

Aunt Hattie's Bible Studies

by

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Chapter 3

ABRAHAM

“Abraham?!”

“Behold , here I am.”

Who called? God.

Who answered? Abraham.

Who was this man to whom God spoke so freely? I'll tell you the story.

Turn to the map in the back of your Bible, called “Assyria and the adjacent lands.” Do you see those two rivers that unite and flow into the Persian Gulf? On the west river find a city called Ur. Oh, yes, now we have it! It is in the land of Chaldea. Even today the ruins of the ancient city may be seen, but history doesn't tell us much about it, nor about the people who lived there. One thing we do know, and that is, they were moon-worshippers.

But why did they worship the moon? At this time of the world's history, which was about two thousand years before Christ, there was so much sin in the earth that God had forgotten and people did not so much as know there was a God. So they looked at the moon and said within themselves, “See, he marches across the sky, he gives us light when we are good, and when we are bad he hides himself and leaves our nights dark.”

There was one man in Ur whose thoughts were reaching out beyond the moon and who longed to know the God who had made the moon. When anyone really wants to know God, then God always makes Himself known to him.

One day, when Abram, for that was his name, was walking alone maybe looking at the moon and thinking in his heart about the mysteries and wonders of life. God spoke to him, and it is written down for us in Genesis 12:1-3: **“Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”**

My! It must have surprised Abram to hear that message. First God said, “I want you to get out of your country,” that is, out of Ur of the Chaldees. Abram might have said, “I love every foot of it, for it is my own home.”

Then, secondly, God told him to get away from all his kindred or relatives. “Leave my folk with whom I have lived all my life?” “Yes, and one thing more, I want you to leave your father’s house.” That meant not only to leave his cousins, uncles and aunts, but his very own father, brothers and sisters. The only one he could take with him was his wife, for he had no children at that time.

Abram must have been filled with wonder at all of this, but imagine how he felt when God said, “And go unto a land that I will show you.” God didn’t give him a map and mark out the route and say, “I am sending you over to this place or that place,” although God knew all the time where He was sending him.

When Terah, Abram’s father, heard about this message from God to his son, Abram, he said, “I guess the whole family had better start on this trip.” So they packed up their tents and all of their belongings, loaded them on their camels, and set out.

Now, let us go back to our map again. Starting at Ur they went north and west until they came to Haran. See it away up north of Mesopotamia? When they got there they thought it was a pretty good place in which to camp for a while, and they stayed until Terah, Abram’s father, died. You see, God had told Abram to go by himself, but I suppose he hated to tell his father not to go. Just the same, because Abram did not fully obey, he did not reach the Promised Land until after his father died. That’s the way it is with us sometimes. We know what we ought to do but we lose so much of the blessing because we do not fully obey.

In this talk that God gave to Abram away over there in Ur, He not only told him what he should do, but He gave him seven promises, or things He would do for Abram.

Let us look at them and count them, See Genesis 12:2, 3.

1. **“I will make of thee a great nation.”**
2. **“I will bless thee.”**
3. **“And make thy name great.”**
4. **“And thou shalt be a blessing.”**
5. **“And I will bless them that bless thee.”**
6. **“And curse him that curseth thee.”**
7. **“And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”**

In the Bible the number seven stands for perfection, so this was a perfect promise, nothing was left out. God’s full plan for Abram was included in this sevenfold promise and all through the Bible we find it carried out to the last detail. Now come back to the story again. Abram knew God had spoken to him and he believed all the promises and obeyed the commands.

After his father, Terah, died up there in Haran, he took his wife, Sarah and his nephew Lot, packed up their belongings, loaded the camels and were off on their journey once more.

This time they went south from Haran, crossing into what is now Palestine and continuing until they came into the center of the land to a place called Shechem. When they arrived there they found the land already occupied by a people called Canaanites, for the country was then known as Canaan. Lest Abram be downhearted and think he had made a mistake and gone into the wrong country, God came and talked to him again.

He told him that He would give all of this land to Abram's seed, that means his children and grandchildren. So Abram built an altar there and worshipped God. Not long afterwards he moved a few miles away and set up his tent between Bethel and Hai and built an altar there.

Wherever, in this land, Abram went he built an altar. I wonder why he did that. When anyone worships God it must be done through sacrifice. We are all born with sin in our hearts and God has said if we sin we must die. In olden times men who were sorry for their sins killed an animal such as a lamb, goat or young ox, took its blood and sprinkled it upon the altar and asked God to accept the blood of the animal in place of their own blood. God was willing to do so until the day when His own Son JESUS Christ, died on the Cross and shed His blood to take away our sin.

So Abram built an altar and offered sacrifices to God, confessing in this way, that he had sin in his heart and asking God to forgive him and to have fellowship with him.

