

The Patriarchs

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph
By Les Wheeldon

Abraham

Abraham is one of the giants of the Old Testament, and his journey begins in Ur of the Chaldees and ends in the glory perhaps as one of the 24 elders seated around the throne in Revelation 4.

Abraham was born around the beginning of the 21st century BC, and died therefore around 1925 BC. (He lived 175 years).

There is no way of counting the blessings that Abraham enjoyed. From the air that he breathed, to the revelations he received, Abraham was blessed beyond telling. So this study is but the study of seven of the most significant of the blessings that he enjoyed:

1. To be blessed and a blessing. God never intended Abraham to be selfish, and this can never be God's will to bless us merely for our benefit, but rather for His glory and the blessing of many.
2. Seven visitations or encounters with God. To meet with God, and to cause us to know Him is God's heart and God's greatest gift.
 - Gen: 12:1 Called of God to leave all and know Him.
 - Gen:12:7 First promise of a son and the land. Abraham responds by building an altar.
 - Gen: 13:14-17. The second promise of a son and a land. Abraham builds an altar.
 - Gen 15. The promise of a son and a land (v 18) but also suffering darkness and hope.
 - Gen 17: 1-22. El Shaddai renews the promise of a son and land.
 - Gen 18 The promise of a son renewed and the revelation of judgment leading to intercession.
 - Ch 21. Isaac is offered and the promises are renewed.
3. The Bread and the Wine from the hands of Melchizedek. Abraham is a New Testament man. He never lived under the Old Covenant and here was the first to be given the revelation of God who shares Himself by being poured out for us.
4. Justification by faith. Abraham knew the blessing of total forgiveness and being made right with God through faith alone. This was and is the only way a man may be right with God. The law can only make us more keenly aware of our need of grace.
5. Circumcision. Abraham received not just the symbol but doubtless the miracle in some measure of the nature of flesh being cut away from his heart. Though Abraham knew this only in part, the Christian may know the fullness of the power of the cross (Col 2:11-12.)

6. A place of prayer. Abraham had a relationship with God that led him to effective intercession for Lot and also for others. To have this close access to God in prayer is the promise of the New Covenant. (John 16:26-27.)
7. The Son of Promise. God gave Abraham a son and a land. But the greater land he looked for was the city of God and the greater son was the Messiah Jesus. There is no greater gift.

New Testament quotes relating to Abraham:

Mat 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham

Mat 3:9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Mat 8:11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

Mat 22:32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

Luk 1:73 The oath which he swore to our father Abraham,

Joh 8:39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham **Joh 8:56** Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw *it*, and was glad.

Joh 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

Rom 4:12 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.

Gal 3:6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Gal 3:9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Gal 3:14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Notes

Chapter 11

Abraham began life in Ur of the Chaldees, an area where the earliest written records have been found dating from around 3000 BC. The city of Ur was idolatrous and had a ziggurat dedicated to the moon god. Abraham heard the voice of God while in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2-3) and he left with his father Terah and moved to Haran, where Abraham's older brother died. (The city Haran was either named after Haran or vice versa.) It was after the death of his father that Abraham fully obeyed the call and left his father's house (Acts 7:4).

Chapter 12

Abraham first heard the voice of God telling him to "get out!" This is the command to repent, and included a promise, that if he would do so God would make him a great nation built on the two promises of a land and a son. Abraham obeyed but on reaching Canaan, where he built altars to the Lord, he found the land was in the grip of one of the frequent famines to afflict the region in that period of history. Abraham then moved south to Egypt to escape the famine.

In Egypt Abraham lied regarding Sarah, which concluded with a stinging rebuke for Abraham but also much wealth. This wealth was a mixed blessing because among the servants was a young child named Hagar.

Chapter 13

Returning to Canaan Lot and Abraham were forced to part ways, Lot choosing to live in the plain, Abraham accepting the rougher terrain of the mountains of central Canaan.

