

LIVING GODS WILL

Vessel of God

ABRAHAM



THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC BY PEDRO ORRENTE

Born: Ur, Chaldees

Died: Hebron, Canaan (at age 175)

Abraham had his name changed from **Abram** by **God**.

Abraham was given a son at **age 100**.

Abraham's father was **Terah**.

Abraham's nephew was **Lot**.

God established the **Abrahamic Covenant** with **Abraham**.

Aside from Moses, no Old Testament character is mentioned more in the New Testament than **Abraham**. James refers to **Abraham** as "God's friend" (**James 2:23**), a title used of no one else in Scripture. Believers in all generations are called the "children of Abraham" (**Galatians 3:7**). **Abraham's** importance and impact in redemptive history are clearly seen in Scripture.

The life of **Abraham** takes up a good portion of the Genesis narrative from his first mention in **Genesis 11:26** all the way to his death in **Genesis 25:8**. Although we know much about **Abraham's** life, we know little about his birth and early life. When we first meet **Abraham**, he is already 75 years old.

Genesis 11:28 records that **Abraham's** father, **Terah**, lived in Ur, an influential city in southern Mesopotamia situated on the Euphrates River about halfway between the head of the Persian Gulf and the modern-day city of Baghdad. We also learn that **Terah** took his family and set off for the land of Canaan but instead settled in the city of Haran in northern Mesopotamia (on the trade route from ancient Babylonia about halfway between Nineveh and Damascus).

Abraham's story really turns interesting at the start of **Genesis 12**. In the first three verses, we see the call of **Abraham** by **God**:

"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. 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. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'" (**Genesis 12:1-3**).

God calls **Abraham** out from his home in Haran and tells him to go to a land that He will show to him. **God** also makes three promises to **Abraham**: 1) The promise of a land of his own; 2) the promise to be made into a great nation; and 3) the promise of blessing. These promises form the basis for what will later be called the Abrahamic Covenant (established in **Genesis 15** and ratified in **Genesis 17**).

What really makes **Abraham** special is that he obeyed **God**. **Genesis 12:4** records that, after **God** called **Abraham**, he went “as the **LORD** had told him.”

The author of Hebrews uses **Abraham** as an example of faith several times, and refers specifically to this impressive act: “**By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going**” (**Hebrews 11:8**).

How many of us would leave behind everything that is familiar to us and just go without knowing our destination? The concept of family meant everything to a person living in the time of **Abraham**. In that time, family units were strongly knit; it was unusual for family members to live hundreds of miles apart from each other.

In addition, we’re not told anything about the religious life of **Abraham** and his family prior to his calling. The people of Ur and Haran worshipped the ancient Babylonian pantheon of gods, in particular the moon god, Sin, so **God** called **Abraham** out of a pagan culture. **Abraham** knew and recognized the call of **Yahweh**, the **LORD**, and obeyed willingly, not hesitantly.

Another example of **Abraham’s** life of faith is seen in the birth of his son, Isaac. **Abraham** and Sarah were childless (a real source of shame in that culture), yet **God** promised that **Abraham** would have a son (**Genesis 15:4**). This son would be the heir of **Abraham’s** vast fortune with which **God** blessed him, and, more importantly, he would be the heir of promise and the continuation of the godly line of Seth.

Abraham believed the promise of **God**, and that faith is credited to him as righteousness (**Genesis 15:6**). **God** reiterates His promise to **Abraham** in **Genesis 17**, and his faith is rewarded in **Genesis 21** with the birth of Isaac.

Abraham’s faith would be tested regarding his son, Isaac. In **Genesis 22**, **God** commands **Abraham** to sacrifice Isaac on the top of Mount Moriah. We don’t know how **Abraham** reacted internally to this command. All we see is **Abraham** faithfully obeying the **God** who was his shield (**Genesis 15:1**) and who had been extraordinarily gracious and good to him up to this point.

