

Abraham

1 Outline of Life

Table 1: Summary and Time Chart of the Life of Abraham

Date	Datable Event	Age	Detail of Events
2166	Birth of Abram	0-75	Abram born in Ur of the Chaldeas, marries Sarai and migrates to Haran with his cousin Lot and Father Terah. Terah dies in Haran (Gen. 11).
2091	Abram's departure from Haran / arrival in Canaan	75-85	The Lord commands Abram to leave Haran and travel to Canaan. On arriving there he travels as far as Shechem in the centre of the land and is promised that the whole of the land will be his. From there he went to Bethel where he build a second altar. Because of famine he takes his family down to Egypt. Abram deceives Pharaoh by passing his wife off as his sister and as a result Abram becomes wealthy. When the ruse is discovered Pharaoh sends them away (Gen. 12). Abram returns to Canaan traveling from the Negev in the south as far as Bethel. There Abraham and Lot separate, Lot moving his flocks into the valley of the Jordan while Abram remained in the hill country. After Lot's departure the Lord renews his promise of the land and Abram moves his camp to Hebron where he builds a third altar (Gen. 13). Lot, who has now moved into Sodom, is captured by the forces of four invading kings and carried off. Abram musters his household and some local allies, pursues and defeats the invading kings and rescues Lot. On returning he is met by Melchizedek, King of Salem who blesses him in the name of the Most High God. Abram accepts the blessing and gives Melchizedek a tenth of the plunder. Shortly afterwards the king of Sodom greets Abram, but Abram refuses to keep any of his property (Gen. 14). The Lord reassures Abram that the promises he has made will be fulfilled by means of a covenant ceremony (Gen. 15).
2081	Abram marries Hagar	85-86	Sarai suggests that Abram take her maidservant Hagar and have children by her. Hagar conceives and Sarai becomes jealous of her. Fleeing from Sarai's mistreatment Hagar meets the angel of the Lord at a spring in the desert and he persuades her to return, promising that she would have a son named Ishmael who would be the father of a nation (Gen. 16).
2080	Birth of Ishmael	86-99	Scripture us silent about the events of Abram's life for 13 years after the birth of Ishmael. When he was 99 years old the Lord gave Abram the covenant of circumcision and changed his name From Abram (<i>exalted father</i>) to Abraham (<i>father of many</i>). Sarai was now to be known as Sarah and would bear Abraham a son and heir (Gen. 17).
2067	Destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah	99-100	The Lord and two angels visit Abraham and tell him that Sarah would have a child within the next year. He also informed Abraham that Sodom and the other cities of the plain were about to be punished for their wickedness. Abraham pleaded for Sodom and the Lord promised to spare it if there were ten righteous men in the city (Gen. 18). The two angels go down to Sodom and are invited by Lot to sleep in his house. During the night the men of Sodom demand that Lot turn the angels over to them. The angels blind the attackers and take Lot, his wife and their two daughters out of the city just before the Lord destroyed it. Lot was the only righteous man in the city

(Gen. 19). Abraham moved his camp into the territory of Abimelech king of Gerar, again pretending that Sarah was his sister. Abimelech takes Sarah as his wife but is prevented from committing adultery by a dream. Abimelech summons Abraham and after receiving an explanation from him for his conduct he gives him gifts of money, sheep and cattle and returns Sarah to him (Gen. 20).

2066	Birth of Isaac	100-137	After the birth of Isaac Sarah had Hagar and Ishmael away. The Lord promised Abraham that he would take care of them and make Ishmael into a great nation. Abimelech and Abraham met and settled a dispute over a well that Abimelech's men had seized and sealed their agreement with a covenant (Gen. 21). God tests Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah. Abraham obeys and at the last minute the Lord intervenes and provides his own sacrifice instead of Isaac. In response to Abraham's obedience and faith the Lord repeats his promise concerning the great number of Abraham's descendants (Gen. 22).
2029	Death of Sarah	137-140	Sarah dies at the age of 127 years and Abraham buys a burial site for her from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 24). Unwilling to allow his son to marry a Canaanite woman Abraham sends one of his servants back to his relatives in Northwest Mesopotamia. The Lord guided the servant who brought back Rebecca, daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor (Gen. 24).
2026	Isaac Marries Rebekah	140-160	Abraham takes another wife: Keturah, who bears him six more sons: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Dedan (Gen. 25).
2 006	Birth of Jacob & Esau	160-175	
1991	Death of Abraham	175	Abraham dies and is buried in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 25).

2 Abraham's Lifestyle

2.1 City Dweller. Scripture is silent about the details of Abraham's life before he entered Canaan. Genesis 11:28 states that he was born in Ur of the Chaldeans, an important Sumerian city. The reference to "chaldeans" is probably anachronistic as the Chaldeans did not arrive in Assyria until about 1 000 BC (Wenhan, 1987: 272). From Ur Terah led his family North to Haran (11:31) where they settled for a time. Although only Terah, Abram, Sarai and Lot are mentioned in the text it appears that Nahor and Milcah also moved North, probably at the same time (cf. 22:20-24; 24:10). Haran was an important caravan centre for the Amorite migrations. There is no evidence in the biblical text to tell us whether Terah and his family settled inside either of these cities in houses or outside in tents, but it seems that the former is the more probable. Elsewhere in Genesis Rebekah's family are said to reside in a city (24:10) and live in houses (24:23) as opposed to the tents in which Abraham's family now lived (24:67). The journey from Haran to Canaan no doubt involved a great change in lifestyle for Abram and his family.

