

Abraham: The First Missionary



SABBATH—JULY 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 12:1–3; Genesis 14:8–24; Hebrews 11:8–19; Galatians 3:6; Genesis 12:6, 7; Genesis 18:18, 19.

MEMORY VERSE: “Think about Abraham. Scripture [the Bible] says, ‘Abraham believed God. God accepted Abraham because he believed. So his faith made him right with God.’ So you see, those who have faith are children of Abraham. Long ago, Scripture knew that God would make non-Jews right with himself by [the act of] believing in him. He announced the good news ahead of time to Abraham. He said, ‘All nations will be blessed because of you’ ” (Galatians 3:6–8, NIV).

IT IS NO ACCIDENT THAT THREE OF THE WORLD'S major faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are often called the “Abrahamic faiths.” That is because all three, in one way or another, go back to this great man of God.

Abraham is admired as the perfect example of faithfulness. This week's lesson will examine this faithfulness in a new way. We will look at Abraham as a missionary called by the Lord to go to another land and witness to the people about the true God, the Creator and Savior.

God gave Abraham, and his family after him (read Galatians 3:29), a purpose with three parts: (1) to guard the divine truth of God's kingdom that had been lost before the Flood; (2) to be the way through which the Savior would enter history; and (3) to be, as God's faithful servants, a light to the nations. Abraham and his family were meant to be a light to those who needed to know the Lord.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM (Genesis 12:1–3)

Abram's name meant "the father is exalted [honored]." But his name was later changed to Abraham, "the father of multitudes." He grew up in Ur, in what is now Iraq. God called him to separate himself from his well-known social and spiritual homeland. Abraham was to travel to an unfamiliar country. During the next 100 years, God turned Abraham into the "father of the faithful." In the midst of personal and family struggles, Abraham became a model missionary to several people groups and a respected leader who witnessed to his faith in God.

Read through Genesis 12:1–3. What principles (important rules) can you find here that could help you in your own special situation? For example, what did Abraham experience that you might experience in your own way too? Read also Hebrews 11:8–10.

Abraham was called by God to leave his past behind him, to step out in faith, to believe what seemed unbelievable, to do what God had called him to do. And as a result of Abraham's faithfulness, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Many of us are tested, as was Abraham. Of course, we might not hear the voice of God speaking directly to us. But He calls us by the teachings of His Word and the events of His leading. We may be required to leave a career that promises wealth and honor. We might have to leave familiar friends and separate from family. We might even have to enter upon what appears only to be a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice. But if God calls us, how can we refuse?

In Genesis, the Hebrew reads, "And God said to Abram, 'Go for yourself from your land.' " He was told to go "for himself." That means he was to leave for his own sake. What does that mean for your life? Has God called you to leave some things behind for your own sake?

ABRAHAM'S TESTIMONY (MESSAGE) TO THE KINGS (Genesis 14:8–24)

Lot was a relative of Abraham and went with him on some of his travels. Lot's choice of the well-watered Jordan Valley brought him into the company of the wicked men in Sodom (Genesis 13:1–13). Once Abraham had to rescue Lot (Genesis 14:11–16), and later two angels helped him to escape before Sodom was destroyed (Genesis 19).

When Abraham heard that his relative, Lot, was in trouble, he decided to help him. In rescuing Lot, Abraham headed a military force of more than three hundred men of his own household. Many kings were involved in the battle for Sodom, and Abraham became the victor.

Read Genesis 14:8–24. What did Abraham's actions say about his character (who he is) and, later, about his faith and his God?

To the kings he conquered, Abraham showed the power of God. Even during this rescue mission, the “father of the faithful” did not lose God's call for him to be a blessing to the nations.