As with the earlier command to leave his home and family, **Abraham** obeyed (**Genesis 22:3**). We know the story ends with **God** holding back **Abraham** from sacrificing Isaac, but imagine how **Abraham** must have felt. He had been waiting decades for a son of his own, and the **God** who promised this child to him was about to take him away. The point is that **Abraham’s** faith in **God** was greater than his love for his son, and he trusted that even if he sacrificed Isaac, **God** was able to bring him back from the dead (**Hebrews 11:17-19**).

To be sure, **Abraham** had his moments of failure and sin (as we all do), and the Bible doesn’t shrink from relating them. We know of at least two occasions in which **Abraham** lied regarding his relationship to Sarah in order to protect himself in potentially hostile lands (**Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18**). In both these incidents, **God** protects and blesses **Abraham** despite his lack of faith.

We also know that the frustration of not having a child wore on **Abraham** and Sarah. Sarah suggested **Abraham** have a child with Sarah's servant, Hagar, on her behalf; **Abraham** agreed (**Genesis 16:1-15**).

The birth of Ishmael not only demonstrates the futility of **Abraham's** folly and lack of faith but also the grace of **God** (in allowing the birth to take place and even blessing Ishmael).

Interestingly, **Abraham** and Sarah were called **Abram** and Sarai at that time. But when Ishmael was thirteen years old, **God** gave **Abram** a new name along with the covenant of circumcision and a renewed promise to give him a son through Sarai, to whom **God** also gave a new name (**Genesis 17**). **Abram**, meaning "high father," became **Abraham**, "father of a multitude."

Indeed, **Abraham** had many physical descendants, and all who put their faith in **God** through **Jesus** are also counted as spiritual heirs of **Abraham** (**Galatians 3:29**). The "Father of the Faithful" had his moments of doubt and disbelief, yet he is still exalted among men as an example of the faithful life.

One obvious lesson to draw from **Abraham's** life is that we are to live a life of faith. **Abraham** could take his son Isaac up to Mount Moriah because he knew **God** was faithful to keep His promises. **Abraham's** faith wasn't a blind faith; his faith was a settled assurance and trust in the **One** who had proved **Himself** faithful and true. If we were to look back on our own lives, we would see the hand of **God's** providence all over it.

God doesn't have to visit us accompanied by angels or speak from burning bushes or part the sea waters to be active in our lives. **God** is superintending and orchestrating the events of our lives. Sometimes it may not seem that way, but **Abraham's** life is evidence that **God's** presence in our lives is real. Even **Abraham's** failures demonstrate that **God**, while not protecting us from the consequences of our sin, graciously works **His** will in us and through us; nothing we do will thwart **His** plan.

Abraham's life also shows us the blessing of simple obedience. When asked to leave his family, **Abraham** left. When asked to sacrifice Isaac, **Abraham** "rose up early the next morning" to do so. From what we can discern from the biblical narrative, there was no hesitation in **Abraham's** obedience.

Abraham, like most of us, may have agonized over these decisions, but, when it was time to act, he acted. When we discern a true call from **God** or we read **His** instructions in **His** Word, we must act. Obedience is not optional when **God** commands something.

We also see from **Abraham** what it looks like to have an active relationship with **God**. While **Abraham** was quick to obey, he did not shy away from asking **God** questions. **Abraham** believed that **God** would give him and Sarah a son, but did wonder at how it could be (**Genesis 17:17-23**).

In **Genesis 18** we read the account of **Abraham** interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah. **Abraham** affirmed that **God** was holy and just and could not fathom **Him** destroying the righteous with sinners. He asked **God** to spare the sinful cities for the sake of fifty righteous and continued to work the number down until ten.

Ultimately there were not ten righteous men in Sodom, but **God** did spare **Abraham's** nephew Lot and his family (**Genesis 19**). It is interesting that **God** revealed **His** plans to **Abraham** before destroying the cities and that **He** was not taken aback by **Abraham's** questions. **Abraham's** example here shows us what it looks like to interact with **God** regarding **His** plans, intercede for others, **trust God's** justice, and **submit to His will**.

