himself, but was made righteous by the faith that the living God gave him.

[8 : 20] In other words, Abraham was saved by faith and he lived by faith. That's the same life all genuine Christians are to live here in this life.

Now, the Jewish people have always been right in looking to Abraham as their example. Unfortunately, they ascribed to Abraham what was not his to claim, namely salvation by works. God spoke to Abraham. Abraham believed God and God was therefore well pleased. So, what kind of faith did Abraham possess and how can we benefit from the example of a man who lived and died some 4,000 years ago?

Well, let's talk about his pilgrimage of faith. The first thing we shall look at is this Abraham's pilgrimage in verse 11 of Hebrews 11.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance.

[9 : 35] And he went out not knowing where he was going. Well, that's a measure of faith right there, isn't it? Now, Abraham was very comfortable with his life in Ur.

That's basically modern-day Iraq. Some Iran, some Iraq. He didn't have any plans to leave. He was equally comfortable with his worship and that of his people.

By the way, history records that the great patriarch, Abraham, started out as a pagan.

Not a very good testimony for Abe. People from that region worship the moon.

Go out in the desert, full moon comes up. You can worship the moon. But God had other designs on Abraham. He spoke to Abraham.

[10 : 43] And it was clear that Abraham was going to be leaving Ur. And when he left Ur, he didn't have any clue where he was going. And he really didn't know what was in store for him or what God had in store for him in the future.

But the Scriptures tell us that Abraham received a call from God. Not on a flip phone like I have. It is more accurately translated out of the Hebrew.

When he was being called. While God was speaking to Abraham about his journey he was to take, Abraham started packing his bags.

He knew this was the God of the Bible that he was talking to. Now we do not know precisely how long it took him to actually leave Ur.

But in his mind he is already gone. He is packing his bags. That is a word for obedient faith. So why did God choose Abraham over others in his village?

[11 : 58] God chose him for the same reason he chose you and I. Same reason. He wanted to. I can't expand on that or expound on that.

He wanted to. He wanted to choose Abraham and he did. Abraham listened when God spoke to him. Trusted in what God commanded him to do.

And obeyed by leaving on the journey. Now Abraham, he had a pilgrim faith. By the way, that is the same type of faith you and I are to have.

When God called us, he ordered us to leave our Ur. The place where we were. And I did. I was in Texas. I was glad to get to Oklahoma. Being from Oklahoma.

He brought a Texan with me though. What did God want us to leave behind in this new faith though? That's crucial. He called us and he wanted us to leave something behind.

[13 : 04] He wanted us to leave behind a life of sin and disobedience. We were to leave behind unbelief. Paul had this to say in Romans 12, verse 2.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what the will of God is.

That which is good and acceptable and perfect. I'd have to say probably the greatest obstacle in coming to Christ is giving up the old life.

People are comfortable with their old way of living. We immediately assume we have to sacrifice fun and enjoyment to become a Christian.

We cannot understand that until the new birth, God then gives us a new set of values, interests, and desires. That part of the new birth actually makes our new life in Christ enjoyable, exciting.

[14 : 21] We cannot see the new adventure laid out before us without spiritual eyes. It takes spiritual eyes to see it. And the only way we can ever have a pair of spiritual eyes is by being born again.

Born from above. Kierkegaard talked about this. He called Abraham's journey a blind leap of faith. That was Kierkegaard. That's why I don't read him. He said this, The world has a very strong attraction, especially when that is all we have known.

We are called upon to make a break with the old world and embrace the new world. This is exemplified in Abraham who left his home, although he did not know where he was going. Now I can live with that.

But this blind leap of faith, I love what Dr. Schaeffer said about that. He said, What do you think blind about it? He had seen God.

[15 : 25] He had visited with God. He had heard from God. He had received promises from God. And God was in the process of fulfilling those promises. Wasn't anything blind about it?

And next we have what is called the patience of faith. Second standard of faithful living. It takes patience. Hebrews 11, 9 and 10.

By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise, for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

And that leads to a question, how can a pilgrim ordered to leave exercise patience? Well, Abraham may have been the most patient man on earth.

I mean, after all, God ordered him to go on a journey to a city that no man had ever built. It was a place constructed by God.

[16 : 44] Abraham dwelt as a nomad living in tents till he finally arrived at the place God had constructed for him. And he did not arrive until he departed this life.

Only then did he see the home God had prepared for him. Abraham never saw the promises of God fulfilled in his lifetime.