“Abraham gave a great service to the country. And he also proved himself to be a man of courage and honor. It also showed unbelievers that living a godly life is not a life of a coward. Instead it showed that Abraham's religion made him courageous in protecting the right and defending the people who suffered. Abraham's brave act gave him a widespread influence among the surrounding tribes. On his return, the king of Sodom came out with his court to honor the conqueror. The king told Abraham to take the goods but to return only the prisoners. In war it was the custom for the spoils to belong to the conquerors. But Abraham had gone to war with no desire for riches. And Abraham refused to take advantage of the losers. He only asked that his allies [supporters] should receive the part of the spoils that they deserved to have.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 135.

Think about your dealings with others. What kind of witness do they present to others about your faith?



Abraham refuses the spoils of war. His unselfishness is a witness to the king of Sodom.

PERFECT EXAMPLE OF FAITH (Hebrews 11:8, 9)

Abraham was not perfect. But he was a man of God. In both the Old and New Testaments, Abraham is used as an example of faithfulness and of what it means to be saved by faith (read Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6).

Read Hebrews 11:8–19. What do these verses tell us about Abraham and his faith? If you want to be a missionary for God, what can you learn from Abraham’s life?



Like Abraham, we must leave our pasts behind when they are not in harmony with God’s law and will.

The Lord wanted to use Abraham. But the first thing He had to do was to get Abraham to leave his past behind. The lesson should be clear to us. God wants all of us to leave our past behind us, mainly the parts of our past that might not have been in harmony with the will and law of God.

When Abraham left, “he did not know where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8, NIV). Most missionaries know where they are going. But when we take a giant leap of faith and give our hearts fully to God, we really do not know where we will end up. But in the long run, we do have the promise of a heavenly reward. If we did know, it would not require that much faith. So, not knowing is a requirement for truly being able to live by faith.

Another important point here is that Abraham “was waiting for the city that God planned and built” (Hebrews 11:10, NIV). Abraham kept the big picture in mind. He knew that whatever he faced here, whatever actions and struggles he had, it would all be worth it in the end.

Abraham knew, too, that he was one of many “outsiders and strangers on earth” (Hebrews 11:13, NIV). This world and our lives in it, as important as they appear to us now, are not the whole story.

And, of course, the greatest example of faith in the Old Testament was what Abraham was willing to do to his son on Mount Moriah at the command of God.

In what ways have you experienced what it means to step out in faith? What hardships have you faced? What joys have you experienced? Knowing what you know now, what might you have done differently?

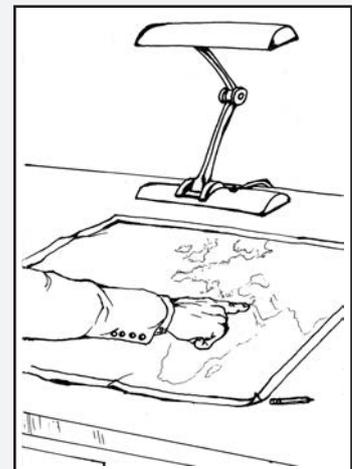
ABRAHAM, THE WANDERER (Genesis 12:6, 7)

A study of Abraham's life shows that his faith included difficult struggles against doubt and disbelief in God's power. Abraham's forefathers were idolaters (Joshua 24:2). Perhaps this background explains why Abraham did not always have full confidence (faith) in God's power. Two times he showed cowardice and told Sarah to tell only a half-truth (Genesis 12:11–13; Genesis 20:2). He laughed (Genesis 17:17) when he was told that he would have a son with Sarah. Abraham had his faults, but he was still used by the Lord because Abraham wanted to be used by Him. So the Lord was able to develop his character (thoughts; feelings; actions).

God used Abraham's many wanderings to train him as a missionary and a reformer.¹ Traveling is an education in itself. It opens a person to new ideas and to change. Trips to Jerusalem were an important and required part of Israelite worship. The changes the pilgrims experienced when they had to walk a long way, sleep in other places, eat different food, face another climate, and meet other people made their faith stronger. Their worship, with its sacrifices and offerings, holy dances, and reading psalms, helped God's people to reconnect with God.

