

Sent: Wednesday, February 08, 2017 7:51 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on the Faith of Abraham!

"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to the place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 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; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God!" Wow!

Hagner sees Abraham as the "key person at the beginning of salvation history"! Wiersbe calls him the "father of the faithful" and states that he "holds the place of greatest prominence in the list" of faith heroes--particularly to his Jewish readers"!

Just what was it, we might ask, that prepared Abraham's heart to hear and respond to God's call to pick up and leave Ur of the Chaldeans, which was once a magnificent seaport city at the mouth of the Euphrates River and Persian Gulf. In the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia, not far from where the Garden of Eden is believed to have been! And just down the river from the rising city of Babylon! Where people, including Abraham's father, Terah (according to Joshua 24:2-4), worshipped many different gods, including the gods of fire, moon, sun, and stars!

Interestingly, Shem, the oldest son of Noah, who survived the flood (ten generations removed from Abraham) was still living (check the math!) and must have had an amazing story to tell--to those who would listen--about how God spoke to his father, Noah, and destroyed the world with water, but preserved him, and those to follow, for a divine purpose! We can only imagine! But one thing is clear: Noah responded in faith to God's call!

And it was Abraham's faith that caused God to "reckon" him as "righteous"! But what great promises God made to him! when he first called him while in Ur--including that He would take him to "a land which He would show him," that he would "make him a great nation," and--best of all--that "in him (through his "seed") all the families of the earth would be blessed!"

So, Abraham "obeyed" God's call and when he finally got to Shechem--about 30 miles north of Jerusalem, where the Canaanites lived--the Lord again appeared to him and told him that "this was the place" that God would give to "his descendants"! And so, Abraham built an altar there to the Lord! And then on to Bethel, just 10 miles from Jerusalem, where he again "pitched his tent...and called upon the name of the Lord"! (We're going to come "back to Bethel" several times, with Abraham and his descendants before we finish our study of Hebrews!)

Interestingly, Abraham never did realize the promise himself of a "great earthly nation"--but it really didn't seem to matter much to Abraham, because, according to Heb.11:9, he was "looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder was God"!

Hagner notes that the promise was "part of a larger reality, so that ultimately Abraham's motivation concerns something beyond the temporary and earthly!" A "better country!" The "heavenly Jerusalem!"--which is finally realized in Revelations 21! Hagner adds: "Already it was realized that the tangible things of this world are in effect anticipations, or foreshadowing, of

eternal realities, and that the manner in which we live therefore should be governed by the unseen and future"! (Wow! So, is this the perspective with which we actually live?)

Well, this lesson is just the start about more of Abraham's faith (and works!) on display in the book of Hebrews--and elsewhere in the Bible! And it raises the question about what it really was about Abraham's life that warranted God's choosing him, and His "reckoning" of Abraham as "righteous"!

It certainly wasn't because of Abraham's works, we know! Titus 3:5-6 makes it clear that it's "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy that He has saved us"! And the Apostle Paul even devoted a whole chapter and more to establish this reality! Rom. 4:2 says that if Abraham was "justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God!" And he simply reports that "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to Him as righteousness" (4:3). But his belief also resulted in obedience and "works of righteousness"--and so also seems to answer the often-cited argument of James concerning the connection between "faith and works."

But wasn't there something that could be credited to Abraham concerning his "faith" alone, if that's what won God's favor? Wasn't that a form of his goodness, or righteousness? Paul addresses that issue too, in Rom.10:17, where he writes that even our faith isn't just something we conger up! "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God!" Ephesians 2:8-9 adds: "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast!"

Well, there's lots more on Abraham! And, as Hagner notes, it's not surprising that more space is given to Abraham than anyone else in Hebrews!

Have a great week, men! And keep the faith!

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