

ABRAHAM

Introduction

Abraham is a key biblical figure who lived 4,000 years ago. In the Old Testament, Abraham was the beginning of the Hebrew family of faith, the nation of Israel, and was identified by God as the *father of many nations* (**Genesis 17:3-4**). In the New Testament, Abraham is identified as the *father of faith* through whom the Israel of the Bible, ultimately the Church, came to fulfillment in persons from anywhere in the world through faith in Jesus Christ. Abraham is highlighted as an example of what faith is all about (**Romans 4:1-3; Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19; James 2:20-24**). Those who in faith would believe the Word and promises of God are called *children of Abraham* (**Galatians 3:6-9**). Abraham's story and his impact are woven throughout the pages of the biblical narrative.

Abraham's Story

He did not begin his life as Abraham. At birth, he was named Abram, which means 'exalted father' (**Genesis 17:5**). We know little about his early life. Abram hailed from the land of his father, Terah, from Ur of the Chaldeans, a Sumerian city near the Persian Gulf in the Euphrates Valley. Abram had a beautiful wife named Sarai who, for many years of their marriage, was unable to bear children. Abram was 75 years old and Sarai in her mid-60s when they first appear in Genesis 11.

God spoke to Abram and extended a challenging request – "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**). Abram must have already had strong faith in God because he did exactly what he was asked to do, even though he had no clue where he would end up. God led him and his family to Canaan where they settled initially.

A severe famine in the land caused them to travel to Egypt where they settled for a while, thrived, and ultimately became very wealthy. In time, they moved northeastward, back to Canaan where God had called them. God told Abram to look

at the land all around him and said that all of it was his (**Genesis 13:14-17**). Subsequently, God appeared to Abram in a vision and promised abundance and blessing. Abram told God, (but) “you have given me no children” (**Genesis 15:2-3**) to inherit all of this great reward. God then promised Abram he would father a son and that, through him, his offspring would be like the unnumberable stars of the heavens (**Genesis 15:4-5**).

Abram and Sarai did not see the fulfillment of that promise right away and became impatient. Sarai said to Abram, “the Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her” (**Genesis 16:2**). Abram agreed and Sarai’s Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, conceived. Even while she was pregnant, Hagar began to despise Sarai. The enmity between them grew to the point that Hagar fled from their presence. But the Lord appeared to Hagar and said, “go back to your mistress and submit to her . . . I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count” (**Genesis 16:9-10**). Hagar obeyed, returned to Abram’s home, and gave birth to a son whose God-given name would be, Ishmael (*God hears*). Though God would bless Ishmael and his descendants because of Abram, Ishmael was not the chosen heir God had promised Abram. That heir would ultimately come through his union with his wife, Sarai, and be named Isaac. In **Genesis 17:1-22**, God restated His covenant with Abram when he was 99 years old:

“I . . . will greatly increase your numbers” (**v. 2**),

“you will be the father of many nations” (**v. 4**),

“no longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham”
(father of a multitude) (**v. 5**),

“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come” (**v. 7**),

“the whole land of Canaan . . . I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God” (**v. 8**).

God then changed Sarai’s name to Sarah (*princess*) and said to Abraham, “I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her” (**Genesis 17:16**). Abraham and Sarah both laughed when they heard God promise them a son in their old age. Abraham was now 99 and Sarah was 90. Despite their amusement, God’s Word became reality. They brought a son into the world and named him Isaac, the one through whom all the promises made earlier to Abraham would be realized.

The results of Abraham and Sarah's union were profound and continued God's plan of salvation. Isaac would father twin sons – Jacob and Esau. Jacob was God's chosen and, after wrestling with an angel of God in a dream, was renamed Israel (meaning **God contends**). Israel had 12 sons, heads of the 12 tribes of Israel, the great chosen nation of promise chronicled in the Old Testament. Unfortunately, the nation of Israel would repeatedly disobey the Law God gave them for kingdom life, so much so that, in God's eyes, the sacrifices of animals through a human priesthood were no longer able to atone for the sins of Israel.

After many centuries, God came to this world in the person of Jesus, the Messiah who would forever atone for the sins of humanity. The Old Covenant of the Law, embodied in the Hebrew people and their priesthood, and centered in God's presence in the city of Jerusalem, came to a devastating end in 70 A.D. with the utter destruction of Jerusalem. The New Covenant of grace through faith in Jesus Christ rapidly expanded God's presence and kingdom to all (Jew and Gentile) who received Jesus as Savior and Lord. This growing *household of God* is the Church, called the New Jerusalem, now comprised of persons of faith, like Abraham, "from every nation, tribe, people, and language" (**Revelation 7:9; 21:9-10**). The Israel of God's heart is now "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God . . . (to) declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (**1 Peter 2:9**).

