

## **Abraham to Sinai – A Chosen People**

*John D. Rose*

### **INTRODUCTION**

When one contemplates the passage of time from the Creation to the present day – some six thousand years, one cannot comprehend the enormity of the lives of all those who have trod upon this terrestrial ball nor the influence of their lives. The staggering complexity of the intertwining of lives and lifetimes is the true hallmark of history. And truly the present is powerless to be born without the behest of the past. For this reason, looking into the past is the only way to comprehend the present with any thoroughness or to have any possibility of preparedness for the future.

These investigatory parameters and penchants are relevant only to human beings and not to God – for God sees the end from the beginning and the beginning from the end (Isa. 46:9-10). Time, space, and matter; the building blocks of the reality of the physical universe, are as so many strands or threads interwoven and multiplied beyond human countability – every established fact and every possibility of the future yet undone: the Almighty God sees from eternity. With this knowledge, which is infinite; God brought forth, in creation, from that which does not exist the things which do exist (Heb. 11:3).

In His mind, from eternity, was a church; but not just any church – the one church, which would be built by His Son (Eph. 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Mat. 16:18). Prerequisite to the building of the church of Christ was the laying of that church's foundation – the vicarious sacrifice of the Lord (1 Cor. 3:1; Heb. 2:9). For the Lord to have become the Lamb of God (John 1:29), He had to have a body to sacrifice and blood to shed (John 1:14; Heb. 9:22, 10:4). To have a body for sacrifice, the Second Person of the God-head had to take on frail human flesh. To accomplish the dwelling of the Second Person among men as a man, and thus be the Son of man; Jesus would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Luke 1:30-35). To be born of a virgin there must be a lineage – a physical descendancy on the part of the virgin precipitating the birth. Behind all of this was the choosing of a peculiar Chaldean family and a man named Abram, whom God would call, prove, and bless.

### **OUT OF CHALDEA**

When Abram, the son of Terah, was seventy-five years old, he left the city of Haran and journeyed into Canaan. God had said unto Abram when he had yet dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1; cf. Acts 7:3). Before Abram's journeying to Canaan; Terah had taken his family, including Abram and his wife Sarai, to Haran where Terah died (Gen. 11:31-32; cf. Acts 7:4). After his father's death, Abram gathered his possessions and family and traveled south into the land that four hundred and twenty-eight years in the future would become the land of Israel – the land on which the feet of the Master would trod, whose soil would receive His blood, and in which rock His sepulcher would be hewn.

Abram was called by God to do more than just vacate his former residence. He was called upon to leave his country, his family, and his father's house (Gen. 12:1). Ur, the city of Abram's nativity was a technological jewel of its day. The common home of his day was a two story plastered brick dwelling with ample accommodation for servants and guests – even boasting inside lavatories. Beyond the at least modest opulence of the average citizen of Ur, they boasted great learning and the Chaldeans were well known for their scientific prowess (cf. Dan. 2:2; Mat. 2:1). Of Abram's Chaldean family, little is known beyond the fact that they were idolaters. Joshua spake of their evil worship when addressing the Israelites prior to his death, "...Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, *even* Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods," and, "Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the

LORD” (Jos. 24:2, 14). That family teraphim and idolatrous custom was of great importance is easily seen in the actions of a pursuing Laban (great-nephew to Abram) and a thieving Rachel (Laban’s daughter (Gen. 31:19-55). Possessions and customs of such great importance have long-lasting and pervasive influence on a family. From this influence Abram was to separate himself. Lastly, Abram was called upon by God to leave the security afforded to him by the wealth of his father’s house. Proof of Terah’s wealth can be seen in the extent of his family for which he was ultimately responsible (Gen. 11:31) and that his house had servants (Gen. 12:5). Though Abram took the substance and servants garnered while yet under his father’s oversight when he journeyed from Haran, he started fresh without the shadowing protection of his father’s earthly prominence.

