

# The Father of Nations:

A Study of Abraham

Lesson One: The Commissioning of the Father of Nations

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*Abraham was a 75-year-old nobody, with no children and with no relative importance in the world. Then one day that all changed. From now on He will be known as the Father of Nations.*

## I. Introduction

### A. To Abraham

1. Abraham is famous
  - a) Abraham is a central figure in Judaism, Islam and Christianity.
  - b) Abraham was a central focus of the Jewish leaders even during the earthly ministry of Christ.
  - c) Abraham was a common person of reference in the Epistles.
    - (1) See Galatians 3-4
    - (2) See Romans 4
    - (3) See James 2
2. Abraham is faithful
  - a) He left his comfort zone (as we will see tonight).
  - b) He was willing to sacrifice Isaac if God so commanded.
  - c) He is featured in the “hall of faith” in **Hebrews 11:8-12**
3. Abraham is flawed.—Sometimes our areas of greatest strength are also our areas of greatest weakness.
  - a) As faithful as Abraham was, sometimes he just...wasn't.
    - (1) He put his wife in a very dangerous position (twice) as we will see tonight.
    - (2) He took multiple wives in order to accomplish what God had promised to do.

**Quote:** “...The ethical attributes of God were regarded by Abraham as the ethical requirement of man. This in theory. In the sphere of applied ethics and casuistry Abraham's practice, at least, fell short of this ideal, even in the few incidents of his life preserved to us.”<sup>1</sup>

### B. To this study

1. Why call this study, “The Father of Nations”?
  - a) Because of what Abraham's name means.
    - (1) אַבְרָם *Abram* **Meaning:** 'exalted father,' the original name of Abraham.<sup>2</sup>
    - (2) אַבְרָהָם *Abraham* **Meaning:** 'exalted father,' the father of the Jewish nation
  - b) Because of the primacy of the theme that Abraham will bless the nations through his offspring.
  - c) Because of **Genesis 17:5** "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.

## II. The Commissioning of the Father of Nations (Genesis 12:1-9)

### A. Who took the initiative. v. 1a

1. God approaches Abraham, not the other way around.

**Quote:** The history of redemption, like that of creation, begins with God speaking: this, in a nutshell, differentiates Abram's story from his father's. The call to forsake all and follow finds its nearest parallels in the Gospels (which are in some ways nearer the patriarchal pattern than was the Law—cf. Gal. 3), and Abram's early

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<sup>1</sup> J. Oscar Boyd in the ISBE (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). Referenced from Bibleworks.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the ISBE (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia) says that Abram may have originally meant “He loves his father” in the language of Mesopotamia. To Hebrew ears, “Abram” means “exalted father”.

history is partly that of his gradual disentanglement from *country, kindred and father's house*, a process not completed until the end of chapter 13.<sup>3</sup>

*B. What was Abraham called to give up? v. 1b*

1. Externally:
  - a) His land
  - b) His extended family.
    - (1) His relatives—It would seem that this refers to his family in general.
    - (2) The house of his father—It would seem that this refers to his family in a closer sense.
2. Internally:
  - a) His comfort zone.
  - b) His sense of control over his own life.

**Quote:** Abram must exchange the known for the unknown (Heb. 11:8), and find his reward in what he could not live to see (*a great nation*), in what was intangible (*thy name*) and in what he would impart (*blessing*).<sup>4</sup>

*C. What does God promise? vv. 2-3*

1. I will make you a great nation.
2. I will bless you.
3. I will make your name great.
  - a) This means that God would grant Abraham a wonderful and well-known reputation.
4. I will bless those who bless you.
5. I will curse those who curse you.
6. I will bless the whole world through you.
7. I will give you the land (v. 7).

*D. What did Abraham do? vv. 4-8*

1. He obeyed
  - a) This obedience was a process. God approached Abraham in Ur, but it wasn't until Abraham had gone to Haran that he broke off from his father's house.
    - (1) See Acts 7:2-4
    - (2) "It is reasonable to think that he was biding God's time until the family ties could be honourably loosened."<sup>5</sup>
2. He took others with him.—Lot, Sarai, etc.
3. He went to the promised land.
4. He went through the promised land.
5. He worshipped.

*E. Notice that Abraham was 75 years old when he becomes the focus of the biblical narrative.*

1. This is important for later (becoming a father).
2. This is important now—God can and does use people that the world (or even themselves) might feel unusable.

*F. What character trait did all this require?*

1. Most of all, it required faith.

**III. What does this mean to us?**

- A. Will we go where He tells us to go?
- B. Will we do what He tells us to do?
- C. Will we be what He declares us to be?

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<sup>3</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 124.

<sup>4</sup> *IBID*, 125

<sup>5</sup> *IBID*, 125.