Chapter 14

Then the Jordan valley was invaded and Lot was taken prisoner. In an act of great daring and courage, Abraham pursued the raiders and recovered Lot and all the plunder. However Abraham was utterly disinterested in the plunder and ceded all to the king of Sodom. Melchizedek meets Abraham at this point and Abraham pays him a tenth of all that he has.

Chapter 15

Abraham is then given a vision of God, including renewed promises and expressions of great love, but also a vision of the cross and a prophecy about the future of the nation that is to be born.

Chapter 16

Abraham cannot fully believe that God can fulfill this dream and so aids God by having a child by Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian servant. This is later explained by the apostle Paul as a picture of the law. Abraham was striving in his own strength to fulfill God's law and of course he was failing.

Chapter 17

God appears to Abraham and gives him the covenant seal, the rite of circumcision. Abraham immediately obeys. God renews the promise of a seed and a land.

Chapter 18

God renews the promise and reveals the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham prays earnestly, because Lot his nephew is living there.

Chapter 19

Sodom is destroyed and Lot is miraculously and somewhat reluctantly saved!

Chapter 20

Abraham moves for a short stay in Gerar and lies again re Sarah. God appears to Abimelech to save the situation.

Chapter 21

The long awaited son is born, a pure miracle from God. Ishmael and Hagar are forced to leave, but though this is God's will He does not cut them off from blessing but provides for their needs and gives promises of future blessing.

Chapter 22

Abraham is commanded to offer up Isaac, and his obedience is swift. This chapter prefigures the cross in such amazing detail, and the site of the event is the future site of the temple in Jerusalem.

Chapter 23

Sarah dies and Abraham buys a burial ground, the only piece of land he legally owns in his lifetime.

Chapter 24

The beautiful account is told of the seeking out of the bride for Isaac. This is a parable of the work of the Spirit working in the Church.

Chapter 25

Abraham marries more wives! More sons come! Then Abraham dies and is mourned by Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac's wife Rebekah conceives in answer to prayer and the twins Esau and Jacob are born.

Isaac

Isaac is of all the patriarchs the one we know least about, and not all that we know is flattering. We are left to fill in many of the blanks in the story. There are three areas to be highlighted in the life of Isaac:

1. Isaac's birth is a type of new birth in the new covenant. Abraham tried to fulfill God's plan through Hagar and this is a picture of the power of the natural life, the flesh, trying to do God's will and failing. We must come to faith and experience a pure miracle from God.
2. Isaac yielded his life to his Father's will, and trusted him with his life in hope of resurrection.

Isaac journeyed with his father on the road to Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem and is a picture to us of Christ journeying the road to Jerusalem for us, through the long years of waiting for the plan to be fulfilled and then through the years of life knowing that this is how His life would end. Isaac trusted his father and did not fight him. Christ laid His life down and allowed the Father to make Him the sacrifice for sin.

3. Isaac received a bride by the will of the Father.

In receiving a bride Isaac is once more a picture of the Son of God, who rests in heaven now till His bride is found by the activity of the Holy Spirit. The key word in the story is “willing”. God does not ask of us much at all. He is prepared to do all for us if we are “willing”.

The Servant of Abraham is a picture of the Holy Spirit who makes a covenant with the Father to bring a bride for the Son. The Holy Spirit is under covenant oath to bring this bride, but if she is not willing then all the covenant obligations are lifted. This means that if we are not willing to receive God’s gifts, then we will live lives in twilight blessing, in partial experience of God’s great promises.

The Servant (the Holy Spirit) desires for the Son a bride who will love others with second mile love. He prays that the one who is to be the bride will fetch water not only for the servant but for the camels also. These ten camels must have been able to drink gallons! But Rebecca eagerly serves and fulfills the desires of the servant.

Then when the brother of Rebecca is approached, he requests that there be a delay and long feasting before their sister is released. But the Holy Spirit is urgent in His desire to take the bride away to the Son. At last they consult Rebecca and she is torn between the relatives she can see and know, and the Son she does not know, nor has ever seen. She knows the Son through the attitude of the servant. At last she gives her answer: “I am willing.” Her journey then begins and she is taken to the tents of Isaac.

