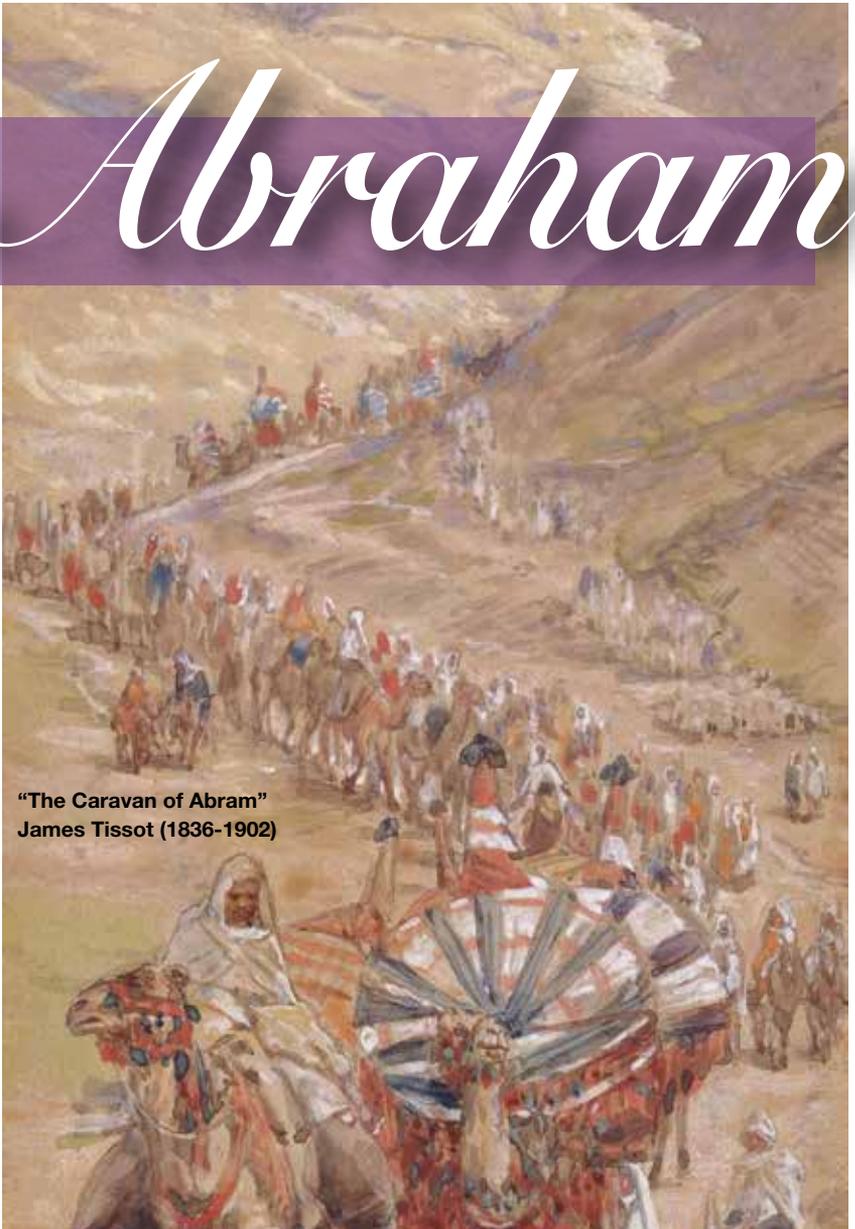


# Abraham



**"The Caravan of Abram"  
James Tissot (1836-1902)**

By Rev. Cheryl L. Hauer, *Vice President*



“Abraham’s Journey  
from Ur to Caanan”  
József Molnár

A

**BRAHAM IS ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FIGURES IN THE BIBLE,** critically important to both Judaism and Christianity. He is recognized as the father of both faith systems, mentioned hundreds of times in both testaments and held up as an example of faithfulness so great that it merited him the friendship of God Himself.