Abraham's lapses of faith, particularly in regards to the situation with Hagar and Ishmael, show us the folly of trying to take matters into our own hands. **God** had promised a son to **Abraham** and Sarah, but, in **their impatience**, their plan to provide an heir to **Abraham** backfired. First, conflict between Sarah and Hagar arose, and later on conflict between Ishmael and Isaac.

Ishmael's descendants ended up becoming bitter enemies of the people of **God**, as we later learn in the Old Testament narrative, and so it continues to this day in the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. We cannot fulfill the will of **God** in our own strength; our efforts ultimately end up creating more problems than they solve.

This lesson has wide-ranging applications in our lives. If **God** has promised to do something, we must be **faithful** and **patient** and **wait** for **Him** to accomplish it in **His** own timing.

Theologically speaking, **Abraham's** life is a living example of the doctrine of **sola fide**, justification by faith alone. Twice the apostle Paul uses **Abraham** as an example of this crucial doctrine. In **Romans**, the entire fourth chapter is devoted to illustrating justification by faith through the life of **Abraham**.

A similar argument is made in the book of **Galatians**, where Paul shows from **Abraham's** life that the Gentiles are heirs with the Jews to the blessings of **Abraham** through faith (**Galatians 3:6-9, 14, 16, 18, 29**). This goes back to **Genesis 15:6**, "**Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.**"

Abraham's faith in the promises of **God** was sufficient for **God** to declare him righteous in **His** sight, thereby proving the principle of **Romans 3:28**. **Abraham** did nothing to earn justification. His trust in **God** was enough.

We see in this the workings of **God's** grace very early in the Old Testament. The gospel didn't start with the life and death of **Jesus** but goes all the way back to **Genesis**. In **Genesis 3:15**, **God** made a promise that the "**seed of the woman**" would crush the head of the serpent. **Theologians believe this is the first mention of the gospel in the Bible.**

The rest of the Old Testament chronicles the outworking of the gospel of **God's** grace through the line of promise beginning with Seth (**Genesis 4:26**). The calling of **Abraham** was just another piece in the story of redemption. Paul tells us that the gospel was preached beforehand to **Abraham** when **God** told him "**all nations will be blessed through you**" (**Galatians 3:8**).

Another thing we learn from **Abraham's** life is that faith is not hereditary. In **Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8, and John 8:39**, we learn that it is not enough to be physically descended from **Abraham** to be saved. The application for us is that it is not enough to be raised in a Christian home; we do not enter into fellowship with **God** or gain entry into heaven based on someone else's faith.

God is not obligated to save us simply because we have an impeccable Christian pedigree. Paul uses **Abraham** to illustrate this in **Romans 9**, where he says not all who descended from **Abraham** were elected unto salvation (**Romans 9:7**). **God** sovereignly chooses those who will receive salvation, but that salvation comes through the same faith that **Abraham** exercised in his life.

Finally, we see that James uses the life of **Abraham** as an illustration that faith without works is dead (**James 2:21**). The example he uses is the story of **Abraham** and Isaac on Mount Moriah. Mere assent to the truths of the gospel is not enough to save. **Faith must result in good works of obedience that show a living faith.**

The faith that was enough to justify **Abraham** and count him as righteous in **God's** eyes (**Genesis 15**) was the very same faith that moved him into action as he obeyed **God's** command to sacrifice his son Isaac. **Abraham** was **justified by his faith, and his faith was proved by his works.**

In the final analysis, we see that **Abraham** was an exemplary individual, not so much in his piety or perfect life (he had his shortcomings, as we saw), but because his life illustrates so many truths of the Christian life. **God called Abraham** out of the millions of people on the earth to be the object of **His** blessings.

God used **Abraham** to play a pivotal role in the outworking of the story of redemption, culminating in the birth of **Jesus**. **Abraham** is a living example of faith and hope in the promises of **God** (**Hebrews 11:8-10**). **Our lives should be so lived that, when we reach the end of our days, our faith, like Abraham's, will remain as an enduring legacy to others.**

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE

James 2:23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

Galatians 3:7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

Genesis 25:8 Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.

Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

Genesis 22:1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Galatians 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Genesis 18:16 Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"



ABRAHAM AND THE THREE ANGELS BY JAN VICTORS