

Biblical Missionaries

Abraham: The First Missionary

Lesson #2 for July 11, 2015

Scriptures: Genesis 12:1-3,6-7; 14:8-24; 18:18-19; Galatians 3:6; Hebrews 11:8-19.

1. God's original plan for human beings was for us to be like Himself (Genesis 1:26-28) and to continue to live in the Garden of Eden. But, Adam and Eve sinned. Before long, it was necessary for God to send a flood to wipe out the human race except for one family—or, to rescue the human race in the form of Noah and his family. He started over with Noah; but, once again, it was not long before the tower of Babel. In our study for this week, God was starting over again, this time with Abram/Abraham. (Abram's name was changed by God to Abraham. See Genesis 17:5. However, for this lesson, the name Abraham is used throughout.) Why do you think Abraham came to be the spiritual root for the three major monotheistic religions in the world: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?
2. Read Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:6. What was it about Abraham that made him a kind of defining example of faith? Does James 2:23 help in any way? In what sense do you think Abraham had become a friend of God. Remember that Abraham had no Bible, no pastor, no church, and lived in the midst of idolaters. Most of his family were idolaters, and we might even consider them pagans.
3. So, why did Abraham stand out? Why did God choose Abraham? Does He call/choose each of us? Do only a few respond? Historically, we know that Abraham's family became the recipients of God's divinely inspired Words. They also became the channel through which the Redeemer—the Savior—would enter history. But, they were also supposed to be God's faithful servants and a light to all those around them.
4. Why do you think God called Abraham to leave his birthplace in Ur of the Chaldees and travel to an unknown country? Where is Ur of the Chaldees? There is mounting evidence to suggest that the Ur from which Abraham moved was in southeastern Turkey and not in southern Iraq as we had thought for a long time.
5. Read Hebrews 11:8-10. While we may not know the details of this relationship, it must have been true that Abraham knew God well enough to accept His guidance and direction in taking a number of extraordinary steps in his life. He left behind an idolatrous family and community and followed God's guidance into the unknown. So, how did God communicate with Abraham?
6. How do you think the conversations between God and Abraham started? How often did they communicate? How many times do you think Abraham had received messages from God? Was he completely sure that the voice that he heard as recorded in Genesis 22 was God's voice? In our day, wouldn't someone who believes that he has received such a message be taken to a psychiatrist, even perhaps hospitalized? Was that a "leap of faith"? What does a *leap of faith* mean? Does it mean leaping in any direction without any evidence?
7. Read James 2:23. Is it possible to become someone's friend by leaping in the dark? Or, by communicating, being trustworthy, and being friendly?
8. Does God call people in our day as well? If so, how do those calls come? Should we sit back and wait for the church to send an official letter? Does God expect us to leave behind prosperous businesses and lucrative careers as well as congenial and pleasant associations and take up a path of self-denial, sacrifice, even hardship?
9. Try to imagine what Abraham had in mind when he first set off. What do you think he told

his friends and family who were left behind?

10. How certain was Abraham about the message he received from God? How certain can we be?

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.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 126.4. [Bold type is added.]

11. We are the most privileged people in this earth's history. We have more light available to us, and it is more readily available than in any previous generation. What are we doing with that light?

Had you followed the light which He has given you, then He would cause more light to shine upon you; but while you neglect the counsels, warnings, and reproofs that have been given, how can you expect God to give you more light and blessings to neglect and despise? God is not as man; He will not be trifled with.—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 197.2.

12. What do you think would have happened to Abraham and his family if he had refused to accept God's call? Would his descendants have slipped into idolatry like those around them? Consider the example of Lot and his family.

13. Read Genesis 14:8-24. What can we learn about Abraham's nature and his responsibilities from these verses? Abraham did not take advantage of that situation to enrich himself. He seemed to be concerned only with the needs of others. He was obviously wealthy; but, he trusted God to take care of him.

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.** On his return, the king of Sodom came out with his retinue to honor the conqueror. He bade him take the goods, begging only that the prisoners should be restored. By the usage of war, the spoils belonged to the conquerors; but Abraham had undertaken this expedition with no purpose of gain, and he refused to take advantage of the unfortunate, only stipulating that his confederates should receive the portion to which they were entitled.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 135.1. [Bold type is added.]

14. Can you think of some examples when Abraham was not faithful to God? What about his lying about his wife? What about his taking Hagar as a secondary wife to try to fulfill God's promises? (Genesis 12:11-13; 16:1-4; 20:2) Try to imagine the conversations that must have taken place between God and Abraham following those times.