The Writings of the Apostles (NT) are filled with references to this mighty man of virtue and faith, and in the *Tanakh* (OT), the prophet Isaiah goes so far as to direct those who follow after God to emulate him. *“Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him”* (Isa. 51:1–2).

Since the writers of the Bible put so much emphasis on Abraham and his example of faithful living, perhaps it is time for us to take a closer look at his life and his remarkable relationship with the one true God; time to reexamine our foundations and the heritage that is ours through our relationship with the Lord who spoke to Abraham as with a friend.

## *Looking Backward*

It is interesting to note that we are not alone in looking backward; it has actually become a global obsession of late. A friend recently called to ask if I had my DNA tested yet. Actually, I had, as has almost everyone else I know, since a genealogy craze is sweeping the globe. Although looking backward to our roots has always been of interest to humans, never in history has it been a focus that borders on obsession. Paul encouraged Timothy not to get involved in foolish arguments about family genetics, but the ability to trace the family tree has always been and remains of critical importance in Judaism. Other cultures have taken it even a step further to involve ancestor worship. But today, the study of genealogy is a billion-dollar global industry, spawning websites, books, TV programs and the star of the show: DNA testing for a small fee. As a hobby, in North America it is surpassed only by gardening, and globally it is the second most searched-for subject on the internet, surpassed only by pornography.

In Malachi 4:5, the prophet speaks of a time he calls *“the great and terrible day of the LORD...”* Many Jews and Christians recognize that terminology as referring to a time that will immediately precede the coming of the Messiah. But first, the prophet says, God will turn the hearts of the children to the fathers. Perhaps this obsession with genealogy that we are witnessing in the world today is not a fluke, some deep-seated psychological need for people living in an uncertain world to discover from whence they came or just the latest internet craze. Perhaps it is a move of God, the beginning of prophetic fulfillment, as He draws the hearts of all of His children to the fathers. For Bible believers, the Book is pretty clear: that father is Abraham.



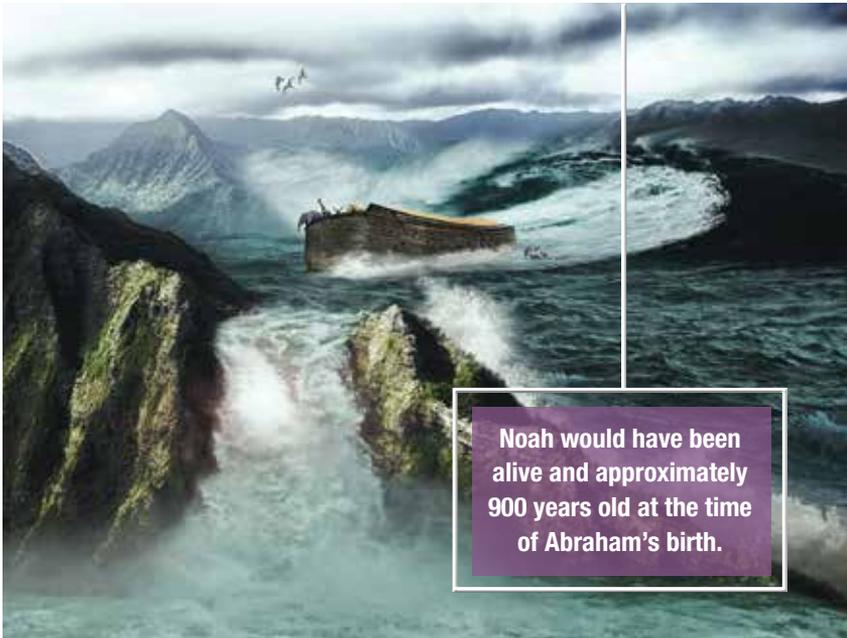
**God will turn  
the hearts of  
the children to  
their fathers.**