Other verses on willingness include:

- Ex 35:5, 21, 22, 29. The people of Israel brought abundance of offerings to build the tabernacle.
- 1 Chron 28:9 Solomon was challenged to serve God with a willing mind.
- 1 Chron 29:5 “Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?”
- Psalm 110:3 “Your people will be willing in the day of your power.”
- 2 Corinthians 8:3 and 12. Willing to give beyond their ability.
- Accepted according to the willingness not the offering itself. See the widow’s mite in Mark 12:41-44.
- 1 Tim 6:8 We only need to be willing.

4. Isaac dug wells of his father.

The Philistines had dug the wells that his father had dug, and we too must uncover the wells that have been filled in by rubble by the

enemies of the gospel. This means that we must dig, through repentance, and find again the original blessing that God intended for His Church.

Notes

Chapter 26

God renews the promises made to Abraham. Isaac makes the same mistakes as his father! He also is forced to re dig the wells that his father had dug, now marred by the Philistines. Esau is a grief of mind to his father and mother.

Jacob

Jacob is of all the patriarchs the most colorful and down to earth character. His life has several clear turning points:

1. He is the arch deceiver. His name means “deceiver” and this is the mark of his early life. He cheats his brother out of the inheritance by making him sell his birthright for a portion of food. (Gen 25:27-34.)
2. He pretends to be Esau in order to deceive his father Isaac. Isaac feels the goatskins and is deceived by what he feels. He does not follow the voice, and this is itself a lesson in faith for believers.
When Isaac challenges Jacob (Gen 27:19) to identify himself he declares he is Esau. This contrasts sharply with the later confession of his own name in 32:27.
This act of deception provokes murderous hatred between the two brothers. The intense selfishness of both brothers is revealed.
Esau prays bitterly for blessing (27:34) but there is nothing of love between them, or preferring one another!
3. Jacob is forced to flee, and meets with God, but once more his prayer of consecration is selfish and reveals the bargainer in Jacob! (28:20-22.) If God provides all his needs and blesses him he will pay his tithes!
4. The deceiver reaps what he sows and is himself deceived. Laban tricks him on his wedding night and gives him Leah instead of Rachel! (29:23). Laban and Jacob become enemies and Jacob has to flee once more.
5. In Ch 32 the great crisis of Jacob’s life is reached and he prays through the night, fighting God but more importantly fighting himself. This is a picture of the way a soul is brought to confess it’s need and yield in inner brokenness to God. God breaks Jacob’s strength and he is crippled by the experience, but he is also blessed, because he is transformed by a meeting with God face to face. Whatever label we put on our experiences, in the end the true power is in face to face encounter with God and a complete surrender to Him. Jacob comes through the battle to a dawn – a new day. Jesus battled through the darkness on the cross and won the victory as the darkness passed when He said “It is finished” (John 19:30)

6. The effect of this brokenness is to bring Jacob to brotherly love and reconciliation. He bows before his brother 7 times, indicating the total self humbling before the one who was his enemy. Esau came to Jacob with an army of armed men, but he is disarmed by the new attitude of Jacob and embraces him.

The early part of the story is the tale of two brothers who represent flesh and spirit and come to hate each. Jacob's life is a picture of the Christian passing through the struggles of knowing oneself and then coming to a place of total repentance and surrender.

Notes

Chapter 27

Jacob connives to steal the blessing of Esau the elder brother. This seals the simmering jealousy and hatred between the two. Jacob is forced to flee for his life.

Chapter 28

God appears to Jacob and amazingly makes great and precious promises to this sinful man. Jacob sees a vision of a ladder reaching to heaven. This is a vision of the Church but also of Christ, both the house of God (Bethel John 1:51).

Chapter 29

Jacob flees to Haran, to relatives, meeting uncle Laban. He works for him and is given Leah instead of Rachel as wife: the deceiver is deceived! He continues to work for Laban and marries Rachel and becomes a wealthy man.