That's obedient, patient living. His life was a life of waiting, waiting some more.

Can you imagine, I don't think I want to, but can you imagine living in a tent with your wife every day? Well, we've got to pull up stakes and we're going to go to another place.

Where are we going? I don't know. Now, Diane likes to camp out. I had enough of that in the service. I've had all the camping I want to do, but she likes to camp out as long as it's a log cabin with a jacuzzi at Big Cedar Lodge in Branson.

[17 : 56] That's her idea. That's the way I like to camp. Yeah, I mean, you know, nothing wrong with that, actually, except when you go up to pay the bill. One of the great men of patient faith that lived closer to our time than Abraham did was the missionary William Carey.

He ministered to a very lost pagan India. In 35 years, he had very few converts.

He admitted he was certain about one and maybe two. He lost his wife and child on the mission field.

He witnessed by day and went home empty-handed and wept for the lack of a move of God on India. He couldn't sleep.

He found himself a total failure. Couldn't sleep. So he began to translate the Bible into various Indian, not American Indian, over yonder, Indian dialects.

[19 : 15] And there's a lot of them. There's a lot of them. And it was very interesting because those Bible translations that William Carey did went out across India and are used to this very day by missionaries to that mysterious land.

Thousands have been saved in India and almost everyone can trace their spiritual lineage back to William Carey. By the way, my youngest son, Rob, is going there in February.

They're going to be preaching at a church over there. Remember when Sukumar came to visit us? Indian guy. Real dark. Neat guy. He invited Rob and his friend Jason who was with us that night to come over and give them a week of services and they're going to go.

William Carey's life appeals to me. William Carey is in heaven. Been there, what, 150 years? But he continues to produce fruit on earth through the efforts he expended in his life here.

His crown continues to grow. We need to find and participate in ministries that will outlive us. And some of us are closer to that time than others.

[20 : 58] I didn't mean to look at Mike. I'm older than Mike is. I'm older than Mike. But Abraham lived as an alien in a foreign land.

And we lived that same life and I'm feeling more alienated almost every day. I mean, there are things going on in this country that my dad, who was in World War II, my uncle who fought in World War II, they'd be appalled.

We are citizens of heaven and live out our lives in a world that is hostile to Christ and yet we are listed as ambassadors representing him until he returns or calls us home.

We're ambassadors for Christ. And then we're going to talk about the power of faith. Verses 11 and 12, By faith, even Sarah herself received ability to conceive a baby even beyond the proper time of life since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Therefore, there was born even of one man and him as good as dead at that as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

[22 : 38] Abraham was not of childbearing age, neither was Sarah. Faith may be the most powerful thing on earth.

One man has said that faith sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, touches the intangible and accomplishes the impossible. And the sad thing is that most faith is all talk and no action.

True faith, which is the kind of faith that God blesses and honors, is active and we can even say powerfully active. God uses as an example the birth of Isaac that was done by faith.

It was impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have a child. Please mark that thought down. It was not simply difficult, it was impossible.

Well beyond childbearing age. But through the faith of Abraham, Sarah conceived and bore a son.

[23 : 54] I say Abraham's faith because we have no outward expression of Sarah's faith found in the Bible. God blessed Abraham with a son.

And so doing, God was keeping a promise that He'd made to Abraham that He would be the father of many nations. And you remember the story, I didn't include it in my notes, but He decided one time He was going to have to help God out and Sarah agreed and she offered Abraham to lay with her handmaiden, Hagar.

Abraham didn't object. I don't read any objections in Scripture. But that was a lapse of faith. And you know what guys? You can read about it on the front pages every day.

They're fighting a war right now in Israel because of that lapse of faith. But God kept His promise to Abraham that He would be the father of many nations.

And I want to talk about the positiveness of faith and to do that I had to create a word, positiveness. It's not in the Webster's Dictionary. Verses 13-16 All these died in faith without receiving the promises but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

[25 : 47] But those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own and indeed if they'd been thinking of that country from which they went out they would have had

opportunity to return.

But as it is they desire a better country. That's a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never possessed the promised land. Technically speaking, if you read about the boundaries, no Jew has ever possessed the promised land.

It takes in a whole lot more than what's in the back of your Bible in the map section. Israel went to possess the land of Canaan some 500 years after the death of Jacob.

They all died in faith but without receiving the promises. God gave them the promises but no indication of how they would be fulfilled.

[27 : 05] now for them it was enough to have the promises. Why? They were men of faith. God said it, therefore they believed it.

