

Abraham's Faith in God's Resurrection Power

Commentary for February 15, 2023 — On What Was It Based?

Editor's note: Below is a short article by Dr. Ernest Martin, 1975, one year after he became Director of the Foundation for Biblical Research.

DWS

The Bible singles out Abraham as a most unique individual. Though he was merely a human being and experienced every temptation which is common to us, God made an outstanding choice in selecting this man for a special role. He was chosen to become **"the father of all them that believe."**

Much could be said about faith and Abraham's example of faith. This article will cover only one aspect of the faith of Abraham — Abraham's faith in the resurrection from the dead.

The teaching of the resurrection was the central message of the early New Testament *ekklesia*. But how many people realize that father Abraham had faith in Jesus' resurrection? In this article we hope to clarify how Abraham believed God, understood Christ, and how he had faith in the resurrection from the dead.

Abraham Saw Christ

The greatest testimony to Abraham's belief in Christ is the witness of Jesus Himself.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to SEE MY DAY; and HE SAW IT, and WAS GLAD.

Then said the Jews unto him, 'You are not yet fifty years old and have you seen Abraham?'

Jesus said unto them, 'Verily verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.'"

• **John 8:56-58**

Then they picked up stones to stone and perhaps kill Him.

Jesus admitted that Abraham saw Christ. Not only did Abraham see in visible form the One who became the Christ (Genesis 12:7, 14:18, 18:1) but he also saw the significance of the future role of Christ as Savior.

Our Method of Study

By means of utilizing New Testament evidence in conjunction with Old Testament records, we can piece together a framework of Abraham's knowledge of Christ and his faith in the resurrection from the dead. There is, however, a basic precaution in a study such as this. We must exercise care in rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

In addition, God teaches not only by direct word, but by parables (Matthew 13:3), by means

of example (1 Corinthians 10:8), and by means of allegory (Galatians 4:24). This glimpse into Abraham's life is determined by some allegorical clues, concepts, and/or direct biblical statements. It is assembled in a manner that should be educational and inspirational, but without any dogmatism intended.

Abraham Looked Forward to Christ

Abraham saw Christ's day. Jesus said so. We do not know at which point in Abraham's life he came to see clearly the course of events as they related to a Savior and the need for a Savior. God revealed information to Abraham progressively. It came by degrees as is evidenced by the expansion of the promises to him (Genesis chapters 12 to 24). In like manner God revealed additional knowledge and understanding of His plan to the New Testament *ekklesia* over a period of years as He had promised. This process of growing in knowledge is consistent with God's method of revelation and this was no doubt the case with Abraham's growth in understanding the Christ.

Sometimes it is years after an event that a person can look back and understand the significance of previous experience. This was certainly true with the followers of Christ during His earthly ministry (John 20:8–9 and Luke 24:32). And with Abraham it was no doubt the same. In his twilight years, Abraham must have reflected deeply over his life and the events which he experienced. He surely wondered what the future would hold for his children as he contemplated the possible courses for the fulfillment of God's promises.

Abraham was promised that **"in him would all families of the earth be blessed"** (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 22:18). This promise expanded an original one made to Adam and Eve, and which had remained dormant for centuries. The promise held that a Savior would be forthcoming at some future date (Genesis 3:15). Ancient people recognized the need for such a Savior, though they did not understand the specifics of when or how He would appear.

In regard to the prophesied Savior, a marvelous lesson was conveyed to Abraham in and through the physical instrumentality of his own son Isaac.

The Promise to Abram

Abram, as he was then called, was promised by God that his descendants would be like **"the dust of the earth"** for number (Genesis 13:16). This was promised at a time when Abram did not have any children from his wife Sarai (later named Sarah). Not only was Abram to have many descendants, but **"all families of the earth"** were to be blessed by one of his descendants who was destined to be the Savior of the world (Genesis 12:3). God made one more requirement: only the offspring of one woman, Sarai, would count. God made it clear that His promises and blessings could only come through the firstborn of Sarai — no one else (Genesis 17:18). Because of this requirement problems awaited Abram and Sarai.