Abram was truly a man who believed what God said, but God had to test him and I am sorry to say that a few times he failed God. When the Bible tells the story of a man's life it tells the bad as well as the good.

Abram moved his tent again and traveled toward the south. Everywhere he went, there had been no rain and there was no grass or grain for the camels and cattle and not much for him and his family to eat, for food was very scarce.

Abram had God's promise to take care of him, but for a time he seemed to have forgotten it when he heard of plenty of grain down in Egypt, he said, "I think we had better go down." Now, God's promises were good only in the land He had given to Abram and not in Egypt.

When he reached Egypt Abram was very miserable and told Pharaoh, king of Egypt, a lie about his wife and Pharaoh sent Abram, Sarah his wife, and all that he had back to his own land. Abram must have felt very sorry about it for we find him going back to Bethel where he had built an altar a long time before. When he got there he worshipped God and found it was better to be in a land of famine with God, than in a land of plenty without Him.

Abram's nephew, Lot, who had always lived with him, had a great many cattle and sheep of his own, and the herdmen who took care of them were always quarreling with those who took care of Abram's flocks. Lot came to Abram to see what could be done about it and Abram, always kind and generous, said,

“Is not the whole land before you? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.”

I think Lot should have said, “Uncle Abram, it is all yours. You take first choice.” But he didn’t, for he was very selfish. From where they were standing at Bethel they could look down over the rich Jordan valley in which were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot thought it looked like Egypt where they had seen so much wealth and so he chose all this good land and moved his family, his cattle and everything he owned, and set up his tent near to the wicked cities.

I do not suppose Lot thought he would ever be friendly with any of those bad people. When he went there he was thinking of the good crops he could raise and the money he could make, but we’ll find out later how it turned out.

After Lot had moved away from Bethel and Abram was left alone, God came to him again. I think he was standing on the hill of Bethel when God said to him, **“Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:**

“For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.

“And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

“Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee” (Genesis 13:14-17).

Abram obeyed the command and went down to Hebron. Do you see it on the map?

Some time after Lot settled near Sodom, five kings of the nations living over east of the Jordan joined together to make war against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and three other kings of near-by nations. Now Lot had by this time moved into Sodom, and when this war came on, he and all his family were taken captives.

Uncle Abram heard of the trouble and might have said, “Well, it is good enough for him. He knew the men of Sodom were bad, but he was bound to go there, so let him get out the best way he can.” But Abram didn’t say that. His only thought was to save Lot and his family.

He formed an army of three hundred of his own servants and set out to rescue the ones he loved. Sure enough, he found them and brought them back to Sodom, not only them, but also the people of Sodom.

The king of Sodom saw them coming and hurried to meet Abram and all the company whom he had rescued. In the meantime a man by the name of Melchizedek, king of Salem, who was a priest of the Most High God came to give Abram bread and wine and to bless him for his great victory.

Then the king of Sodom told Abram if he would give him his people he could have all the goods that belonged to them. Abram said, “No, thank you, I won’t take even a shoe-string, for if I do, then you might say that you had made Abram rich.”

God was so pleased with Abram that He came to talk to him again. This time He said, “**Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.**” In other words, “Abram, I’ll be around you like a shield so that no one can hurt you, and I will give you riches far greater than those the king of Sodom wanted to give you.”

Down in his heart all these years, Abram had a great wish. He wanted a son, and time went on and no son came. Abram thought this was a good time to speak about it, so he asked God if he should adopt his servant Eliezer’s son and make him his heir.

God said, “No, Abram, I am going to give you a son of your very own. Come out of your tent and let me show you something. Look up to the sky.” I think it was a moonless night and the Milky Way was bright with stars. “Count them, Abram.” And Abram began, one, two, three, four, five, six, and then the fact of the great number came over him and he cried, “Why, God, I can’t count them. There are too many.” Then God said, “You’ll have as many children, grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren as there are stars.” And Abram believed what God said.

That night, when Abram was asleep, God came to him in a dream and told him very strange things that would happen to his family long after he was dead. He said this nation of whom Abram was to be the father, would be strangers in a strange land for four hundred years and then would be set free. All of this was very hard for Abram to understand.

The years passed and Abram and Sarah, his wife, were growing old and still God’s promise of a son had not been fulfilled. Sarah became impatient and thought she would fix things up her own way. It was a custom of those days for men to have more than one wife, although that was not God’s way. Sarah got to thinking that if she gave Hagar, her maid, to Abram for a wife, if God have Hagar a son, she would adopt it and raise it for her own. Sarah talked it over with Abram and he agreed.

When men and women take things into their own hands and do not follow God’s plans and wait His time, trouble always follows, and it did with Sarah and Abram. It wasn’t long before Sarah began to be very jealous of Hagar and to hate her.

