

## Reflection on Abraham – Gill Gough

Abraham, (known in Hebrew as Avraham) originally called Abram or in Hebrew Avram was the first of the Hebrew Patriarchs and a figure revered by the three great religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

According to the biblical book of Genesis, Abraham left Ur in Mesopotamia, because God called him to found a new nation in an undesignated land that he later learned was Canaan. He obeyed unquestionably the commands of God, from whom he received repeated promises and a covenant that his “seed” would inherit the land.

In Judaism, the promised offspring is understood to be the Jewish people descended from Abraham’s son, Isaac, born of his wife Sarah.

Similarly, in Christianity, the genealogy of Jesus is traced to Isaac, and Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac is seen as a foreshadowing of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. In Islam, it is Ishmael, Abraham’s firstborn son, born of Hagar, who is viewed as the fulfilment of God’s promise and the prophet Muhammed is his descendant.

I remember a very proud Jewish lady in one of the residential homes I visited. She was delighted to tell me she was not just Jewish she was a Jewess! She kindly listened to the service, participated in prayers to God but it was not until I talked about Abraham that she came alive and really related to the scriptures. We then established a great relationship talking about the Old Testament, especially Abraham.

So today I will concentrate on what we can glean of his life from the Bible.

The Bible is relatively silent on the first few decades of Abraham’s life, telling us that he was born in Ur the son of Terah (Genesis Ch 11 from v26) and was originally called Abram meaning “the Father is Exalted”, and it was not until much later when he was married that he was called Abraham meaning “the Father of Many Nations”. He married Sarai who was barren, having no children later called Sarah. Terah his father took his family from Ur to the land of Canaan but when they came to Haran they settled there. Terah, lived to the age of 205 and he died in Haran.

So what was he like, this Abraham the founding father of the Jewish nation? He was a man of great faith and obedience to the will of God. The Lord changed his name to Abraham as a symbol of the covenant promise to multiply his descendants into a great nation that God would call his own.

Prior to this God had already visited Abraham when he was 75, promising to bless him and make his offspring into an abundant nation of people. All Abraham had to do was obey God and do what God told him to do.

God's covenant with Abraham was established and it was also Abraham's first test from God, since he and his wife Sarai (later changed to Sarah) were still without children. Abraham demonstrated remarkable faith and trust, immediately leaving his home the moment God called him to go to the unknown territory of Canaan some 400 miles south. Accompanied by his wife and nephew Lot, Abraham prospered as a rancher and shepherd, as he made his new home surrounded by pagans in the Promised Land of Canaan. Still childless however, Abraham's faith wavered in subsequent times of testing.

When famine struck, rather than waiting on God for provision, he packed up and took his family to Egypt. Once there and fearing for his life, he lied about his beautiful wife's identity, claiming she was his unmarried sister. Pharaoh, finding Sarah desirable, took her from Abraham in exchange for generous gifts, to which Abraham raised no objections. You see, as a brother, Abraham would be honoured by Pharaoh, but as a husband his life would have been in danger. Once again Abraham lost faith in God's protection and provision. Abraham's foolish deception backfired and God kept his covenant promise intact. The Lord inflicted disease on Pharaoh and his family, revealing to him that Sarah must be returned to Abraham untouched.

More years passed during which Abraham and Sarah questioned God's promise. At one point they decided to take matters into their own hands. With Sarah's encouragement, Abraham slept with Hagar, his wife's Egyptian maid servant. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, but he was not the promised son. God returned to Abraham when he was 99 to remind him of the promise and reinforce his covenant with Abraham. A year later, Isaac was born to Sarah and Abraham.

God brought more tests to Abraham including a second incident when Abraham lied about Sarah's identity, this time to King Abimelech. But Abraham underwent the biggest testing of his faith when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, the promised heir. (Genesis 22)

"Take your son, your only son, yes Isaac, whom you love so much and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will show you."

This time Abraham obeyed, fully prepared to slay his son, while fully trusting God to either resurrect Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11 v17-19) or provide a substitute sacrifice. At the last minute God intervened and provided the necessary ram.

The death of Isaac would have contradicted every promise God had made to Abraham, so his willingness to perform the ultimate sacrifice of killing his son is probably the most strikingly dramatic example of faith and trust in God found in the entire Bible, apart from Jesus.

God tested Abraham severely in more than one instance, and Abraham demonstrated extraordinary faith, trust and obedience to the will of God. He was well respected and successful in his occupation. He also had the courage to face a powerful enemies. However, impatience, fear and a tendency to lie under pressure were a few of his weaknesses revealed in the biblical account of his life.

So what can we learn from this great Patriarch.

- He is the father of us all (Romans v16)
- The Lord visited him on several occasions.
- The Lord spoke to him several times, once in a vision and once in the form of three visitors.
- Abraham was very hospitable to family, friends and strangers.

And what can we learn about God from his relationship with Abraham?

- God can and will use us in spite of our weaknesses.
- God will even stand by us and rescue us from our foolish mistakes.
- God will use us in his own time
- God does not consider us too old.
- God's calling to us and his purpose for us may take time and come to us in stages.
- God keeps his promises.
- We need only to trust, have faith and be patient!

Amen