Neither Abram nor Sarai, whose names were later changed to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 17:5, 15), originally believed that their promised child would have to be produced by a miracle (Genesis 16:1–3). Though Sarah had been unable to have children, physical hope remained as long as she was reasonably young. But as the years rolled on, her age made

childbirth no longer a practical reality (Genesis 18:11–13).

Man's Attempt to Fulfill Prophecy

After approximately ten years of waiting, they wrongly concluded that Hagar, a handmaid of Sarah, should be the one to promulgate the lineage of Abraham. This she did when she bore Ishmael, but God insisted that the birthright and blessings should come from the firstborn of Sarah, a woman now much older. Abraham and Sarah tried to fulfill God's promise the way they thought it should happen, but God's ways are not man's ways.

The apprehension and concern over the ultimate birth of the promised child, who was to be called Isaac, was one of preparation for Abraham. Through this promise and the birth experience itself, God provided one of the greatest foundations for a lesson in faith. Once Isaac was born one promise had been accomplished, Abraham and Sarah arrived at a new level of faith and character. But this would become the basis for their next test and finally the firm belief in the resurrection from the dead.

Isaac Grows Up

Abraham saw Isaac, the son of promise, grow before his eyes. After years of hopes for his son, and the love and closeness which developed, God made a new demand upon the faith of Abraham. Abraham was instructed to give up his son, and to personally take his life in sacrifice to God (Genesis 22:2). This was no easy matter. It was an extreme trial of faith, but God had adequately prepared this man for an event which could have become an emotion-shattering experience. The faith of Abraham in the resurrection was reaching full maturity.

The key to this magnificent lesson is found in Genesis 22:5, **"And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide you here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."** From all outward appearance this scripture looks as if Abraham asserted that he would return to the attendants alone. After all, he had been instructed to slay his son. But there is more to this verse than meets the eye.

Both to Return Alive

The original Hebrew should more correctly be translated: **"... and we will come again unto you."** When this is joined with the statement in Hebrews 11:17–19, we see a picture unfolding which shows that Abraham did not expect his son to remain dead. In the Book of Hebrews we read that Abraham expected to fulfill God's injunction and to slay his son, yet in **"accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead"** (verse 19).

Abraham did not second guess God by assuming that God would intervene at the last moment. Abraham expected to obey God fully, but as a result of that obedience, he expected to see his son come back to life through God's power. Abraham's example of faith was not simply obeying God to the point of killing his son, but it was a firm belief (faith) that God would keep His promise that Isaac would have a multitude of descendants. How could Isaac produce children if he were dead? Abraham believed that God would have to resurrect him from the dead after he had killed him in order for God's promises to be fulfilled. He told his servants: **"We will come again unto you."**

This leads us to the central object of the article. Where did Abraham obtain the knowledge about the resurrection from the dead? There had been no previous historical example of a resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of Isaac would have been a first, which would be fitting if he were a type of Christ. Yet Abraham was not tested regarding the death and resurrection of Isaac until he had grown in faith by other means.

Training for the Final Test

God offered the final test for Abraham's faith in the power of the resurrection years after Abraham had already witnessed a resurrection of sorts. The preparation of Abraham's faith was contained in the drama of the miracle of Isaac's birth. That drama itself contained a preliminary lesson of faith for Abraham and one that prepared him to believe in the actual resurrection of Isaac from the dead.

In Genesis 17:15–19 we have the record of God's announcement to Abraham and Sarah about Isaac's birth. There was doubt to be overcome in this promise. In the following chapter, we read of the couple's physical condition.

"Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women."

• **Genesis 18:11**

Sarah had passed menopause. It was now a human impossibility for her to have a child. She had been barren all her life and now the likelihood of having a child was impossible. Yet God had promised a son and that son would become a multitude of peoples.

Abraham and Sarah were being prepared for a strong belief in the resurrection from the dead. This faith would meet its greatest test years later when Isaac was to be offered as a human sacrifice. This is outlined by Paul in the epistle to the Romans:

"Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, 'So shall your seed be.'

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb."

• **Romans 4:18–19**

Abraham still believed God even though all the factors seemed to point to a different conclusion. God is not limited as man is; therefore, His ways of doing things are usually different than ours. Yet Abraham knew that God would somehow keep His promise.