# The Beginning

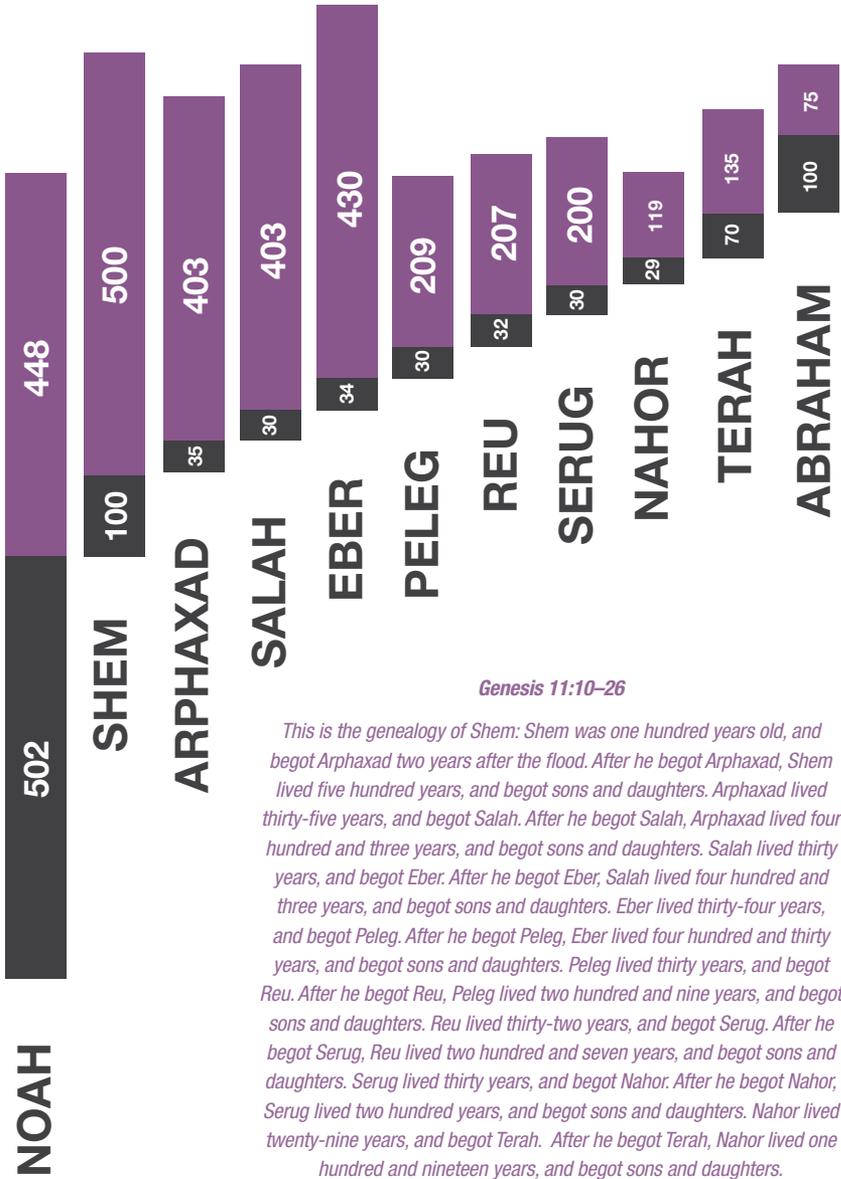
Abraham lived approximately 4,000 years ago. When we think of him, we often picture a semi-nomadic shepherd, bearded and clothed in the robes typical of Bedouin *sheiks* today. Sandals on his feet, staff in hand, we envision a strong and passionate man who brought the message of monotheism to the world. Perhaps a brief look at his early life, however, will help us to better understand how this son of an idol worshiper became a friend of God.

Abraham, called Abram at birth, was born in Ur of the Chaldeans in approximately 1800 BC. His father Terah, a direct descendent of Shem, was 70 years old at the time of his birth. According to mathematical calculations done by biblical scholars and Jewish sages, Shem would have been alive and nearly 400 years old at the time of Abraham's birth. Noah would also have been alive and approximately 900 years old. Further calculations tell us that Abraham would have been nearly 60 years old when Noah died.

