

## Abraham, Father of Faith

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*Photo Oakland, California, date unknown*

"By faith Abraham obeyed." (Hebrews 11:8)

Abraham was 75 years old when the Lord told him, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Gen. 12:1) And so this old man, with nothing on his mind except following the command of God, with his wife and his brother's son, packed up their belongings on camels and set forth like gypsies, traveling on until the Lord told him to stop. To a couple with no heir and not expecting any, the Lord promised the land presently occupied by the Canaanites to their descendants.

Again and again, the Lord showed His love for Abram: "All the land which you see I will give to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted." (Gen. 13:15-16) "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." (Gen. 15:1)

From this Biblical account, we might get the impression that God just blessed Abram and loved him unconditionally. But this was not so. God blessed Abram on the basis of his devotion and love for God. He had cut himself off from his family, his native land, his material possessions, to go to the unknown land of God's choice. His whole life was a life of self-denial and righteousness. "But he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land," the Bible tells us. (Heb. 11:9) When God said, "Go," he went. When God said, "Stop," he stopped. When God said, "Do it," he did it.

Life wasn't all that easy in the new land for a man wandering without a real home, living wherever he pitched his tent. Times of famine came, and the couple traveled on at God's direction, to Egypt. Here new trials came. Abram was so dedicated to doing God's will that he was even willing to give up his beloved wife. Unsure of his reception in Pharaoh's court because of Sarai's beauty, he asked her to introduce him as her brother. Quietly he endured this humiliation until God intervened with the Pharaoh and the Pharaoh sent them on their way with much cattle, silver, and gold.

While some theologians wonder why it was necessary, from the viewpoint of the Divine Principle we can understand that this incident was necessary to restore the lost position of Adam's family before Abram can fully assume his role as a central figure in God's dispensation. The archangel took Eve while she and Adam were still in a brother-sister relationship, still immature. To reverse this situation, Pharaoh (symbolizing Satan) took Abram's wife from him while she was in the position of his sister. By taking her

back as his wife, he restores that pattern. His nephew Lot symbolized mankind and their material possessions symbolized creation, all claimed back from Satan.

Abram and Sarai must have been an unusual couple, united in their faith, for her to accompany him on his lonely path. How much more it must have hurt them not to have children, so that when God promised great rewards to Abram, all he could think of to ask for was an heir. This God promised to him: "as numerous as the stars in heaven, so shall your descendants be. And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." (Gen. 15:5-6)

Abram had by now proven his faithfulness to the point where God could ask him to make the symbolic sacrifice of a heifer, she goat, ram, turtledove, and young pigeon. These he cut in half, but he did not cut the dove and pigeon in half and birds of prey came down to claim them. For this the Lord told Abram that his descendants would be slaves for 400 years in a land that was not theirs.

What does all this mean? Abram was chosen to stand in the position of Adam and his family, as well as Noah and his family. Therefore, the sacrifice which he performed had to finally restore those things which were intended to be restored through the offerings of Cain and Abel and the building of the ark. His symbolic offering of the dove, ram and heifer had a very special meaning. These three offerings symbolized the whole universe which was created to reach perfection through three stages of growth. Abram would have restored all three generations (Adam, Noah, and himself) at once by successfully completing his offering. By failing to cut the birds in two, the whole offering was lost.

God had told Abram to cut the offerings in half in order to separate good from evil, which had been His purpose since Adam became the origin of good and evil through the Fall. Cain and Abel had failed to restore the sovereignty of goodness in Adam's family. The flood judgment in Noah's time had also been meant to separate good and evil. Abram's failure to completely cut the offering in two means that these two previous failures were not restored, nor could Abram set up the symbolic condition of separating the world of goodness from the world under Satan's dominion in order for God to be able to claim it. Instead, the birds of prey, symbolizing Satan, were able to invade the sacrifice. Everything that was to have been restored by the symbolic offering was lost. That is why God later put Abram's descendants into slavery for 400 years in Egypt.

The years passed. Abram was growing older and losing hope of ever getting the son he had been promised. It was not until he was 99 years old that God renewed His promise of a son, pledging that Sarah would bear a child "at this season next year," and establishing circumcision as the sign of the covenant between Himself and Abraham, whom He had just renamed. Anxious to fulfill God's commands, Abraham performed circumcisions that very day on all his family and followers.

Again the Lord returned, accompanied by two angels. Here we get a feel for what Abraham's lifestyle was like. He was considered a wealthy man, yet his life was certainly austere by contemporary standards. He was resting in the doorway of his tent to escape from the relentless mid-day heat when the angels approached. He invited them to rest under a tree, then rushed off to urge Sarah to make ready some fine meal for cakes, to the herd to pick out a calf for the slaughter. "Then he took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate." (Gen. 18:8)

But before the blessing of a child could be fulfilled, God again tested Abraham and Sarah, this time sending them to the land of Abimelech, king of Gerar, where the pattern that had taken place in Egypt was repeated, again successfully. Sarah did conceive, and bore Abraham a son at the age of 100. "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised." (Heb. 11: 11) And Sarah was glad, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." (Gen. 21:7)

God had a special mission in mind for Abraham. He had tried twice before to establish a family through whom He could begin His work of restoring mankind after the Fall, but Cain and Abel, then Noah's family had not been able to fulfill their responsibilities. In the principle of creation, three is the number of completion, of perfection. With Abraham, God could not fail. He had prepared him, chosen him to establish that vital foundation of faith without which the work of restoration could not begin. Throughout his life, Abraham had proven himself to be a faithful, loyal servant. But he had made one mistake-he had failed in the offering. How could God continue to use him?

In order to complete his mission, Abraham was asked to make a second sacrifice. He had waited expectantly all his life for a son to inherit the promises the Lord had made to him. Now God asked him to sacrifice Isaac. But we don't find one word of question or one hint of anguish in the Biblical account. "So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him." (Gen. 22:3) Neither did Isaac offer one word of complaint, and because they were united in their faith, God stopped Abraham in the very act of raising his hand with the knife, and renewed His blessings

and His promises.

Thus Abraham secured for himself the title of father of faith for all generations to come. "The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.... That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants- not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations." (Rom. 4: 13, 16) The promise, then, is given to all those who share the faith of 'Abraham. Paul's letter to the Galatians goes one step further: "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to off springs,' referring to many; but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' which is Christ." (Gal. 3:16) Laws were made afterward, because of transgressions, "till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made." (Gal. 3: 19) Paul explains, the law was our guideline until Christ came but is no longer necessary, for through our faith in Christ we are all sons of God. "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." (Gal. 3:29)

If we are heirs to the faith of Abraham, then are we ready to be tested, ready to prove our unquestioning obedience and faith, ready to put God's will above our own, God's desires before our own? Are you ready to go when He says "Go." Are you ready to stay if He says "Stay." Are you ready to do it, if He says "Do." Are you ready to die if He says, "Die."