

The creation, fall and spread of sin

Abraham is the greatest figure in the Bible, after Jesus. The biblical story in Genesis 1–11 swiftly leads to him. God created the world in perfection ¹. Man and woman were the climax of creation ². Soon, however, inspired by ‘the snake’ they tried to be like gods ³ and the result was shame, guilt, loss of innocence and exclusion from paradise⁴.

¹ 1:1–2:3
² 2:4–25
³ 3:1–7
⁴ 3:8–24

• Depravity

One might think that human beings would never sin again, but the fall of the human race was more serious than that, and sin had become part of their nature. Having sinned in the garden of Eden, man sinned outside the garden of Eden as well. Soon demonic powers of some kind were entering into intimate relationship with the human race ¹. The result was awful depravity and God decided to destroy humankind from ‘the world’ and begin again with Noah. Even the flood did not restrain human sin for very long. Soon men were trying again to climb into heaven by their own devices ². Innocence had failed ³. Exclusion from paradise brought no worldwide repentance ⁴. The exterminating flood led to no new humanity in any deep sense ⁵. Depravity was on the increase. It was the right time for God to introduce His major initiative in fulfilling the promise of Genesis 3:15 that He would crush ‘the snake’ and everything that he had done. He had promised worldwide blessing through someone in the line of Shem ⁶.

¹ 6:1–8
² 11:1–9
³ Genesis 1–3
⁴ Genesis 4–6
⁵ Genesis 6–11
⁶ Genesis 9:27

• The flood

• God’s initiative to fulfil his promise

God’s solution through Abraham

God chose Abraham – or Abram as he was called at this point. He was an idolater from the moon-worshipping cities of Ur and Haran. But just as Noah had ‘found grace’, Abram too had ‘found grace’ and had been chosen by God to be the initiator of God’s programme of salvation. God stepped into his life. There was no special preparation in the life of Abram. The story is abrupt and startling; the initiative was entirely on God’s side. The voice of God came to a pagan man living in Ur, a city in which the ‘Chaldean’ tribe lived. (Later, the ‘Chaldeans’ inhabited Babylon and the word ‘Chaldean’ meant ‘Babylonian’, as in the Hebrew of Habakkuk 1:6.)

¹ see Romans 8:29
² see Ephesians 1:4–5
³ see Ephesians 1:11
⁴ see Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15
⁵ Genesis 20:12

• God chose Abram – an idolater

• Abram predestined to an inheritance

This is typical of the Bible’s teaching about grace. God chose Abram, setting His love on him and determining that he should be summoned to salvation and used by God. ‘Those whom God foreknew He also predestined’ ¹. Abram was chosen before the foundation of the world ², predestined to an inheritance ³. Before Abram was born God had set His heart on him (like Jeremiah and Paul).⁴

• Abram’s family background

Terah, Abram’s father, had at least two wives ⁵. Haran and Nahor were, apparently, Abram’s elder brothers. At some time before Abram was 75 years old, Terah left Ur. The son Haran married in Ur and had two daughters, but then died at a time when the family were still living in Ur. Nahor married one of his nieces. Abram married his half-sister, Sarai.

• Ur to Haran and onwards

At some time before Abram’s seventy-fifth year the family moved to Haran. Then Terah died; Abram was about 75 years old ¹. Long before he had been called to leave Ur ², but it was only after Terah’s death that there was opportunity for him to follow God’s summons. Abram was called to keep travelling. He took with him Sarai and Lot (his nephew).¹

¹ Acts 7:4
² see Acts 7:4; Genesis 15:6

¹ See Family tree in Part 36

Abraham's life of Faith - 1

1. Faith must arise from a revelation of God's will

• Faith relates to what God has said

• Spiritual instinct

• God's character

• A wrong approach to faith

He was called to a life of **faith**. God had come to him in Ur. 'Now *Yahweh said to Abram...*'. Genesis 15:7 makes it clear that it happened in Ur. 'I am *Yahweh who brought you from Ur...*'. This is why some translations have 'The Lord **had** said...'. On God's side Abram's story began with God's predestination. On Abram's side, all of Abram's blessings came to him by faith, when God spoke to him.

1. **Faith is based on a revelation of God's will.** 'Now *Yahweh said...*'. It is not possible to have faith unless there is some kind of revelation. Faith is faith in something that God has said. It is not a 'natural' ability that all people have that can be 'switched on'. Faith is always faith in some kind of word or revelation from God.

Abram is the model man of faith ^{□1} and all believers are 'children of Abram'. But Abram's faith was faith **in what God had spoken**. 'Against hope but in hope Abraham believed in order that he would become a father of many nations, **according to what had been spoken**, "So shall your seed be" ' ^{□2}. This is a very important matter. Many strange 'faith-teachings' go astray because they do not see that **faith always relates to what God has said**. Faith is believing God, taking God at His word. If God has not given a word about any particular matter it is not possible to exercise faith. The essence of faith is to be able to say: 'I believe God, that it shall be just as it has been spoken to me' ^{□3}. If it has not been spoken it cannot be believed.

It is true that faith sometimes can take the form of spiritual instinct (I think 1 Samuel 14:6–14 is an example); and faith sometimes is trusting more generally in the character of God (Matthew 8:5–10 and 15:27–28 are examples), but ordinarily faith has to have some kind of 'word' from God.

If we try to 'claim' something when we have no word from God, we shall be in trouble. By faith Joshua destroyed Jericho. He did it because he was **told** to march round it for seven days blowing trumpets. If we were to march around a city for seven days blowing trumpets nothing would happen! We probably have not been given that precise word from God. By faith Enoch skipped his funeral ^{□1}, but if you were to try to go to heaven without dying you might find out you cannot take what God is not giving! We need a word from God. Then we can believe that word and 'inherit' it.

□1 Romans 4:16

□2 Romans 4:18

□3 Acts 27:25

□1 Hebrews 11:5



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