

Abraham – The First Missionary

Memory Text: “Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” (Galatians 3:6-8)

Setting The Stage: British explorer, Sir Francis Drake, sailed from England in December 1577 with six ships and 164 sailors. What was his mission? To become the first Englishman to circumnavigate the world. Three years later, just one ship crewed by 59 surviving sailors limped into Plymouth Harbor. While ultimately successful in their mission, Sir Frances and his men had endured a litany of horrors – storms, shipwrecks, attacks by hostile people, and starvation.

Going on a mission isn’t always easy. In fact it’s often very difficult, as was the case with Sir Frances Drake. Think of great men of old, like Enoch and Noah, whom God called to go on a mission for Him. They certainly wouldn’t have had it easy (see Gen. 6:5), but they were faithful in their responsibilities.

The first true missionary (“a person sent on a religious mission [to] a foreign country”), because he left his homeland at the request of God, was Abraham. Through that first call to leave his native home, God had promised that through him a knowledge of salvation – justification by faith – would come to all nations. Abraham was to witness to those of another land about the true God.

Sunday – The Call Of Abraham

Genesis 12:1-3

Genesis 12:1-3. In Gen. 11:26-32 Abraham (ref. 17:5) is introduced to us for the first time as Abram, meaning ‘father of elevation’ or ‘exalted father,’ pointing to his honored position as an ancestor of Shem. Shem was a part of that unbroken line of faithful men, starting with Adam and his son Seth, who served God. Abraham grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans (Iraq, NE of the Persian Gulf), which was a hotbed of superstition and heathenism. Sadly Abraham’s own family had succumbed to the surrounding culture by serving other gods (Josh. 24:2).

To preserve the truth about Himself God called Abraham, along with his household, out of Mesopotamia (see Gen. 15:7; Neh. 9:7; Acts 7:2, 3), then again out of Haran, 500+ miles NE of Ur (Gen. 12:4). Sadly Abraham’s father, Terah, died not having made it to the Promised Land. Even more serious was the fact that Abraham’s brother, Nahor, and his family decided not to continue the journey. Under these conditions Abraham obeyed the call of God.

Hebrews 11:8-10: “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.”

What was so remarkable about Abraham’s decision to obey God’s call?

1. He left the burial place of his father behind
2. He left his brother and family behind
3. He left all that was familiar behind
4. He was called to sever ties with his past
5. He was called to an itinerant life
6. He was called to accept God’s impossible plan for him

“The happiest place on earth for him [Abraham] was the place where God would have him to be.” (Patriarchs & Prophets, p. 126)

The word of God came to Abraham as a *command*, then continued as a *promise*, then concluded with a *blessing*. These three aspects characterize every manifestation of God to man. The promises of God are fulfilled and His blessings received only as His commands are obeyed.

“Many are still tested as was Abraham. They do not hear the voice of God speaking directly from the heavens, but He calls them by the teachings of His word and the events of His providence. They may be required to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor, to leave congenial and profitable associations and separate from kindred, to enter upon what appears to be only a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice.

“God has a work for them to do; but a life of ease and the influence of friends and kindred would hinder the development of the very traits essential for its accomplishment. He calls them away from human influences and aid, and leads them to feel the need of His help, and to depend upon Him alone, that He may reveal Himself to them.

“Who is ready at the call of Providence to renounce cherished plans and familiar associations? Who will accept new duties and enter untried fields, doing God’s work with firm and willing heart, for Christ’s sake counting his losses gain? He who will do this has the faith of Abraham, and will share with him that ‘far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, with which ‘the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared’ (2 Corinthians 4:17; Romans 8:18).” (Ibid, p. 126)

Monday – Abraham’s Testimony To The Kings

Genesis 14:8-24

Traveling with Abraham was Lot his nephew (Haran’s son). After a time in Egypt

due to a famine in Canaan, Abraham made his way back to the Promised Land. Not long afterwards, conflict arose between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot because the land could not support them both. Not taking his eyes off his mission Abraham sought to rectify the situation immediately by inviting Lot to decide on a place where he and his family could settle. Lot chose the well-watered plain of Jordan, but this brought him into contact with the sorry inhabitants of Sodom.

During a war between surrounding cities Lot was taken captive. When Abraham heard about this he headed a military force of three hundred and eighteen men to rescue his nephew. Ultimately Abraham came out on top and Lot was returned to his home.

What do Abraham's actions say about his character, his faith, and his God?

1. Genesis 14:14-16. *"The worshiper of Jehovah had not only rendered a great service to the country, but had proved himself a man of valor. It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed. His heroic act gave him a widespread influence among the surrounding tribes."* (Ibid., p. 134)

2. Genesis 14:17-24. On his way back the king of Sodom, Bera, (along with Melchizedek) came out to honor Abraham. He encouraged him to take the goods, begging only for the prisoners to be returned. Although it was common for the spoils to belong to the victor, Abraham had not undertaken the expedition for gain but only with the intention to right a wrong, so he returned everything on the condition that Bera would share the spoils with his confederates.

"He would give them no occasion to think that he had engaged in warfare for the sake of gain, or to attribute his prosperity to their gifts or favor. God had promised to bless Abraham, and to Him the glory should be ascribed." (Ibid., p. 135)

"Abraham was honored by the surrounding nations as a mighty prince and a wise and able chief. He did not shut away his influence from his neighbors. His life and character, in their marked contrast with those of the worshipers of idols, exerted a telling influence in favor of the true faith. His allegiance to God was unswerving, while his affability and benevolence inspired confidence and friendship and his unaffected greatness commanded respect and honor. His religion was not held as a precious treasure to be jealously guarded and enjoyed solely by the possessor...Rich in faith, noble in generosity, unfaltering in obedience, and humble in the simplicity of his pilgrim life, Abraham was also wise in diplomacy and brave and skillful in war. Notwithstanding he was known as the teacher of a new religion..." (Ibid. p. 133)

Can we learn anything from Abraham's generous spirit?

