

Abraham: Father of the Faithful

Intro: Abraham lived approx. 4000 years ago, yet mentioned about 74 times in NT. He is important to men who wrote about contemporary issues. He remains important today.

1. Abraham in Romans 4

- A. Context: Paul is establishing a common system of salvation for Jew and Gentile. Both had violated their respective understanding of God's will. All have sinned (3:23), and salvation will not come through law (3:20-22). Abraham is cited as an example of salvation through faith rather than law.
- B. Abraham was an idolatrous Gentile at the start.
 - 1. He was uncircumcised – Rom 4:10; an idolater – Jsh 24:2.
 - 2. When God called Abraham from Ur, Abraham responded in faith – Ac 7:2-3.
 - 3. Abraham “*received the sign of circumcision*” and thus became the “father” of both circumcised and uncircumcised (4:11-12). His faith preceded law/circumcision.
- C. Abraham was not justified by “works” – Rom 4:1-2, 4. He did not merit God's favor by his moral excellence.
 - 1. The testimony: “*Abraham believed God ...*” (Rom 4:3; Gn 15:6). The heart of the belief: “*believes on Him who justifies the ungodly*” (Rom 4:5).
 - 2. The need to obey God's revealed will is not excluded from this, for Abraham left Ur, went to Canaan, built altars to God, “called on the name of the Lord,” paid tithes to Melchizedek and lived a constantly compliant life. But strictly on the basis of performance, even Abraham is “ungodly.” But he sought to do the will of God by faith. *This is the person God promises to save* (Heb 11:6).
 - 3. But what is the nature of such a faith in God that He is willing to accept it rather than strict, *perfect obedience*?

2. James' Reference in James 2

- A. James' audience is at war with each other (Jas 4:1-4; 2:8-9, 12-13). They are “hearers” of the law but not “doers” (1:21-25). James must reeducate them on the subject of true faith. Is faith oral only? What is evidence of its existence?
- B. Faith that does not seek to follow, obey God is useless and unprofitable (2:15-16); dead (2:17); the faith of demons (2:19).

C. Abraham, the father and example of *faith that works*:

1. Justified by offering Isaac – 2:21. “*Faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect*” (2:22). In this active, productive faith “*the Scripture was fulfilled which says ... [Gn 15:6]*”. Also cited in Rom 4 and Gal 3.
2. This “ultimate” offering asked of Abraham shows us how great God’s expectations of us can be. We will never be tested in exactly this same way as Abraham, but the strength of our convictions will be seriously challenged.
3. “*A man is justified by works **and not by faith only***” (2:24); that is, not by mere mental believing or oral declaration but by a life that is molded and shaped by doing God’s will. This is not “salvation by works,” but evidence of saving faith.

2. Abraham in Hebrews 11

A. Hebrews addresses Christians who are wavering in their faith and entertaining a return to Judaism, a law-system that cannot save them.

B. “*By faith Abraham obeyed ...*” (11:8). Abraham was not the first to have faith in God (Abel, Enoch, Noah – 11:4-7), God’s covenant made him “father of us all.”

1. He was a sojourner; he never dwelt in it as its rightful possessor (11:9). He sacrificed (in principle) Isaac (11:17-19).
2. Abraham obeyed God under extreme duress, uncertainty of the future, fear and anxiety. It was *his way of life*.

C. How can faith be so strong?

1. “*He waited for the city which has foundations ...*” (11:11).
2. They “*confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (11:13). They did not look for ultimate happiness here.
3. They “*desire a better, that is, a heavenly country*” (11:16). If this eternal perspective were not alive within them, they would have returned to the country from which they came (11:15). **This is ultimately why people leave God. They may choose an ineligible marriage partner, booze, money, etc. but the bottom line is that they have taken their eyes off heaven.**

Conclusion: Of the truly faithful, “*God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them*” (11:16).