15. When Abraham departed from Ur and later from Haran, was he taking a great leap of faith? Was it as some have suggested—a leap in the dark? Or, did Abraham have such a relationship with God that he felt quite comfortable in moving forward, knowing that God would guide him and go with him? Furthermore, Abraham looked forward to a better future on the basis of what God had promised him.

16. The great test of faith came to Abraham when in the middle of the night he received the message that he was to take his son three days journey to Mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice. Ellen White suggested that he was afraid even to tell his wife. He did not even

tell Isaac! He spent those three nights in constant prayer. What can we learn about the plan of salvation from that story? (Genesis 22) God was placing a great deal of trust in Abraham. And when Abraham told his wife to lie about their relationship (Genesis 12:11-13; 20:2) and when he and Sarah laughed about the possibility of Sarah having a son, (Genesis 17:17; 18:12) Satan must have toured the universe making fun of God and His "friend" Abraham.

17. When Abraham faithfully went through that incredible experience described in Genesis 22 and proceeded to the point of taking the knife in hand to sacrifice his son, the entire universe rejoiced; Satan was defeated. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 154-155)
18. It is a well-known sociological phenomenon that when people move to a new environment, they are much more likely to take up new habits and to learn new customs, etc. Traveling, especially traveling to a different culture, language group, or continent, is a very educational experience. It forces one to think about why s/he does what s/he does. Why do you think God asked the children of Israel, at least the males, to travel quite frequently from their homes all the way to Jerusalem to worship at the temple? There, they were exposed to different peoples from different cultures with different ideas.
19. It has been estimated that in his travels from his birthplace in Ur to his burial site in Hebron, Abraham came in contact with at least 15 different cultural and geographical groups. Notice a few of the specific lessons that Abraham apparently learned at different locations: 1) At Moreh near Shechem, (Genesis 12:6-7) God told Abraham this was the land that He was giving him. There, Abraham built an altar and worshiped God. 2) At Hebron (Genesis 13:18-14:20) God protected him and guided him as he went to war. He did not selfishly come home with the spoils from that war to enrich himself. He even paid tithes to Melchizedek. 3) At Mamre (Genesis 18:1, 20-33) Abraham not only welcomed Jesus Christ and two angels who appeared as wandering travelers but also received the promise from God that even at the age of 99, he was to have a son with Sarah. Later, he walked with Jesus Christ out to the edge of the Jordan Valley overlooking Sodom and bargained with God regarding that city. 4) At Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:1-14) he followed God's guidance explicitly to the point of raising the knife to take his son's life.
20. Read Genesis 18:18-19. What is implied by the idea that Abraham taught his children and his household members to follow the Lord, doing what was right and just?

Abraham's household comprised more than a thousand souls. Those who were led by his teachings to worship the one God, found a home in his encampment; and here, as in a school, they received such instruction as would prepare them to be representatives of the true faith. Thus a great responsibility rested upon him. He was training heads of families, and his methods of government would be carried out in the households over which they should preside.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 141.1.

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 his children and his household in the principles of God's law. And that which gave power to Abraham's teaching was the influence of his own life. **His great household consisted of more than a thousand souls, many of them heads of families, and not a few but newly converted from heathenism.** Such a household required a firm hand at the helm. No weak, vacillating methods would suffice. Of Abraham God said, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him." Genesis 18:19. Yet his authority was exercised with such wisdom and tenderness that hearts

were won. The testimony of the divine Watcher is, "They shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." Genesis 18:19. And Abraham's influence extended beyond his own household. Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained; and many a roving Canaanite, whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham His servant, tarried at that altar to offer sacrifice to Jehovah.—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 187.2. [Bold type is added.]

21. We have been told repeatedly that **a well-ordered Christian family is a greater witness for the truth than any pastor's sermon.**

We want to see the family altar established, and we want there to bring our children right before God with earnest prayer, just as the minister labors for his congregation when he is before them. Every father should feel that he is placed at the head of his household to offer up a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God and of praise to Him, and to present these children to God and seek His blessing to rest upon them, and never rest until he knows that they are accepted of God—until he knows that they are children of the Most High. **Here is a work for the mother. What a responsibility rests upon her! Do we consider and realize that the greatest influence to recommend Christianity to our world is a well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family? The world sees that they believe God's Word.--Manuscript 13, 1888.** (A sermon preached in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Des Moines, Iowa, December 1, 1888. Reported by W. E. Cornell. Portions of this manuscript appear in *Evangelism, 7BC, This Day With God, Our High Calling*, and *Manuscript Releases 347 and 749.*) MR 900.26; 1SAT 77.1. [Bold type is added.]