The trials of Abram were many. He was tried from the very beginning by that which he was called upon by God to leave behind: country, family, and his father’s house (Gen. 12:1). An early trial of great significance was the facing of the unknown. God commanded Abram to, “...Get...unto a land that I will shew thee” (Gen. 12:1). The land was yet unknown to Abram as was the way into that mysterious parcel. It is evident that the going was to precede the showing. Thus, Abram was to go by faith – he was to walk by faith and not by sight (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). The Hebrews writer spoke thusly of Abram’s (later to be named Abraham) faith, “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8). The exemplary faith of Abram was not a blind faith – a leap into the dark. He had the Divine commission (Gen. 12:1) and he had the general revelation of God available to all men (Psa. 19:1-7). His faith was based upon evidence but he was required to trust in the Lord and be patient in the Lord knowing that what God had promised He was also able to perform. The apostle Paul spoke of Abraham’s endurance:

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. (Rom. 4:20)

Another great trial of Abram, now called Abraham (Gen. 17:5), was the command by God to offer his son Isaac – his only son of promise – as a burnt offering before the Lord. Within this account one can see two points pertinent to God’s scheme of redemption – to the making and molding of a people to bring the Christ into the world that men may be saved through Him.

The first point is the sacrifice. Isaac was Abraham’s only seed of promise, for God had said, “...for in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen. 21:12). Isaac was the second link or step in the fulfillment of God’s promise to and through Abraham:

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. (Gen. 12:2-3)

By the agency of Isaac would all the earth be blessed, “...for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.” However, the primary aspect of the Abrahamic promise was to bring the Christ into the world. In the wisdom of God, which is not the wisdom of men (cf. 1 Cor. 1:21), the Christ would come into the world by way of miraculous conception and a physical birth, necessitating a physical lineage on behalf of Mary the virgin mother of Jesus and the His legal earthly father Joseph, and this through the descendancy of Judah the son of Jacob the son of Isaac the son of Abraham. As Isaac was Abraham’s only son of promise, the only son through whom the promises would be fulfilled; his life was precious and necessary and Isaac, as yet, had no son. Yea, Isaac must live and live to have a son or sons to further the purpose of God to bring the Christ into the world (Gen. 17:19). For this reason it is said thus of Abraham concerning his willingness to offer Isaac, “Accounting that God was able to raise him

[Isaac] up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Heb. 11:19; bracketed insert JDR). Abraham had been promised by God that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. In the process of time, he came to know and understand that through Isaac would God proceed in fulfilling His promises. Abraham knew that Isaac must live and beget children, for through him the descendancy of Abraham would come to be as the number of the stars of the heavens: for God said, “...Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (Gen. 15:5) and God’s covenant would be established with Isaac and his seed after him, “And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (Gen. 17:19).

This now brings one to point two: the faith of Abraham. Abraham’s actions in this trial were exemplary. Firstly, it should be recognized that Abraham knew that Isaac was his only son of promise. Equally understood was the meaning of a burnt sacrifice. Since God had promised that His blessings would be upon Isaac and his seed after him and God’s **unconditional** promises cannot and will not be altered; the only outcome left, consistent with the standing command of God to sacrifice Isaac, was that God would raise Isaac from the dead: thus Abraham was, “Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Heb. 11:19). Abraham was equal to the task at hand for the Text says, “And Abraham rose up early in the morning...” (Gen. 22:3). Abraham trusted in the Lord, believing that God would not fail – and he conducted his life accordingly. On the third day (verse 4) Abraham, Isaac, and their servants arrived at the mountain of God’s choosing. One should be cognizant of the strain of three days’ apprehension. Abraham could not simply muster a boisterous faithfulness, lively but short lived. He was required to endure with patience the race set before him (cf. Heb. 12:1). His faith had to be strong and deep seated – he had to have godly courage (cf. Jos. 1:9). Therefore, James wrote, “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (Jam. 2:23). It was Abraham’s faithfulness that occasioned this passage from Paul’s letter to the brethren in Rome:

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. (Rom. 4:11-13)

The lesson of faith – an enduring courageous faith – is one of the greatest means by which God was making and molding a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. Abraham was to be the father of many nations (Gen. 17:5) but more importantly he was to be a father of the faithful, both of Israel and the Israel of God: the church (Gal. 6:16).