Jewish tradition has it that Abraham actually spent some years of his young life on Mount Ararat, living with Noah and his family. Those same scholars calculate that Noah would have known Methuselah, who had been a contemporary of an aging Adam. In other words, tradition says Abraham would have learned from the righteous Noah, whose obedience saved humankind from destruction. He would have heard firsthand the stories of the building of the ark, the flood and the rebuilding of the earth. Additionally, he could have heard, nearly first-hand, the very stories of Creation, when only Adam and his family inhabited the earth, when the Garden was still a place of communion between God and man.



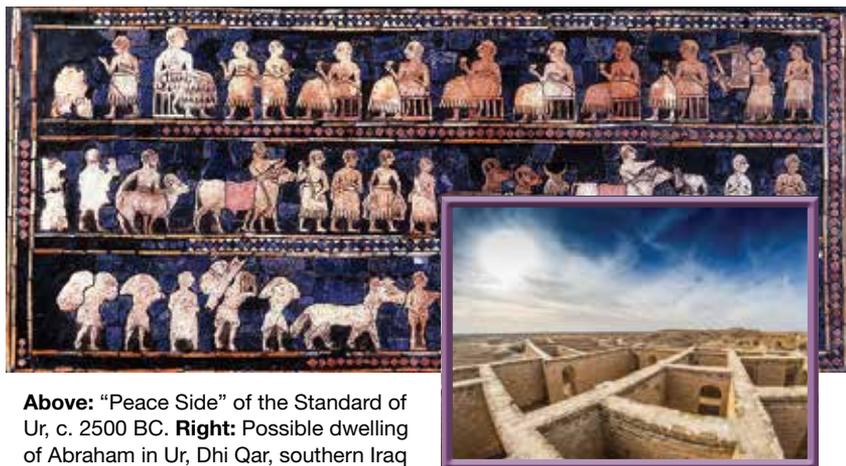
# Graph of Abraham's Lineage



## Genesis 11:10–26

*This is the genealogy of Shem: Shem was one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. After he begot Arphaxad, Shem lived five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begot Salah. After he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters. Salah lived thirty years, and begot Eber. After he begot Eber, Salah lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters. Eber lived thirty-four years, and begot Peleg. After he begot Peleg, Eber lived four hundred and thirty years, and begot sons and daughters. Peleg lived thirty years, and begot Reu. After he begot Reu, Peleg lived two hundred and nine years, and begot sons and daughters. Reu lived thirty-two years, and begot Serug. After he begot Serug, Reu lived two hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters. Serug lived thirty years, and begot Nahor. After he begot Nahor, Serug lived two hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and begot Terah. After he begot Terah, Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years, and begot sons and daughters.*

*Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran.*



**Above:** “Peace Side” of the Standard of Ur, c. 2500 BC. **Right:** Possible dwelling of Abraham in Ur, Dhi Qar, southern Iraq

## *Life in Ur of the Chaldeans*

All of that would have been in stark contrast to his life in Ur. As a Sumerian whose father, tradition tells us, was an idol maker by profession, Abraham would have lived a life of some privilege. Education was highly valued in his culture and he would have learned mathematics, science and certainly the art of writing and record keeping. As a young man, he would have dressed in the typical fashion of his day, a calf-length, high-waisted skirt with a bare chest and sandals, a fair amount of jewelry and a bit of eye makeup to finish the look. He would have bathed daily in perfumed water and joined his family for meals, which were as much for enjoyment as nourishment. Pita bread, a vast array of fresh fruits and vegetables, fish, fowl, mutton and wild game adorned the table, and entertainers helped diners to relax after the meal with songs, dancing and poetic recitations.

Abraham’s father Terah would have raised his son to be a patriarch, as was the destiny of sons. Although such men most often loved their wives and children, they had absolute power in their households and held unqualified sway over their family members. In effect, wives and children were possessions. They could be punished, divorced or sold into slavery at the patriarch’s whim. Rabbi Jonathan



Saks believes that this early training continued to influence Abraham in his later years, necessitating certain well-known biblical events. God clearly changed the paradigm when He instructed Abraham to listen to his wife. In effect, God was saying that Sarah was not a possession but a partner. Rabbi Saks further posits that God's instruction to Abraham to kill his son Isaac had nothing to do with human sacrifice at all, but rather it was about surrender. Abraham had to recognize that his son was not his possession, but in fact belonged to God, who alone would determine his future.