They possessed the land, promised them from a great distance. That was true because their focus was on this better country that one in heaven made without human hands.

I wonder what it's going to be like when we get there. I'm kind of in John MacArthur's school where he says I'm going to be fascinated with golden streets and pearls that make up gates for about 20 minutes.

But he said what I'm going to be fascinated with is being in a place where there's no sin. That's going to be fascinating. Now my wife, let me tell you, she's going to look at every square inch.

I promise you. We go to museums, we get there when they open and we close them. That's Diane though. But these men of faith were quite content to be exiles and strangers on earth because they possessed a heavenly mindset.

[28 : 27] We should possess a heavenly mindset. This is not our home. what is the most positive thing about our faith?

It is that we shall be with the Lord forever. Can you imagine that? The only true satisfaction on this earth is that one day we're going to see Jesus as he is.

David understood this in the Psalms 27 4. One thing I've asked from the Lord that I shall seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord.

Job cried out with certainty that one day he would see God. The Lord Jesus said, I'm going away to prepare a place for us so that we may see him and dwell with him forever.

And he's going to come back for us. That's in stone. And then we have the proof of faith. we have proof of faith in the life of the patriarch Abraham.

[29 : 54] Verses 17 to 19. By faith Abraham when he was tested offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son.

It was to him to whom it was said in Isaac your descendants shall be called. He considered that God was able to raise people even from the dead from which he also received him back as a type. When he was taking them up Mount Moriah to sacrifice him, every step Abraham took had to be agony. And he kept thinking, how's God going to pull this off?

He's given me all these promises through Isaac. And now he wants me to kill him. And it says he finally figured out God is able to raise people from the dead.

And that's true. But he's also able to stop the hand of Abraham from killing his son. Abraham withheld nothing from God.

[31 : 05] He gave him his life and served him as a nomad searching for the celestial city not made with human hands. He was even willing to give God his son Isaac.

He withheld nothing. That is the proof of Abraham's faith. He was willing to sacrifice his own son because he knew that God had promised him heirs and thus God would be able to raise Isaac from the dead.

Now in regard to the sacrifice of Isaac we know that God stayed the hand of Abraham and did not require the life of the boy if he was a boy.

I sometimes think he was probably 33. But Isaac was as good as dead. In that regard we have a type of resurrection.

The proof of Abraham's faith was in his offer of Isaac. And that had to be the most difficult thing he would ever face.

[32 : 18] God had commanded him to offer his son as a sacrifice and Abraham set in motion to do just that. We've been called to perhaps a similar sacrifice but one difficult to achieve.

I've never been asked to sacrifice my son. I'm glad. But I haven't been successful in some of what I've been asked to sacrifice and that's to die to self.

We've all been instructed by God we need to die to self. this is what the Lord says in Matthew 16 24 Jesus said to his followers if anyone wishes to come after me he must deny himself take up his cross and follow me.

Listen again to the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 12 this time backing up to verse 1 therefore I urge you brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship.

John Bunyan spent years in jail in Bedford England. What was his crime? Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[33 : 54] I promise you we had people arrested today for doing that we had people killed in the world today for doing that I promise you. When my wife and I were in England several years ago we went to Bedford took a train we went to the train station and said we need two round trip tickets to Bedford and the ticket station says no one ever goes to Bedford but we went to Bedford and I stood in John Bunyan's pulpit we also visited the site and there was a plaque there and said this is where his prison cell was located but then it was a sidewalk in downtown Bedford but back then it was a prison while in prison Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress if you haven't read that get busy there will probably be a test in heaven in my opinion this is one of the two greatest what I would call non inspired pieces of literature ever produced

I think the other was Fox's Book of Martyrs but what grieved Bunyan the most about his imprisonment of some twelve years and sometimes they actually let him go home on weekends but what really grieved him he had to spend time away from his daughter Mary who was totally blind and he had a very special affection for her he was moved to write these hauntingly beautiful words I saw in this condition I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children yet thought I I must do it I must do it he had to serve God and then Bunyan wrote this the dearest idol I have known whatever that idol be help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee the patriarchs on whose work we are building held to five standards of faith their pilgrimies was in separation from the world their patience was in waiting for

God to work their power was in doing the impossible their positiveness was in focusing on God's eternal purpose and their proof of faith was in obedient sacrificial service and next time we're going to look at Jacob and Isaac sons and grandsons of Abraham Thank you.