#### *The Blessings*

God richly blessed Abraham. Yea, He blessed him with great wealth for it is written of Abraham that he was, “...very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. 13:2) and, “...the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things” (Gen. 24:1). Furthermore, Abraham was a mighty prince in Canaan, his land of sojourn, “...my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us...” (Gen. 23:6). Though Abraham had great earthly wealth his true riches were those that he laid up in Heaven by being rich toward God through faith. The Lord Jesus said:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither

moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Mat. 6:19-21)

Where was Abraham's heart? God's own words tell of Abraham's heart, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19). Abraham's heart sought God, for without such seeking and finding he would not have shown his children the way of righteousness in word and in deed. Without such seeking and finding Abraham would not have become the father of the righteous. Without such seeking and finding he would not have been the friend of God, as He himself has said, "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend" (Isa. 41:8). The greatest blessings of God unto Abraham were the opportunities to walk and to grow in the way of truth through the trials laid before him by God that Abraham might have Heaven after a while.

### **INTO EGYPT AND ON TO SINAI**

In the eternal purpose of God to bring the Christ into the world that salvation may be a realized thing and not a product of prospect only, He desired a foreshadowing of the church – the body of His dear Son. The shadow would be a nation of priests and a holy people unto the Lord. This body of people would be a living example of holiness and obedience before the world around them; a nation of godliness in the midst of nations of wickedness. Israel was to be a holy people, a theocratic nation – but a nation nonetheless. To this end God brought His people into Egypt to grow them and prepare them for Sinai that they might truly be a nation in number, law, and Divine purpose. This maturation was effected through the agency of the life of Joseph.

#### *Joseph*

Joseph was also called, tried, and greatly blessed. Joseph's call came by way of two dreams of his youth. Both dreams spoke of that which would come to pass many years in the future – Joseph would become ruler in Egypt second only to Pharaoh (Gen. 37). At the time that the dreams were Divinely revealed to Joseph, he was but a youth among the sheep; loved by his father but hated by his older brethren. In great cruelty, he was stolen from his father by his brothers and sold into Egyptian slavery (Gen. 37). A temporary respite was given to Joseph in the house of Potiphar. God richly blessed Joseph that he rose to prominence over Potiphar's household. Once more calamity befell Joseph, for he was insidiously betrayed by Potiphar's wife and cast into prison (Gen. 39). While in prison opportunity was given to Joseph by God through the imprisoned butler and baker of Pharaoh (Gen. 40). In time, Pharaoh dreamed a greatly troubling dream and Joseph was remembered in prison and brought to Pharaoh to give the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41). By Joseph's Divinely appointed ability to interpret Pharaoh's dream, he was set over all the kingdom to be administrator. As administrator, Joseph prepared Egypt, through the guidance of the Lord, to be a sanctuary in the time of terrible famine – and it was the famine that was the impetus for Jacob to send his sons into Egypt to buy grain. Through the actions of Joseph with his brothers, Jacob journeyed with all Israel, some seventy souls, and came into Egypt to settle in the land of Goshen (Gen. 41-45). That this was part of the eternal purpose of God is beyond dispute, for Joseph said, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life," and, "...God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God..." (Gen. 45:5, 7-8). To serve God and further His plans to bring the Christ into the world was Joseph's greatest blessings.

#### *A New Nation*

With Israel now in Egypt, every opportunity and advantage was theirs to grow and be readied

for their departure unto Sinai. To lead the people, God chose a shepherd of Midian who was of the stock of Israel reared in the house of Pharaoh. That man was Moses. Moses was certainly called, tried, and blessed; but, for the greater purpose of calling, trying, and blessing Israel. He was called by God to bring His people Israel out of bondage – out of the land of Egypt (Exo. 3:10). Moreover, Moses was called upon by the Lord to be His prophet; to speak unto Israel and Pharaoh all the words of God (Exo. 3:16; 4:14-16). Moses was the instrument by which God called His people out of bondage saying:

...The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and *seen* that which is done to you in Egypt: And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. (Exo. 3:16-17)