Sumerian tradition also sheds light on Genesis 23, where we learn of Abraham's purchase of a burial place for his wife. Burial of the dead was taken very seriously in Sumer, and burial customs were firmly entrenched. Bodies were placed in large jars or stretched out in caskets and buried in a family tomb as soon after death as possible. A burial ceremony was required, and for the wealthy, a lavish burial was an absolute necessity. Abraham would not take no for an answer as he negotiated the purchase of the cave at Machpelah where he would entomb Sarah and provide a burial place for himself and other members of his family. No price was too high.

## *The Journey*

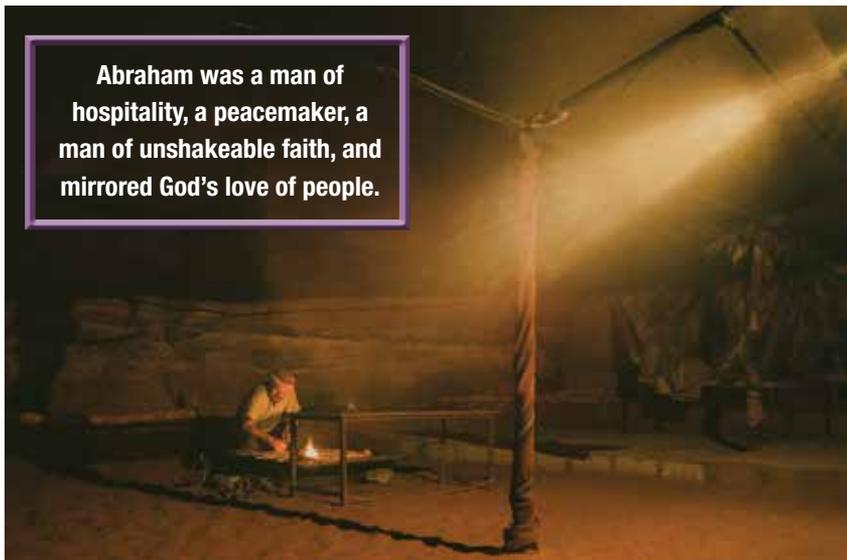
The Bible makes it clear that Abraham, his father and his brothers were pagan idol worshipers. The book of Joshua tells us, *"Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods'"* (Josh. 24:2). Yet the Bible contains no information about the transformation from idol worshiper to disciple of the Lord that Abraham had to have gone through to some degree by the time we read of God's instructions to him in Genesis 12. Jewish tradition, however, is rife with stories of Abraham the seeker, the tortured young man who is torn between the religion of his father and the God of Noah and Shem.

One beautiful story of his conversion is well-known and often retold even among Christians. The *Bible Hub* recounts it as follows:

One night, Abraham reclined on a mountain top watching the heavens. A star suddenly rose that was so brilliant and beautiful, he was filled with the glory of it and cried: "This is my god; this will I worship." But alas, as



**Abraham was a man of hospitality, a peacemaker, a man of unshakeable faith, and mirrored God's love of people.**



the hours of the night passed, the star sank and was gone, causing Abraham to lament, "Of what avail is it that I worship this god if it dies in the darkness and is no more?" But then above the hills, the moon arose and flooded the earth with silvery light, quenching even the stars. Abraham again cried out, "At last, you are fairer and greater than the star, you are my god, for you are worthier!" Again, however, the moon hastened away and sank in darkness.

Abraham cried out in devastation, "If my gods forsake me, then I am no different than all the others who are in error!" But soon the sun rose in radiant splendor. It scattered the darkness and with it, all of Abraham's doubts. "You are my god," he cried, "greater than the moon or the stars!" But as evening came, the sun sank, and like the moon and stars, it too was gone. Abraham was alone, gazing sadly into heaven when he was overcome with the realization that there is One indeed who is the Maker of the star and the moon and the sun. Again, he cried out, "O my people, I now understand! I am free of doubt and confusion, and I turn my face to Him who has made the heavens and the earth. He and He alone is my God!"