When Hagar’s son, Ishmael, was born Sarah wasn’t as happy as she thought she would be, but they had to live together and make the best of it.

A few more years passed by and then one day God came again to talk to Abram. This time He said, “Abram, I will make my covenant with you and will multiply you exceedingly, and I am going to change your name from Abram, which means ‘father,’ to Abraham, which means ‘father of many nations.’” Then God went on to tell him that Sarah, his wife, would have a son. That was almost too good to believe, and Abraham was so pleased with the promise that he fell on his face and laughed.

Not long afterward Abraham was sitting in his tent door one hot summer day when he saw three men coming to call on him. He ran out to meet them and gave them a hearty welcome. Really, two of these men were angels and the other was the Lord, Himself, from Heaven.

Abraham invited them to stop under the shade of the trees and hurried around to wait upon them and to make them comfortable. Then he went into the tent to tell Sarah to get dinner, quickly. He rushed out to the field and got the finest calf of his flock and told his servants to dress it. It wasn't long before Sarah and the servants had the meal ready, and Abraham stood by while his guests ate. He seemed to realize they were more than ordinary visitors.

After dinner was over they asked where Sarah was and he told them she was in the tent. Then they went on to say, so that she could hear, that the long promised son was soon to come to them. Now, Abraham was about a hundred years old and Sarah was ninety and God doesn't usually send sons and daughters to such old people. Sarah laughed to herself and thought they must be joking, but the men said she ought not to laugh; for it was really true.

When the guests arose to go on their way toward Sodom, according to the oriental custom, Abraham went with them. The Lord was much pleased with Abraham and decided to tell him why they were going to Sodom and what they were going to do to that wicked city. The other two heavenly beings went on and left the Lord talking with Abraham. Of course, Abraham was greatly concerned because his nephew, Lot, lived in that wicked city that was about to be destroyed. So he pleaded long and hard for mercy on the people of Sodom. Finally, the Lord said He would save the city if they could find ten good people living in it.

Abraham went back very much worried about his relatives. When Lot went to live in Sodom he not only brought trouble on himself but on others also. Isn't that the way it always is? Sin brings the sinner and all his family to grief.

The next day the Lord drove Lot, his wife and daughters out of Sodom and then destroyed the city. So you see, Lot, when he was an old man, lost everything he had and was driven out into the cold world to find a new home.

The Lord loved Abraham and respected him so much that He saved Lot because Abraham asked Him to and not because Lot was worthy. Thus the **“fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”**

I think Abraham spent a long sleepless night and then rose early in the morning and went to the top of the hill and lo, he saw the whole valley of the Jordan filled with smoke as from a great furnace, for Sodom and Gomorrah were burning. Abraham's only comfort was the fact that he had done his best for Lot, although, in his willfulness, Lot wouldn't listen.

Can you not see noble, faithful, old Abraham bow his head in agony of soul and in sorrow at Lot's condition? But there is no record that he ever visited Lot again. Lot had made his choice, had his way, and he had to suffer the results.

I suppose because of better pasture and farming lands, Abraham moved down to Gerar which was on the border of his country. So long as he lived well in the land he kept up his worship on the altars, but when he moved away and lived near the boundary he always got into trouble.

When he lived in the land and in fellowship with God, he wasn't a bit afraid of anyone or anything, for God was right there to be a shield to him as He had promised. But now he moved out on the edge and he began to be afraid and, one day, I think it was when Sarah moved about the tent as usual, it all came over him, as it did years before when he was out of the land in Egypt, how very, very pretty and good looking she was. He thought she surely carried her years well for one who was ninety, and he was greatly troubled about her. "Why," he thought to himself, "this king of Gerar will kill me and take Sarah." So he said to Sarah, "If the king should want you, tell him you are my sister." This was partly the truth, for she was his half sister.

Now, Sarah wasn't any more beautiful than she ever had been, but Abraham was out of fellowship with God and afraid of his life.

It wasn't long until Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah to come to his house. Then God came to Abimelech in a dream and told him he couldn't have Sarah for she belonged to another, and that he must send her back.

In the morning Abimelech called for Abraham to come to see him and talk things over. Can you imagine how a good man like Abraham felt when he was rebuked by a heathen? Finally they got affairs all settled and Abimelech gave Abraham a present of sheep, oxen, menservants and maidservants and restored to him Sarah, his wife.

And now the time drew near for the fulfillment of the promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah. When the baby came they named him Isaac, which means "laughter." I think Abraham, although a hundred years old, went about very proudly and happily that day. And Sarah, dear Sarah, indeed she must have been exceedingly happy and have looked into the face of her son and thanking God for the great gift, for she held a secret in her heart that told her the baby's birth was only through God's power. The Bible says she laughed so that everyone who heard her laughed too.