To this calling the children of Israel hearkened for when they heard the words of God and saw the confirming signs, "...the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped" (Exo. 4:31). From this moment unto Sinai the people of Israel saw and experienced many new and wondrous events: the plagues, the Passover, and the parting of the Red Sea. The greatest was at Sinai. Exodus chapters nineteen and twenty chronicle one of the greatest events to have ever happened in the sight and hearing of mortal men. God spake into existence a nation. A nation gathered unto Himself to show forth His own glory:

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deu. 7:6-8)

God again reiterated His calling of Israel and set forth the challenges and trials to prove Israel and the attendant blessings for the faithful. Upon that day, God spoke to the people from Heaven (Exo. 20: 22). He reminded them that He had brought them forth from bondage with His own strong arm. He reminded them that He was a jealous God unwilling to share His glory with any other. The Lord stated plainly that mercy was abundant for the obedient but wrath only awaited the ungodly. God demanded honor for it was due Him and Israel was to show mercy and do justice unto all (Exo. 20:1-17). If Israel would give up their idols (Jos. 24:14) and worship and obey God, He would come unto them and His presence would be with them and He would bless them:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. (Exo. 20:22-24).

God has always required of men to give up their fear and trust in Him and worship only the one true living God. He required this of Abraham. He required it of Joseph. God also demanded this of Israel. And He demanded it of those who would hear and obey the Gospel on, "...that great and notable day of the Lord..." (Acts 2:20).

## PENTECOST THE SUBSTANCE OF SINAI

About fourteen hundred seventy-seven years after God spoke the nation of Israel into existence – that is, He established Israel as a nation; a nation in number, in Divine Law, and Divine purpose, He established a new nation, a new Israel (Gal. 6:16). This would be a nation in number: every creature (Mark 16:15); a nation in Divine Law: the Gospel (Heb. 8:10), a nation in Divine purpose: to teach and live the Gospel to save themselves and others (1 Tim. 4:16) – this nation would be the church of Christ.

With its tabernacle, Temple, Levitical priesthood, and animal sacrifice; the old Law was a shadow of good things to come (Heb. 10:1, 4). As the shadow is not the substance; so the Law of Moses and its ordinances were not the law or the body of the Christ. God brought forth Israel from Mount Sinai but He said He would bring forth a new covenant: a new people:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer. 31:31-34)

The calling would not be from Sinai but from Zion:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Isa. 2:2-3)

As it was with Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Israel: so it was with those on the day of Pentecost. They were called, they were tried, and they were greatly blessed.

### *The Calling, Trial, and Blessing*

On that great day, just ten short days after the ascension of the Lord back to Heaven, where He presented His own blood before the Throne of God and sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High (Dan. 7:13-14; Heb. 1:3); God began His final steps to redeem mankind from their sins, started all those years earlier in Abraham in that far away land of on the other side of the “flood” (Gen. 12:1-3; Jos. 24:15). The greatest moment for mankind as individuals – after the death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement of the Christ – was the opening of the door into the church by the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles; which opened the gates of Heaven to all those that would obey, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...” (Mat. 16:19).

Peter called on those on that day to, “...Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). How could they so do? They could be saved if they believed, “...that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ;” and if they would, “...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” (Acts 2:36, 38). Three thousand passed the trial and proved themselves worthy of the Kingdom (Acts 2:41). Those three thousand souls put off their fear, their prejudices, and their rebellious traditions and submitted unto the Gospel. They triumphed in faith as Abraham had. They walked in trust as Joseph had. And they became

a holy nation unto God as Israel had.

### **CONCLUSION**

God has always sought belief, love, and obedience from mankind. In Abraham, He found just that. God also found faithful servants in Joseph and Moses. All of these men were tried **and** refined through hardships, failures, and triumph. The anchor of their faith was the Almighty God. Today, every man is called by the Gospel to give up his idols and serve the Living God in sincerity and in truth. As those on the day of Pentecost were saved so shall a man be saved today – being called by the Gospel, triumphing in trial by obeying, and finally receiving that crown of life eternal.