## *The Mission*

In Genesis 12:1-3, the sages say, we see God's reaction to Abraham's passionate expressions of faith, and His first recorded interaction with the man who would become His friend. Jewish tradition holds that Abraham immediately recognized the gravity of the mission God had for him. He was not just to let the world know that there is one God and one God alone, although that is certainly true. Nor was his mission simply to introduce ethical monotheism, the knowledge of one God who requires His children to adhere to a standard of behavior that respects all mankind, cares for the widow and orphan and protects the vulnerable.

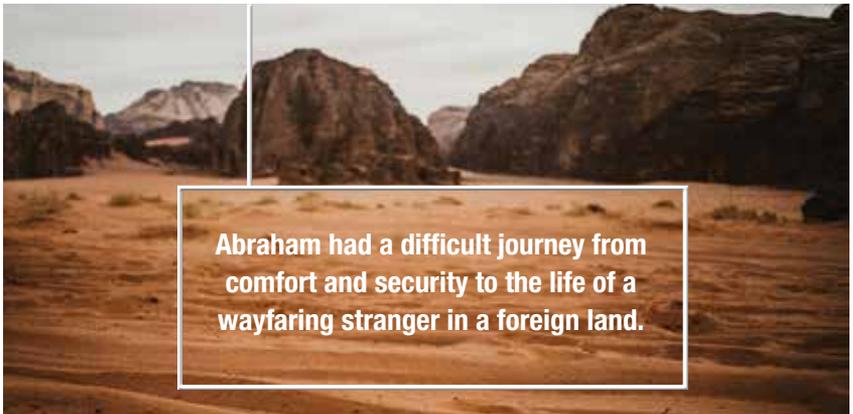
Abraham was being sent forth as the first evangelist, the purveyor of a message of good news and hope. The one true God, the God of the living and not the dead, is a God of mercy, goodness and grace, unlike the countless gods in the Sumerian pantheon who ruled through fear and intimidation. Yes, He is a God of ultimate authority and power, but He is a personal God, One who desires fellowship and intimacy with His children. He is the God who walked with Adam in the cool of the evening, the God who would be a friend.

Abraham would come to embody character traits of a truly Godly human being. Among them was that of peacemaker. When his shepherds quarreled with Lot's because the latter group did not respect other peoples' boundaries, Abraham separated from Lot rather than taking other, more forceful or violent actions.

He was a man of hospitality, welcoming all into his tent, where food, drink and safety were offered. He was a gracious host, offering "a little water" and "a morsel of food," yet providing a sumptuous meal that he personally, not his servants, had prepared. He was a man of unshakable faith, who believed explicitly and obeyed immediately. But above all, he was a man who mirrored God's love of people, His *chesed* (grace). Abraham's God was the embodiment of extravagant, unconditional love and goodness, forgiveness and faithfulness. Jewish tradition abounds with stories of Abraham's acts of selfless kindness, which were his means of illustrating the character of the One True God. With each expression of thanks he received, his reply was a simple, "Give thanks to the One True God, the Creator of all things, whose love has made this possible."

## *Abraham's Ten Tests*

That Godly character didn't come naturally to Abraham, however. His was a difficult journey from a man of comfort and means, perfumed baths and the security of family and friends, to a wayfaring stranger in a hot and dusty foreign land. It is suggested that there were ten very specific tests that Abraham faced that would shape him into a man worthy of emulation. These tests, though instigated by God, were not designed to reveal what Abraham's response might be. God certainly knew that in advance. They would prove to Abraham what his strengths and limitations were and attest to God's faithfulness being with Him in every trial.