Abraham's Faith

Scripture says that "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (**Hebrews 11:1**). Likely during his lifetime and definitely in all generations of the world since, Abraham is recognized as an example of what faith is all about. Here are key reasons for this honor:

At God's request, he left home and everything familiar to him, traveling to an unknown destination that ended up in Canaan, 650 miles away through harsh desert. That would be like flying halfway around the world today. "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. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (**Hebrews 11:8-10**). Abraham could not see the end result, but he was certain of the outcome because God promised it. After his death, the promise would take over a thousand years across numerous generations to find its completion in Jesus, the Messiah. And the promise continues to become reality today.

With the anointing of God, he fathered Ishmael at 75 and Isaac at 99. “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so, from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore” (**Hebrews 11:11-12**). Childless couples were a source of shame in ancient cultures. Abraham and Sarah were able to discount the shame and trust God, even though they initially thought His promise was laughable. God can do the impossible for anyone who has faith even if what God asks seems humorous.

When instructed to do so, he was willing to sacrificing his only son, Isaac. “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death” (**Hebrews 11:17-19**). Of all the things God asked Abraham to do, this had to be the most challenging. It had to tear up Abraham internally, but he had faith in the One who had been so gracious and good to him prior to this test. In the end, God provided a ram to substitute for Isaac, a foreshadowing of God providing his only son, Jesus, as the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Abraham and others in the Bible who had exemplary faith are highlighted in **Hebrews chapter 11**, which could be titled **Heroes of Faith**, another article in Resources.

Faith is a crucial and necessary component of our relationship with God. Abraham’s faith proved that. Note that at the center of Abraham’s faith was action. God asked, Abraham believed and acted, and God always came through. “**And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only . . . for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead**” (**James 2:23-26, KJV**) (**emphasis added**).

Abraham’s Legacy

Abraham is recognized by three world religions:

Judaism, for originating the divine charter of the Hebrew people to the land of Israel.

Islam, for their lineage through Hagar and Ishmael.

Christianity, for all the reasons stated in this article. Abraham is mentioned 72 times in the New Testament, more than any other Old Testament character. He is the supreme example of the faith we should have. That is why believers can call themselves **children of Abraham**. “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Understand, then, that those who believe are **children of Abraham**. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (**Galatians 3:6-9**) (*emphasis added*).

Gentile believers are blessed through Jesus, who is genealogically the **seed of Abraham**. “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his *seed*. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your *seed*,” meaning one person, who is Christ” (**Galatians 3:16**) (*emphasis added*). “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s *seed*, and heirs according to the promise” (**Galatians 3:26-29**).

Interestingly, the sons of Abraham – Ishmael and Isaac, who were at the center of contention in their family thousands of years ago, became the faces of two groups of people on this earth who are still in contention today – followers of Islam through their progenitor, Ishmael . . . and Jews through Isaac, his lineage, and the nation of Israel.

Final Thoughts

Abraham was a man of faith but, like all people of faith, was not a perfect man. Twice, Abraham passed off Sarah as his sister, to save himself and his family. He did this once with Pharaoh in Egypt (**Genesis 12:10-20**) and again with Abimelech, king of Gerar in the Negev Desert (**Genesis 20:1-18**). There may be some justification for his actions, but his deception was not the best behavior. Still, he was used in a mighty way as a vessel for God’s will on this earth. Most believers can relate to Abraham in his faith and in his failures. Despite our weaknesses at times, God uses, for His purposes, every individual who is willing to step out in faith.

This is an introduction on the subject of **Abraham**. Here are a few other resources you may wish to explore on the subject:

Books

Who's Who in the Old Testament, Joan Comay, 1971, pp. 28-33

Who's Who in the Bible, Reader's Digest Biographical Dictionary, 1994, pp. 16-25

Living in the Gap Between Promise and Reality: the gospel according to Abraham, Iain M. Duguid, 2015, available through www.christianbooks.com

Our Father Abraham: Jewish roots of the Christian Faith, Marvin R. Wilson, 1989, available through www.christianbooks.com

Websites

[Who was Abraham in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)

[Abraham in the Bible - 4 Things You May Not Know About Him \(crosswalk.com\)](#)

[How many sons did Abraham have? | GotQuestions.org](#)

[What Does the Bible Say About Abraham? \(openbible.info\)](#)

[Who is Abraham in the Bible and Why is He Important? - Beliefnet](#)

[20 Bible verses about Blessings, To Abraham \(knowing-jesus.com\)](#)