

Sent: Wednesday, November 29, 2017 5:42 PM  
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on the Life of Abraham!

Last nite we walked through the life of Abraham--recorded in Genesis 12-25, and highlighted in Hebrews 11:8-12 and 17-19--in anticipation of our upcoming study (from Romans 4, on December 9th), where the apostle Paul uses Abraham as example of how a person is "justified by faith alone"!

It all begins in Genesis 12:1-3 (about 2000 B.C.) where the Lord said to Abram: "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the ones who curse you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed!" And verse 4 says, "So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him!"

So how did Abraham first learn about the true God (Elohim)? And why did he respond to His call and revelation? Abram's father was Terah, 10 generations (427 years) removed from Shem, one of the three sons of Noah (along with Ham and Japheth), the so-called "godly line" of Noah who, after the flood, offered sacrifices to God on the altar (Gen. 8:20). Shem was there--and, believe it or not, was still living at the time of Abraham (you can check the numbers!). And it's likely that Abraham may have heard from him about the story of Adam and Eve, and of God's deliverance of Noah and his family from the flood, and of Noah's act of worship in response to God's faithfulness! Just speculation on my part! But he did respond in faith to God's call!

He first left the city of Ur, which at the time (about 2000 B.C.) --according to Haley's Handbook--was the "leading city of the world," and the capital of the Chaldean Empire, in ancient Mesopotamia! It was in the so-called "fertile crescent," not far from where the Garden of Eden is thought to have been located! But it was also a city of many gods and goddesses--and (according to Joshua 24:2) --his countrymen, even his father Terah, were caught up in idolatry!

Abram, along with his father Terah, his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot (whose father had died in Ur) traveled 600 miles northwest following the Euphrates River to Haran--a "crossroads trading town" in northern Mesopotamia (modern day Syria). He stayed there until his father Terah died, and then received a second call from God (Acts 7:2), and "set out for the land of Canaan (400 southwest) ...passing through the land as far as the site of Shechem" (30 miles north of what would someday--and in God's timing--become Jerusalem)! And it was there that God appeared to him, and said: "To your descendants I will give this land"! And so, Abram "built there an altar to the Lord"! (Gen. 12:7) Then "Abram proceeded from there to the mountain of Bethel (just 7 miles north of Jerusalem) ...and built another altar to the Lord..."

But then! There was a "famine in the land; so, Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there!" And you probably know about some of the problems Abram had there (Gen. 12:11-20)! Bad move? Or part of God's sovereign plan, to test Abram's faith and help prepare him for what was to follow? Abram obviously was not ready to occupy the land of Canaan! In fact, it was occupied at the time by the Canaanites, the idolatrous descendants of Ham, and his son Canaan--thus explaining the name! (Gen. 10)

Did you know that Abraham would never "occupy" the land of Canaan? In fact, according to Hebrews 11:9, "by faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise"! And it would be over 400 years before the descendants of Abraham (the "children of Israel") --under Joshua--would finally conquer and occupy the land of Canaan, the "promised land"!

But back to the story of Abram! After being "kicked out" of Egypt, Abram returned to Bethel (a place outside of Jerusalem that, along with Shechem and Hebron, have a long and important history in the Old Testament)! It was there that Abraham again "called on the name of the Lord"! (Gen. 13:4) But "strife" developed between the "herdsmen" of Abraham and Lot (because they both had "great possessions"! ) and they decided to separate, with Lot "pitching his tent toward Sodom...where the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against God" (13:12-13). (You probably know the later sad story, recorded in Genesis 19, about how the "outcry" of their sin before the Lord had become so great that He sent two angels to "rain down brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" on Sodom and Gomorrah! And about how Lot was rescued by Abram!)

Meanwhile Abram was "sojourning" in Hebron--when four kings from the East (maybe including the legendary Hammurabi), united under Chedorlaomer of Elam (territory near ancient Ur, in modern day Iran), "made war" against five kings of Canaan, with Lot becoming a prisoner of war (POW)--and Abram again coming to his rescue! (Gen. 14). And then, after returning from battle, Abram was "met and blessed" by Melchizedek, the "priest of God Most High, and king of Salem." (See more on this story, and its significance, in Hebrews 7!)

And then (in Gen. 15), "the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision," announcing again that "an heir would come forth from his own body"---and that his descendants would be "as the stars of the heavens"! It was then that God made His covenant "official"--even giving him the exact boundaries of the land of promise! (vs. 18-19)

Genesis 16 gives the story of Sarai and Hagar, and the birth of Ishmael--eventually leading to the Arabic world!

Then, when Abram was 99 years old, God appeared to him once again to re-affirm His covenant--a covenant that was to be passed on to a son still to be born, to be named Isaac--change Abram's name to Abraham ("father of many nations"), change Sarai's name to Sarah (a "mother of nations"), and require "circumcision" as a "sign" of His "everlasting covenant for his descendants after him"! (Gen. 17)

In Genesis 18, Isaac is born, to Sarah in her old age! Gen. 21:1-2 says: "Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised! So, Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him!" Wow! Love that verse!

And then! In one of the most dramatic, and significant, stories in the Bible, God calls upon Abraham once again--this time to "offer up" Isaac as a "sacrifice" to Him! Gen. 22:2 says: "Take

now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I tell you!" Wow! And how did Abraham respond? He "rose up early in the morning...and went to the place of which God had told him...placing the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac his son..." And, in answer to Isaac's question, said that "God would provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son!" You know the rest of the story!

So why would God ask Abraham to do this? Genesis 22 is clear that it was a "test"--another test of faith--for Abraham, in his walk with the Lord! But we know it was also a clear and powerful picture of God's plan of redemption! Here we see the doctrine of "substitutionary atonement," prophetically illustrated for all to see! God would "provide" His Son as the perfect, and only sufficient, sacrifice for sin! "Jehovah Jireh"--The God who provides!

And so, we've seen in this lesson, as Dave Brien so eloquently expressed in his presentation last nite: God's call to Abraham; God's covenant; God's fulfillment; God's provision; and Abraham's belief! Giving new meaning to Hebrews 11:8-12, and 17-19--and the "faith of Abraham," which we'll be talking more about when we meet on December 9th!

All of which ties to our memory verse for this lesson: "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is! And that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him!" (Hebrews 11:8)

Have a great couple of weeks, men--as we approach Christmas and the blessed birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham!

Lowell