



# The call of Abraham

## Genesis 12.1-9

**Genesis 17:1-14; Romans 4; Hebrews 11:8-19; James 2:14-24**

It is always interesting and challenging to see a man who has achieved fame in spite of his small beginnings. With Abraham, the beginning lies in the call of God and his response to it. It was God who made him what he was and his importance and fame are only such in the history of God's saving action which came to its climax in Christ.

What is Abraham's position in the New Testament? Jews claimed that, because Abraham was their father, they were secure and had no need of repentance.

*And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. Matthew 3:9*

*Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. Luke 3:8*

Abraham's merit was enough to cover them. Kinship with Abraham was their guarantee. A Jew describing heaven put it in concrete personal terms as "Abraham's bosom" i.e. no man was nearer to God than Abraham.

*The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. Luke 16:22*

Paul's vital argument for justification by faith was based on Abraham (Romans 4). On the other hand, James can use Abraham as an example of justification by works.

*Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? James 2:21*

While James and Paul have contrasting emphases, they both teach the same thing, i.e. that Abraham was a real man of faith which expressed itself in trust and obedience. In a most remarkable passage where Jesus claims that God is not the God of the dead but of the living, Abraham is one of those who are alive.

***“But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” Matthew 22:31-32***

We are justified then in seeing in Abraham one of those whom Jesus would have called a "Christian before Christ". This is what we assume when we sing

***The God of Abraham praise  
Who reigns in heaven above  
Ancient of everlasting days  
And God of love.***

Abraham's importance for the early Church may be reflected in the fact that, along with Moses and David, he is more frequently mentioned than other Old Testament characters, many being on-the-spot references.

Abraham is presented to us in stories often told in Israel before they were welded into a kind of unity in Genesis. He is a man addressed by God where he lived in the town of Haran. Note too the ready obedience and the constant awareness of God revealed in the building up of altars, also representing a claim on the territory as God's and suggesting that Abraham's God is universal. He appears in Haran, also in Canaan. He is not restricted to any one locality. There is no restriction of race in the promise made to Abraham - ***"In him would all the families of the earth be blessed."***

Here is the ideal man of faith, whose faith was put to the most demanding of tests, e.g.

- Lack of descendants through Sarah – Genesis 15:2; 16:1
- Calling the promise of God into question Genesis 17:15-21
- The call to sacrifice the one person who was the channel of the promises, Isaac - Genesis 22:1-19.

Yet his faith never wavered. He is a man of compassion who intercedes patiently for a sinful city, prefiguring the compassion of Jesus for all outcasts and His intercession (cf Hebrews 7:25). Moreover, he is no plaster saint but a man who had his own problems and temptations and yielded to them at times, e.g. his deceit and cowardice in Egypt (Genesis 12: 11-16).

It is interesting that Jesus' own disciples were very human people. We have only to think of Peter, James, John and Thomas, not to speak of Judas. God calls us as we are and, in response to the call, we become what He wants us to be. Only in Him do we realise our full possibilities through forgiveness, grace and the power of the Risen Christ and the indwelling Spirit.

## Discussion

List the sacrificial demands made on Abraham and compare them with those Jesus made.  
Genesis 12:1-9

Why did Abraham proceed with the sacrifice of Isaac if it would make God's promise null and void? Genesis 22:1-19