Abraham's Resurrection Experience

Abraham had already witnessed a type of resurrection.

"And being not weak in faith he considered not his own body NOW DEAD, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the DEADNESS of Sarah's womb."

• **Romans 4:19**

Isaac's birth was a miracle. Sarah's womb was in a sense "raised from the dead." Abraham's body was also "resurrected." And Isaac was born by this miracle of God.

Abraham could well conclude that if

[1] God could perform a miracle like that when life (Isaac) came from the “dead” (bodies of Abraham’s and Sarah), then

[2] God could restore Isaac to life even though Abraham’s had to sacrifice his own son.

Paul in the Book of Hebrews adds weight to his statement [from Romans]: **“Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude”** (Hebrews 11:12).

Abraham and Sarah were past the childbearing years — they were **“dead.”** Human hope would have been tried to its limit — and yet God accomplished His promise because Abraham was **“... fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”** (Romans 4:21).

But Abraham’s experience was not just for Abraham — it was an experience for you and for me. This lesson is a gift of God to you:

“Now it was not written for his sake alone ... But for us also to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

• Romans 4:23–24

Christ and Isaac

Abraham was able to see Christ in a spiritual sense (and what the Father would do with Christ) in the example of himself and Isaac. He saw Christ’s day and rejoiced (John 8:56–58). Notice seven points which show the typicality in Isaac’s life. Isaac reflected Christ’s own life.

1. The birth of Isaac was miraculous, so was Christ’s.
2. Isaac carried the wood to his sacrifice, so Christ carried His cross.
3. Isaac did not dispute his father’s will, neither did Christ.
4. Both Isaac and Christ were **“sacrificed”** on Mount Moriah.
5. Isaac laid his life down of himself. (He was younger and stronger and could have resisted, but he did not.) Christ did not resist either.
6. Abraham gave his only son, so did God the Father.
7. Though Isaac was called a lad, it does not mean he was an infant or even a teenager. He was a young man. So was Christ. Christ died when He was thirty-three years old.

By looking on the spiritual meaning of Isaac’s life, Abraham was able to see Christ’s day and rejoice. He had faith in all the promises of God. Abraham saw his own body (and that of his wife) **“resurrected”** back to life. He had faith that God could (and would) also resurrect Isaac from the dead — **“we will come again unto you.”**

Abraham was an ordinary human like all of us. And the very fact that the bleakest moments

in his life turned out to the greatest good can give us hope that we can jointly share with Christ and Abraham the joys and glories of our resurrections to the end of the eons and beyond.

Ernest Martin, 1975

More About Abraham

For additional information about Abraham, read Dr. Martin's other material on this important patriarch:

- Bible Secret Number 28, "[Abraham's Legal Wives](#)" in [101 Bible Secrets That Christians Do Not Know](#).
- "[Prophetic Geography and the Time of the End](#)" discusses the four nations that came from the north and attacked Sodom and Gomorrah, captured Lot, and were defeated by Abraham and his retainers.
- "[Did Abraham Observe the Sabbath?](#)" Some Bible teachers believe and teach that Abraham observed the Sabbath, or did he?
- Why did Abraham give tithes to Melchizedek? That question is answered in Chapter 5: "[A History of Tithing](#)" and Chapter 12: "[A Change in the Law?](#)" in Dr. Martin's book, [The Tithing Dilemma](#).
- The place where Abraham's faith was tested with the near ritual killing of his son Isaac is discussed in Chapter 13: "[Abraham, Isaac and The Mount of Olives](#)" in [Secrets of Golgotha: The Lost History of Jesus' Crucifixion](#).
- More about Abraham's marriage to Sarah, his half-sister. After Sarah died Abraham married Keturah when he was even older than 99 years old. Chapter 3: "[Progressive Revelation](#)" in [Essentials of New Testament Doctrine](#).
- Abraham and Jacob [Isaac's son] were both born on the Day of Trumpets. Note who else was born on that day. Read Chapter 6: "[The Birth of Jesus and the Day of Trumpets](#)" in [The Star That Astonished the World: The Star of Bethlehem](#).

"Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

• 2 Timothy 2:15

And after that ...

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

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