His first trial came in rebelling against the idolatrous system of Ur, rejecting his friends and family and offending what was dearest to his father by turning from polytheism to the worship of one God. Leaving his home and family was the second test, walking away from all that he knew and loved (Gen. 12:1). But God had promised a new land, a home where he would be blessed and be a blessing. How demoralizing it must have been that immediately upon his arrival, famine struck, calling into question his ability to spread the good news of the One True God (Gen. 12:10). Next, he was forced to surrender his wife to Pharaoh out of fear for his own life. Then, even though a man of peace, he was forced into war to rescue his nephew Lot (Gen. 14:13–16). Later he dealt with the painful rite of circumcision at 99 years of age (Gen. 17:24) and Abimelech, king of Gerar, would again force him to surrender his wife (Gen. 20:2).

Perhaps the most difficult of his trials, however, involved those whom he loved the most. He would deal with the emotional pain of expelling Hagar and his firstborn, Ishmael. There is obvious anguish in his reaction to being separated from his son and heir, but he is obedient and trusting, doing as God instructs with what Rabbi Saks calls “sublime faith” (Gen. 21:9–14). His ninth test was the surrender of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. One cannot imagine the pain and horror involved in such an action. But for Abraham, as we discussed earlier, it was the surrender of an entire worldview. He did not own his family; he really didn’t own anything. When he surrendered Isaac, he surrendered it all. Only the exercise of remarkable faith would make it possible (Gen. 22:1–18).

Some teachers suggest that the surrender of Isaac was the final trial. But others say the death of Sarah was actually the last of Abraham’s tests. After years of life together, facing difficulties and tragedies, ministering together, as the sages say Sarah’s commitment to teaching the world about God was as strong as Abraham’s; after learning the lesson that Sarah was in fact a partner and not a possession, he is alone. Perhaps the most difficult challenge of all stems from the fact that God had promised on several occasions that He was giving Abraham the land of Canaan, that the land would be his and his descendants’ after him. Yet when it was time to bury his wife, he had not a plot of land on which to do so. He was forced to buy the cave at Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite. Yet the next chapter begins with the words, “*Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things*” (Gen. 24:1).

## *Look to the Rock from Which you were Hewn*

Abraham clearly fulfilled his destiny. Despite trials well beyond those that we have examined, his faithfulness to the Lord never wavered. As Rabbi Saks says:

That is the faith of an Abraham. The man promised as many children as the stars of the sky has one child to continue the covenant. The man promised the land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates, has acquired only one field and a tomb. But that is enough. The Journey has begun. Abraham knows it is not his to complete the task.

Abraham has walked with God; he has spread the message of the One True God; he has loved his fellow man; he has lived a life of faithfulness and sublime trust. He has been obedient in all circumstances because he truly knew the God

he followed. Again from Rabbi Saks: “So, at the end of his life, we see Abraham, dignified, satisfied, serene. There are many types of heroes in Judaism [and Christianity], but few as majestic as the man who first heard the call of God and began the journey we still continue.”

Abraham is to be our example, and obviously, his are very tough shoes to fill. But ours is the same God of *chesed* with the same desire for intimacy that kept His friend faithful on a long and difficult journey. Like Abraham, all we need to do is surrender to the One who is worthy of our trust, believing unequivocally that He will not, cannot, fail us. And like Abraham, it is not ours to complete the task, only to mirror divine love for all to see.

