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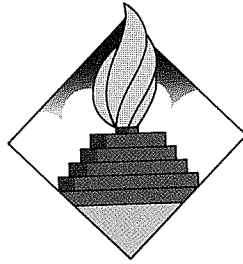
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Abraham—Man of Faith

by Harold L. Willmington

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed. . . . By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:8-10).



Whatever could have happened to one of Ur's leading citizens? Not only had he forsaken the worship of the moon goddess for that of an

invisible monotheistic being, but he was actually planning to leave his famous and fruitful city for a far-off country. Had Abraham taken leave of his senses? More than one eyebrow must have been raised as the future father of the faithful started his pilgrimage for Canaan. He was 75 years old at the time, but marvelous and mysterious things would befall him during the next 100 years before his death. He, with a small band of servants, would win a war; he would father a child through a barren wife; entertain angels unawares; and be visited by God Himself.

The importance of Abraham's life cannot be overestimated. In fact, the very relationship between heaven and earth changed drastically with the advent of Abraham. Prior to this, as seen in Genesis 1-11, God had dealt in a general way with nations, peoples, and entire civilizations. But beginning in Genesis 12 He focuses on one man and his immediate descendants. Or, to use an analogy, with Abraham, heaven's floodlight gives way to a brilliant spotlight!

His parents first named him at birth in the city of Ur. God renamed him at age 99 in the land of Canaan, from Abram (honored father) to Abraham

(founder of nations). Quite a difference! His wife was also renamed. No longer would she be known just as Abraham's wife, Sarai, but now, Sarah, a princess of the Abrahamic covenant. The divine timing was perfect, for in less than a year the founder of nations and the barren princess would conceive and bear their first child—Isaac! Wonder of wonders! God's promise had come true. There awaited, however, one final test for Abraham. It took place on Mount Moriah, right outside ancient Jerusalem. Here, obeying the command of God, Abraham prepares to offer up his only son. But the scheduled execution was stayed at the last moment. A substitute was found! God, who had previously changed Abraham's and Sarah's names, chose this occasion to give a new name for Himself, Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide! So He did with Abraham. So He will with us.

Twenty centuries later, another Father led His only Son up those same mountain slopes for the identical purpose. This time, however, there was no

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last-minute reprieve. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Following is a suggested study overview for this man of faith. His conversion (Acts 7:2); his calling (Gen. 12:1; Josh. 24:3; Acts 7:3); his caution (Gen. 11:31-32); his Canaan (12:4-9); his carnality (12:10-20); his courage (14:1-16); his communion (14:17-24); his compromise (16:1-15); his circumcision (17:1-27); his compassion (18:1-33); his celebration (21:1-34); his "Calvary" (22:1-24); his city (25:7-10; Heb. 11:8-10). ■

"In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." This is what the apostle Paul would later point out as the same "gospel" which he preached (Gal. 3:8). God's good news for all mankind could be reduced to this linchpin word—*blessing*—which would be accomplished by the promised seed of Abraham.

There is more. This climactic word is the earliest missionary mandate. The promise of God to Abraham was specifically given *in order that* he and his seed might be, through the gracious provision of God, the avenue of carrying the same good news to every one of the 70 families on the earth listed in chapter 10.

Now, even though we have spoken about the promise given to Abraham in the singular form, it actually embraced three key elements: an heir—the seed, an inheritance—the land, and a heritage—the blessing for all the families of the earth. First, God granted this promise to Abraham and his seed. We must be careful not to translate this word as "descendants," for this misses the point. The word God deliberately utilized is a collective singular noun. Thus it is like our word sheep or deer: we may say one deer or seven deer, but not seven deers.

Accordingly, we may translate it as "seed" or "offspring," for both retain the biblical emphasis that God wishes to incorporate in one meaning the idea of One (i.e., the Messiah who will epitomize and climactically represent the group) and of the many (who will also believe). This is why the apostle Paul legitimately insisted in Galatians 3:16 that "to Abraham and his seed were the promises made." The Scripture does not say, "and to seeds" meaning many people, but, "and to your seed" meaning one person, who is Christ. Paul's point is that the noun is a collective singular, and thus it could and did point to one ultimate Man of Promise, even though there were many individuals in the promised line. In fact, without sensing any contradiction with himself, Paul will affirm 13 verses later in Galatians 3:29: "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The same "promise" with the same "seed" embraces not only Christ, but all believers of all ages!

But no less prominent is the element of inheritance of the land. True, Abraham, and not the other patriarchs

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