According to the custom of those days Isaac was weaned when he was about three years old and his father made a great feast to celebrate the event. Everything went along very well until Sarah saw Ishmael, Hagar's son, who was about fourteen years old, making faces at Isaac.

My, but Sarah was angry, and she told Abraham she wouldn't put up with this any longer, that he would have to put the servant and her son out of the house. She didn't want them any where near, for this son of a servant could not be heir with her son, Isaac.

Sarah should have taken time to think how she had brought this whole trouble on herself by trying to fix things in her own way; and Abraham, dear me, how sad he must have felt to have to drive his own son away. But, of course, he had listened to Sarah instead of to God, and now they must both face the results of their own foolishness.

It was another day of sorrow for Abraham and so greatly was he grieved that God came and talked to him about it. He said, “Never mind, Abraham, do as Sarah says, for it is in Isaac that your nation is to be blessed. But I will also make of Ishmael a great nation because he is your son.”

I think Abraham must have spent another night of sober thinking. He might have been saved all this trouble if he had only waited instead of being impatient. Next morning, heavy of heart and sad of face, he got up early, packed some bread and a bottle of water in a sack, and putting them on Hagar’s shoulder sent her and Ishmael away. That seemed pretty hard for all of them, but God Himself, came and took care of the woman and her son.

When Isaac was about seventeen years old God brought the hardest test of all into Abraham’s life. It was more than just to prove Abraham, it was a great and wonderful picture of what the Father in Heaven was going to do when His Son should be born on the earth.

One day, I think it was when Abraham was alone that God called, “**Abraham!**” and he answered, “**Behold, here I am.**” It is a great thing to live within calling distance and be able to answer when God calls.

What special message did God have for this man Abraham? A very unusual one. He said, “**Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.**”

Abraham must have been almost overcome when he heard those words and he might have said, “Why, Lord, do I understand you right? It is through Isaac that all the promises are to come. He is the son that you promised so long and his mother and I love him so much, I can’t think you mean what you say!”

But he didn’t say any such thing for the Bible says that early the next morning he “**saddled his ass and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up and went unto the place of which God had told him.**”

Mount Moriah was three days journey from where Abraham lived and the third day as they went along, they caught their first view of it. By the way, that is the mountain on which Jerusalem was built later.

With the mountain in sight Abraham said to the servants, “**Abide ye here... and I and the lad will go yonder, and worship and come again to you.**” “**And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it upon Isaac his son; and took the fire in his hand and a knife and they went both of them together.**”

As they walked along Isaac said, “**My Father, ...Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?**” I think those words must have touched Abraham very deeply, but his faith in God and his willingness to obey kept him up. Abraham told Isaac that God would provide Himself a lamb. When they got to the place that God had chosen, Abraham set about to build the altar and piled the wood upon it.

This finished he bound Isaac and put him on the altar, and stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son. Just at that very moment the angel of the Lord called to him out of Heaven and said, **“Abraham, Abraham!”** and Abraham said, **“Here am I.”** God said, **“Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.”**

And then Abraham loosed Isaac and when he turned around, near-by in a clump of trees was a ram for an offering. Isaac was the dearest of all earthly things to Abraham, but God wanted to be first in his love and now He knew that He was.

I think Abraham praised God and put his arms around Isaac, and I think they both cried a little. There is no joy like that which comes from perfect obedience to God’s Word.

There must have been a great time in Heaven the day that Isaac was offered. All the angels must have been interested in what was going on down on Mount Moriah, for twice the angel of the Lord called out from Heaven, the first time to stay Abraham’s hand and the second time to tell Abraham that because he has not withheld his only son Isaac:

“That in blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of Heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because thou have obeyed my voice.”

A few years later Sarah, the only woman in the Bible whose full age is recorded, died at the age of one hundred twenty-seven years. This was the first death in Abraham’s family and having no cemetery lot he had to look around for one. He finally decided on the cave of Machpelah near where they lived at Hebron, which he bought of the sons of Heth and there he buried Sarah. I will tell you of how Abraham found a wife for Isaac in the next story.

After Sarah died, Abraham married a woman by the name of Keturah who bore him many sons.

Abraham gave all of his property to Isaac, but to these sons and to Ishmael he gave gifts and sent them away from Isaac to live in the east country. Abraham died when he was one hundred and seventy-five years old, and Isaac and Ishmael buried him beside Sarah in the cave of Machpelah.

So ended the life of the man whom God called His “Friend.” Abraham made some mistakes but he was full of faith in God and was always ready to obey His Word. We stand when the great hymns of our nation are sung. Let us bow reverently in the presence of so great a man as Abraham.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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