In his travels from his birthplace in Ur to his burial site in Hebron, Abraham visited at least fifteen different geographical places. Most of the important life-changing and missionary experiences in his life were connected with his journeys.

What were some of the spiritual lessons that Abraham experienced in the following places: Moreh at Shechem (Genesis 12:6, 7); Hebron (Genesis 13:18–Genesis 14:20); Mamre (Genesis 18:1, 20–33); and Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:1–14)?



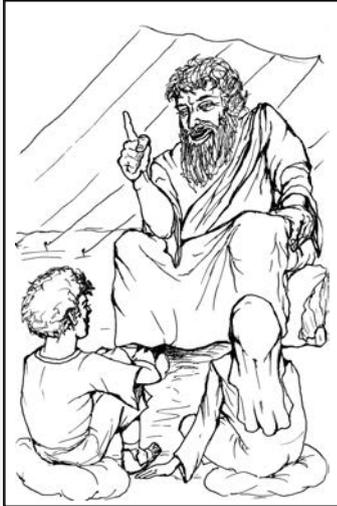
Traveling opens a person to new ideas and to change, and strengthens one's faith.

DEFINITIONS

1. reformer—a person who encourages other people to change for the better.

A MISSIONARY IN HIS OWN HOUSE (Genesis 18:18, 19)

What important lessons about faithfulness and serving God do we find in Genesis 18:18, 19?



God chose Abraham because he instructed his household to know and follow God.

“God called Abraham to be a teacher of His word. He chose him to be the father of a great nation, because He saw that Abraham would instruct [teach] his children and his household in the principles of God’s law. And the influence of Abraham’s own life gave power to his teachings. Abraham’s great household included more than a thousand souls. Many of them were heads of families. And they were also new converts [believers] from heathenism [not believing in God].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 187.

Missionary activities will be more successful when they are backed by a family life that follows God’s plans faithfully. Bible history and church history tell us that most early Christian churches were house- and family-based. One of the reasons Abraham was chosen was that God saw his ability to direct his children and his household in the way of the Lord. God’s purpose in the family equals His purpose in missions. His purpose is “to do what is right and just” (Proverbs 21:3, NIV).

What examples of Abraham’s family can you find that tell us that they were faithful to the Lord? Read, for example, Hebrews 11:11, 20.

Of course, in the Bible we can also find examples of godly men whose families did not follow the way of the Lord. But the point of the verses for today is clear: Abraham’s faith and example were strong enough that those of his household learned to “keep the way of the LORD” (Genesis 18:19).

To “keep the way of the LORD.” What do these words mean to you? How are we to “keep the way of the LORD”?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “God called Abraham, made him successful, and honored him. Abraham’s faithfulness was a light to the people in all the countries where he traveled. Abraham did not shut himself away from the people around him. He made friends with the kings of the surrounding nations. Some of them treated him with great respect. And Abraham’s honesty and unselfishness, his bravery and kindness represented [showed] the character [holiness] of God. In Mesopotamia, in Canaan, in Egypt, and even to the people of Sodom, the God of heaven was shown through His representative Abraham.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 368.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 For thousands of years, the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah has thrilled and challenged faithful people. But others have thought of it as an act of cruelty. Read the story over again in Genesis 22. What great lessons can we learn from it? What does it teach us about the cross and the terrible cost of sin? What does it teach us about what taking a leap of faith really means? Why does the story bother so many so deeply?
- 2 Read Genesis 12:11–13 and Genesis 20:2, two stories that tell how Abraham, a man of God, revealed a lack of faith. What can we learn from these stories?
- 3 One of the most famous verses in the Bible is Genesis 15:6. What does it say? But what does it really mean? How is this verse used in the New Testament? (Read Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; and James 2:23.) What does it teach us about faith, works, and salvation?
- 4 Who were some of the great religious leaders whose family members did not follow in “the way of the LORD”? What can we learn from their stories that can help anyone who struggles with helping family members be faithful?