“It is His plan that all who are partakers of the great salvation shall be missionaries for Him. The piety of the Christian constitutes the standard by which worldlings judge the gospel. Trials patiently borne, blessings gratefully received, meekness, kindness, mercy, and love, habitually exhibited, are the lights that shine forth in the character before the world, revealing the contrast with the darkness that comes of the selfishness of the natural heart.” (Ibid., 134)

Tuesday – Exemplar Of Faith

Hebrews 11:8-19

Abraham is known as the father of the faithful. He is listed in the “hall of faith” in **Hebrews 11:8-19**. Abraham’s faith obeyed, patiently sojourned a foreign land, believed he would have a son at an old age, left the past behind, hoped in a heavenly city, and claimed the promise that God would raise the dead. Don’t you want a faith like that?

Question: 1. Gen. 15.6, Rom. 4.3, Gal. 3.6, and James 2.23 all say, “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.” How is it then that Abraham, who was one of the greatest men of the Bible, did not believe God would give him a son at his old age? He even listened to his wife’s advice to have a child with her servant. 2. God forgave him and a few years later made a covenant with him, but did he ever ask for forgiveness?

Answer: 1. Was Abraham’s faith perfect? No. Both he and Sarah struggled with the promise at times. It is true that there was one instance (among a few) of consequence where Abraham’s constant faith in the promise gave way when he accepted Sarah’s advice to have a child by her handmaid Hagar. But it must be remembered that notwithstanding all the promises from God it had still been ten years.

Is it possible that faith may be genuine but can prove to be weak in moments of stress and perplexity? Truly. Having weak faith is no more equivalent to having no faith than having small muscles is equivalent to having no muscles. But God allows the trial so that faith might be exercised in order for it to become strong (see Rom. 4:19-22).

2. In order for a sin to be forgiven the sinner must ask for forgiveness. Did Abraham ask for forgiveness? I would believe so (see Rom. 4:3-8; cp. 1 John 1:9).

Wednesday – Abraham, The Wanderer

Genesis 12:6, 7; 13:18-14:20; 18:1, 20-33; 22:1-14

We can take great courage in knowing that despite Abraham’s struggles with doubt and disbelief in God’s power (twice he showed cowardice and told Sarah to tell only a half-truth, and once he laughed when he was told he would have a son with Sarah), God was still able to use Abraham to bring to the heathen a knowledge of the true

God, and that was because he was still willing to become all that God desired him to be.

In his travels from Ur to Hebron, his final resting place, Abraham visited at least 15 different geographical areas.

What are several reasons God had Abraham on the move, and how did they contribute to his successful missionary experience? (see Gen. 12:6-9 – initial wandering through the populated Canaan and the building of the first altar near Bethel and Ai; Gen. 13:18-14:20 – travel to Hebron, the building of the second altar, and the rescue of Lot; Gen. 18:1, 20-33 – the Lord’s appearance to Abraham and his intercession for the people of Sodom; Gen. 22:1-14 – the journey to Mt. Moriah)

1. God desired that many in that region become acquainted with Himself through the faithfulness of Abraham. This meant Abraham needed to keep moving.
2. Traveling was a means to possibly educate Abraham to: a) desire a better country; b) lean more implicitly on the Lord; c) become more openhearted and generous. How willing are you to leave your comfort zone?

Thursday – Abraham: A Missionary In His Own House

Genesis 18:18, 19

Genesis 18:18, 19. How effective would Abraham’s witness have been if his household lacked order and genuine Christian courtesy and love? How can we have well-ordered homes like Abraham did?

1. *“Abraham’s affection for his children and his household led him to guard their religious faith, to impart to them a knowledge of the divine statutes, as the most precious legacy he could transmit to them, and through them to the world. All were taught that they were under the rule of the God of heaven. There was to be no oppression on the part of parents and no disobedience on the part of children. God’s law had appointed to each his duties, and only in obedience to it could any secure happiness or prosperity.”* (Ibid., p. 142)
2. *“His own example, the silent influence of his daily life, was a constant lesson. The unswerving integrity, the benevolence and unselfish courtesy, which had won the admiration of kings, were displayed in the home. There was a fragrance about the life, a nobility and loveliness of character, which revealed to all that he was connected with Heaven. He did not neglect the soul of the humblest servant. In his household there was not one law for the master and another for the servant; a royal way for the rich and another for the poor. All were treated with justice and compassion, as inheritors with him of the grace of life.”* (Ibid, p. 142)

3. *“He will command his ... household.” There would be no sinful neglect to restrain the evil propensities of his children, no weak, unwise, indulgent favoritism; no yielding of his conviction of duty to the claims of mistaken affection. Abraham would not only give right instruction, but he would maintain the authority of just and righteous laws.”* (Ibid., p. 142)

“A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion—an argument that the infidel cannot gainsay. All can see that there is an influence at work in the family that affects the children, and that the God of Abraham is with them. If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the ‘light of the world.’” (Ibid., p. 144)

Appeal: In light of Sir Frances Drake’s terrible journey, the words of a prayer, usually attributed to Sir Frances, seem especially relevant: “Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves. When our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little. When we arrive safely because we sailed too close to the shore.” When Abraham set out from Ur, he was beginning a journey that would take him “far from shore.” Are you willing to “sail far from the shore” for God?