

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ABRAHAM (Ge 12-25)

Abraham was an old man who lived some 4000 years ago. Why is it important to study about him today? Surely people who live in these modern technological times have little to learn from this old man who lived in tents and moved about from place to place in a tiny corner of the ancient world. He was a pioneer of faith, but surely there have been many who have improved on his faith. Spiritual evolution, however, doesn't work that way. We must learn from Abraham.

First, we must know the God of Abraham. The God of Abraham is the Creator and Possessor of heaven and earth (Ge 14:19-20). He is God who makes promises and who faithfully keeps his promises. God promised Abraham, "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....all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Ge 12:2-3) Abraham stubbornly believed this promise, and he obeyed God in spite of everything. God's promise to Abraham is the promise that flows through the Bible like a shining thread of light and life. It is the promise which sustained the Israelites when they languished in slavery in Egypt (Ex 2:24; Acts 7:17); it is the promise which Nehemiah claimed when he returned from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Ne 9:7). It is the promise which God kept when he sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world (Ac 3:25-26).

Second, we must know the faith of Abraham. Abraham's faith is the foundation of New Testament faith. It is saving faith. We are saved, not by good works or rituals but by God's grace, by faith alone. Genesis 15:6 says, "Abram believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness." Paul says, "the words, 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." Galatians 3:6-7 says, "Consider Abraham: He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Understand then that those who believe are children of Abraham."

Third, we must walk in the footsteps of Abraham's faith. Paul tells us in Romans 4 that Abraham is the father of those who walk in his footsteps of faith (Ro 4:12). This is saving faith, the kind of faith that God accepts and blesses. What kind of faith did Abraham have? **(i) Abraham believed God's promise and obeyed God's word.** He obeyed God's word and left his home country, going to the land God showed him. He obeyed God and was ready to offer his one and only son, Isaac, whom he loved, on the altar (Ge 12:4; 22:18). God swore by himself to keep his promise to Abraham because Abraham obeyed him. **(ii) Abraham had resurrection faith.** Abraham believed in "God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were." (Ro 4:17) Abraham exhibited this resurrection faith when he believed God's promise and gave birth to a miracle baby, Isaac, the child of promise. He believed in God who raises the dead when he offered Isaac to God on the altar of sacrifice (Ro 4:19-21; He 11:19) **(iii)**

Abraham had world mission faith. Paul tells us that the world mission command to evangelize the Gentiles rests on God's promise to Abraham. "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and he announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."(Gal 3:8) **(iv) Abraham had a sense of God's history.** He had no son, but he believed that he would be the father of many nations. "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'so shall your offspring be.'" He never saw Jesus the Savior of the world with physical eyes, but he saw him with the eyes of faith. Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." (Jn 8:56) **(v) Abraham had faith in the kingdom of God.** Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham lived in tents in the promised land because he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. He was longing for a better country, a heavenly one (Heb 11:9-10,15,16). May God help us grow in faith until we can have faith like Abraham's—faith that is sufficient even for the third millennium.