

Bible People

2. Abraham

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God's Friend

Aside from Moses, no Old Testament character is mentioned more in the New Testament than Abraham. James refers to Abraham as "God's friend", a title used of no one else in Scripture. Believers in all generations are called the "children of Abraham". 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 all the way to his death in Genesis 25. When we first meet Abraham, he is already 75 years old.

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. What really makes Abraham special is that he obeyed God.

Abraham was an exemplary individual, not so much in his piety or perfect life (he had his shortcomings), 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.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **By faith** he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. **By faith** Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore... **By faith** Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. *Hebrews 11:8-12;17-19.*



Things we learn from Abraham's Life...

We 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. We read the account of Abraham interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah. 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 life is **a living example of the doctrine of justification by faith alone**. Paul shows from Abraham's life that the Gentiles are heirs with the Jews to the blessings of Abraham through faith. Abraham's faith in the promises of God was sufficient for God to declare him righteous in His sight. Abraham did nothing to earn justification. His trust in God was enough. And faith is not hereditary. In the Gospels 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.

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 neighbours. We cannot fulfil 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.

Finally, we see that James uses the life of Abraham as **an illustration that faith without works is dead**. 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 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.