---

## Bibliography

- Bogomilsky, Moshe. “Vedibarta Bam - Questions and Answers on Pirkei Avot.” *Chabad*. [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/2835280/jewish/Vedibarta-Bam-Pirkei-Avot.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2835280/jewish/Vedibarta-Bam-Pirkei-Avot.htm)
- Costa, Leopoldo. “Family Life in Ancient Sumeria.” *Stravaganza*. <https://stravaganzastravaganza.blogspot.co.il/2011/12/sumerian-family-life.html>
- McClellan, Matt. “Abraham and the Chronology of Ancient Mesopotamia.” *Answers in Genesis*. <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-timeline/abraham-and-the-chronology-of-ancient-mesopotamia/>
- “Mesopotamia Daily Life in Sumer.” *History’s Histories*. <http://www.historyshistories.com/mesopotamia-daily-life-in-sumer.html>
- Mindel, Nissan. “Abraham, Our Father.” *Chabad*. [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3911153/jewish/Abraham-Our-Father.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3911153/jewish/Abraham-Our-Father.htm)
- Pearce, Mark Guy. “Abraham’s Conversion.” *Bible Hub*. [http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/pearce/abraham\\_s\\_conversion.htm](http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/pearce/abraham_s_conversion.htm)
- Pinner, Daniel. “Abraham’s Ten Tests.” *Israel National News*. <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/12410>
- Sacks, Jonathan. “Chayei Sarah (5771) – Abraham: A Life of Faith.” *The Office of Rabbi Sacks*. <http://rabbisacks.org/chayei-sarah-5771-abraham-a-life-of-faith/>
- “The Binding of Isaac (Vayera 5775).” *The Office of Rabbi Sacks*. <http://rabbisacks.org/binding-isaac-vayera-5775/>
- “To Bless the Space Between Us (Vayera 5776).” *The Office of Rabbi Sacks*. <http://rabbisacks.org/to-bless-the-space-between-us-vayera-5776/>
- “Vayera (5774) – Answering The Call.” *The Office of Rabbi Sacks*. <http://rabbisacks.org/vayera-5774-answering-call/>
- Schochet, Dovie. “Abraham’s Covenant With G-d: The Brit Bein HaBetarim.” *Chabad*. [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/246614/jewish/Abrahams-Covenant-With-Gd-The-Brit-Bein-HaBetarim.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/246614/jewish/Abrahams-Covenant-With-Gd-The-Brit-Bein-HaBetarim.htm)
- Wilson, Dr. Ralph F. “Abraham: An Introduction to His Life and Times.” *JesusWalk Bible Study Series*. [http://www.jesuswalk.com/abraham/0\\_intro.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/abraham/0_intro.htm)

Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

---

## TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

# Thousands of new immigrants

arrive in Israel with meager belongings, few contacts, very little money and no idea how to better their situation.



God has called Bridges for Peace to support these new immigrants and meet their practical needs while they settle down, study Hebrew and find a job.

Please consider a monthly commitment (1 year) to our Adoption Program to help us reach out in love to those who answer God's call to come home to Israel.

Hannah Taylor/bridgesforpeace.com

## Bridges for Peace - Offices

**Australia:** Tel: 07-5479-4229, Toll free: 1800-000-661, [bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com)

**Canada:** Tel: 204-489-3697, Toll free: 855-489-3697, [info@bfpcan.org](mailto:info@bfpcan.org)

**Japan:** Tel: 03-5637-5333, [bfp@bfpj.org](mailto:bfp@bfpj.org)

**New Zealand:** Tel: 09-430-2943, [bfpnz@outlook.com](mailto:bfpnz@outlook.com)

**South Africa:** Tel: 021-975-1941, [info@bridgesforpeace.co.za](mailto:info@bridgesforpeace.co.za)

**South Korea:** Tel: 070-8772-2014, [bfp@bfpkorea.com](mailto:bfp@bfpkorea.com)

**Spanish:** Tel: (1) 787-755-0327, [bfpтери@gmail.com](mailto:bfpтери@gmail.com)

**Russia:** Tel: (7) 903-309-1849, [info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com)

**United Kingdom:** Tel: 01656-739494, [ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com)

**United States:** Tel: 800-566-1998, Product orders: 888-669-8800, [postmaster@bfpusa.org](mailto:postmaster@bfpusa.org)



### © COPYRIGHT POLICY:

Bridges for Peace holds the copyright on this material. We encourage pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people to use these articles for preaching and teaching, and we hereby grant permission for a limited number of copies for such educational purposes. However, any other reproduction or transmittal of this material in any form—including reprinting, republishing, recording or use with any information storage and retrieval system—requires written permission from BFP International.

**Bridges for Peace:** Christians supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews in Israel and around the world.

**International Headquarters**  
P.O. Box 1093, Jerusalem, Israel  
Tel: (972) 2-624-5004

[intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com](mailto:intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com)

[www.bridgesforpeace.com](http://www.bridgesforpeace.com)