22. Missionary activities clearly are more successful when they are backed up by a family life that is in harmony with God's design. As we know, early in the history of Christianity, almost all of the so-called churches were located in private homes. What would be the advantages or disadvantages of having a church meet in a private home?
23. "It was faith that made Abraham able to become a father." "It was faith that made Isaac promise blessings for the future to Jacob and Esau."—*The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Hebrews 11:11,20). New York: American Bible Society. In what sense did faith make it possible for Abraham to become a father? Remember that he had six more sons with Keturah after Sarah was dead!
24. In contrast to Abraham's story, the Bible gives some very sad examples of faithful servants of God who did not command their households after them. Consider the story of Eli and his sons as well as the story of Samuel and his sons. (1 Samuel 1-3; 8; 16)
25. It seems that Abraham was a light to all with whom he associated.

God called Abraham, and prospered and honored him; and the patriarch's fidelity was a light to the people in all the countries of his sojourn. Abraham did not shut himself away from the people around him. **He maintained friendly relations with the kings of the surrounding nations, by some of whom he was treated with great respect; and his integrity and unselfishness, his valor and benevolence, were representing the character of God.** In Mesopotamia, in Canaan, in Egypt, and even to the inhabitants of Sodom, the God of heaven was revealed through His

representative.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 368.2. [Bold type is added.]

26. Looking at things from God's perspective, do you think He was happy with the results of His experience with Abraham? Do you think God is looking for Abraham's in our day? We may not have to travel to a new location; but, God is certainly calling each of us to witness where we are.
27. How different would the Bible be if the story of Abraham was removed? Does God intend for us to learn something from Abraham's mistakes as well as his successes? Why did God lead Abraham into so many challenging situations? Why is it that so many church members in our day are reluctant to reach out in any kind of mission? Do we feel inadequate? Do we think that the pastor should do it because he is being paid? Surely, we do not believe that our salvation will depend upon the work the pastor does! Many of us are inspired by mission stories of experiences in various parts of the world. So, why aren't we willing to at least try?
28. As you think over the story of Abraham's life, do you see growth from the time God first started working with him until the end of his life?
29. We are now more than 170 years past the Great Disappointment in 1844. Do you think God intended for this long delay? What is the main reason for the delay? See Matthew 24:14.
30. One of the greatest fears is the fear of the unknown. Abraham launched into a lifetime journey that led him to many unknowns. Do we need to be a little more courageous and more bold?

To His servants Christ commits "His goods"—something to be put to use for Him. He gives "to every man his work." [Mark 13:34] Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in co-operation with Christ for the salvation [327] of souls. **Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God.**—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 326.4. [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

31. Are we daily and weekly developing a clearer and clearer understanding of the gospel so we can share it with others? To what kind of mission do you think God is calling you today?

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

In light of his terrible journey, the words of a prayer traditionally attributed to Sir Francis seem especially poignant:

"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 arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore." *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 27.

32. Are we too timid to reach out to others? Are we "sailing too close to the shore"? Do we have any questions in our minds about God's long-term goals for humanity? Are there things we need to leave behind before we reach out? Fears? Material possessions? Sins? Our comfortable Christian cocoon societies?

33. It is clear that Abraham was not a saint. On occasion, he stumbled and disobeyed God. So, why do you think Abraham was chosen?
34. Were Abraham and his descendants chosen because God already knew that they would represent to the rest of the world not only the blessings of following God but also the consequences of disobedience?
35. One of the things we notice as we follow Abraham through his life in Canaan, is that he left altars wherever he spent any period of time. Even the Canaanites coming along saw those altars and remembered Abraham and his God. (See *Education* 187.2 quoted above in Item #20.) Read Genesis 12:8. In many of the more traditional translations, it says Abraham “Called on the name of the Lord.” However, in *Young’s Literal Translation*, it suggests that there is a deeper meaning to this verse: Abraham “preacheth in the name of Jehovah.” How many people in Canaan were convinced by Abraham’s example to follow the Lord? Where did Abraham get his 318 trained soldiers? How many people do you think it took to herd his sheep, goats, cattle, and camels? Is it not possible that he needed those trained soldiers just to protect his herds from thieves?
36. It is fairly easy to trace Abraham’s geographical journey. But, what about his spiritual journey from a culture of idolatry to being a faithful follower of *Yahweh*?
37. Do we need to open our hearts and our minds to God’s callings? What kinds of methods is God using to communicate with us? None of us has spoken to God face-to-face. So, what means is God using to speak to us today?

© 2015, *Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH*. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: May 9, 2015

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\Biblical Missionaries\SS-2-Bib-Miss-2015_07_11-Fin+.wpd