Chapter 30 - 31

Jacob's family grows and so do his herds. But at last God commands him to return to Canaan. He flees, and Laban pursues him. They meet and agree not to violate a boundary that will separate them.

Chapter 32

Jacob meets his match, his maker, and is broken and changed.

Chapter 33

The new Jacob is able to humble himself before Esau and the two are reconciled.

Chapter 34

Dinah is raped and her brothers avenge her.

Chapter 35

Jacob returns to Bethel and communes with God.

Chapter 36

Esau's genealogy.

Joseph

Joseph is among the most Christ like of Old Testament characters. There are many blessings from studying his life. First there is the blessing of realizing the prophetic weave that is in the very fabric of the Bible. This is a miraculous book that proves the identity of Christ beyond doubt as the Son of God. There are many aspects of the story that parallel the life of Christ:

1. Joseph dreams that he will be exalted over his father and mother and all his brothers. To Christ all knees will bow.
2. Joseph is thrown in a pit where there is no water. This is a picture of the desolation of the cross.
3. Joseph is betrayed by his brothers for 20 pieces of silver. Christ was betrayed by his brother Israelites for 30 pieces of silver.
4. Joseph is taken to Egypt where he prospers but through evil plans he is brought to the lowest prison. There he interprets dreams that speak of the 3 days between the death and resurrection of Christ. The chief baker is a picture of the flesh that is hung on the cross and is dead and buried. The chief butler is a picture of the wine of the spirit that is raised to the throne of God from where the wine of worship is poured into the heart of God. The symbols of bread and wine clearly foreshadow the communion.
5. Joseph is raised to the highest throne from where he executes a plan that saves the world and provides bread for all. Christ is the bread of life and is the savior of the world.
6. Joseph's brothers are brought with all the world to bow to Joseph.
7. Joseph was not revealed to his brothers on their first visit, but he is revealed on the second. Christ was not revealed to the Jews in the first coming but is revealed in the second coming to the Jews.

The story of Joseph is also a lesson in godly character. Joseph suffers terrible wrong both physically and mentally. He is rejected and betrayed by those who were to love him. But he maintains a positive faith in God throughout all the trials that befall him. In the end he kisses his brothers and it is his kiss that speaks of love and forgiveness that breaks their hearts and releases them to know him. The heart of man is locked up in unforgiveness and bitterness, but as we forgive and love others we are freed and they too are made free. Love and faith triumph in all things.

Joseph is like Job and Christ a lesson in patient enduring of sufferings, with the underlying confidence that although the purposes of suffering may be hidden from view, they will ultimately be revealed and God will be glorified. There is never a moment when there is a suggestion that Joseph is bitter or resentful regarding his unjust treatment at the hands of his brothers. His brothers lived out the lie of hiding from their father that they knew that Joseph was not dead

but was sold as a slave. They were consumed with guilt and regret, while Joseph found the path of peace and joy.

Notes

Chapter 37

Joseph has visions of his future importance, but they provoke hatred and jealousy. He is father's favorite, and his brothers sell him into Egypt.

Chapter 38

Judah's immoral behavior – amazingly incorporated into God's plan for the Savior – Redeemer's genealogy.

Chapter 39-40

Joseph resists temptation, but is falsely accused and imprisoned.

Chapter 41

Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams and is exalted to the right hand of the throne of Egypt, where his wisdom saves the world by providing bread through seven years of famine.

Chapters 42-5

Joseph's brothers are forced by the famine down to Egypt where they beg help from Joseph. He tests them, and finally reveals himself to them. All these are types of Christ and His ministry to Israel.

Chapter 46-47

Jacobs descends to Egypt and meets Joseph. He and his sons are honored by Pharaoh.

Chapter 48-49

Jacob blesses Joseph's sons, and gives prophetic blessing to all his own sons.

Chapter 50

Jacob dies in Egypt but is buried in Canaan. Joseph's brothers fear him, but he assures them of his love. Joseph dies in Egypt but is embalmed and secures an oath that he will be taken up one day and buried in Canaan.