2.2 Nomadic Tent-dweller. From the time that Abraham left Haran onwards Abraham lived in a tent (cf. Heb. 11:9), moving from place to place taking his flocks and herds with him (12:6; 13:3-5). After his return from Egypt and separation from Lot Abraham seems to have spent much of his time in Canaan encamped near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron (13:18; 18:1), before moving into Philistine territory (20:1; 21:34). At Hebron Abraham made alliances with the local Amorite leaders (14:13, 21) (see COVENANT 4.2.1) and led them during the operation to rescue Lot (14:24). He was held in great esteem by his neighbours (23:5), although he considered himself to be only a resident alien (23:4; cf. 17:8; Heb. 11:9). Abraham was recognised as a person of substance (cf. 12:5) when he went down to Egypt and is said to have left that country a rich man (12:16, 20). When called upon he could muster 318 trained men for battle (14:14), so the total number of his household must have been at least twice that. Later when dealing with Abimelech king of Gerar Abraham is treated as an equal as is indicated by the parity treaty that they established (21:22-31) (see COVENANT 4.2.2).

2.3 Family. The account of Abraham opens with the statement that Sarai his wife was barren (11:30) and this becomes a central theme of the story. God continually promises that he will be the father of nations (Gen. 15:4-5; 17:5-8). Sarah gave Abraham the Egyptian servant Hagar and Abraham had a son by her (16:1-4), but Ishmael was not the fulfillment of God's promise (17:20-21). When Abraham was a hundred years old the promise was fulfilled with the birth of Isaac (21:1-5). Following the death of Sarah Abraham took another wife, Keturah and six more sons (25:1-4).

3 Second Millennium Context. Since the beginning of the critical study of the Old Testament the patriarchal narratives have been treated with scepticism. Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) argued that the accounts were created in the time of the monarchy and therefore lacked any historical basis. His famous *Prolegomena* set the tone of most Old Testament scholarship since his day. Today there are still those who argue for a first millennium origin of the accounts, but increasingly archaeological discoveries are establishing the antiquity and credibility of the accounts.

3.1 Specific Extrabiblical Parallels. Extrabiblical data from discoveries at Mari and Nuzi have been used to furnish parallels to Biblical events (Selman, 1980: 97). The means by

which these parallels were arrived at owes more, at times, to enthusiasm than to scientific method. Alan Millard points out that the data selection was often eclectic, being based solely on its similarity to a Biblical passage, regardless of whether it was representative of practices recorded in other texts found at the same location. Often a single text was used for comparison. Millard concludes:

When all is said these 'parallels' [those based on unbalanced or distorted data] prove nothing. At worst, they can be misleading as additional evidence shows a custom to be local or commonplace. At best they show the possibility that the Patriarchal Narratives exhibit some [of the same] practices, so permitting us to conclude that they may tell of the same times. They are not to be neglected, however, when they are thoroughly understood in their context. Brackets mine (Millard, 1980: 47).

With this cautions in mind we will now go on to discuss some specific examples of archaeological evidence that has been put forward to support a second millennium date for Abraham.

3.1.1 Abraham's Name. No references to the biblical Abraham have been discovered so far in excavations in and around Israel. This is not at all surprising considering the fragmentary state of the extant material dating from the 2nd millennium. Material written on papyrus perishes very quickly in a damp climate and even clay tablets and not indestructible. Although large archives have been discovered the gaps in our knowledge are still enormous and it is not surprising that references to one family group, albeit one of reasonable size, have failed to survive. There are no known references to the name "Abram" from this era, but a variant of Abraham "Aburahana" occurs in the Egyptian Execration Texts of the 19th century BC (Millard, 1992: 39). More significant is the absence of other people named Abraham in Judaism until the sixth century AD (Wiseman, 1980: 154), clearly an indication of the esteem in which he was held by his descendants.

3.1.2 The Account of the Four Kings. The material contained in Genesis 14 is the most sharply debated area of patriarchal archaeology. The mention of so many characters and events that would be expected to appear in extra-biblical accounts have made this chapter a focus of special attention. Many scholars regard the account as late and unhistorical and attempts at the beginning of the 20th century to identify the four kings (most famously Amraphel with Hammurabi, King of Babylon) have been now been generally rejected on both philological and historical grounds (Miller & Hayes, 1986: 64; Wenham, 1987:308). It has been argued that not only is there no other record of such a campaign but Abraham, with an army of 318 men would hardly have been able to defeat a force that he reckons to number several thousand. However, our knowledge of this period of history is still so patchy that these events could have gone undetected in extra-biblical finds (Bimson, 1980: 60). It is probable that the armies in the ancient world of 2nd millennium were small, more on the level of raiding party than of an invasion force (Wenham, 1987: 320). Although there is no direct archaeological confirmation of this account, the names of the Kings (which are well attested in the 2nd millennium), the route taken by the armies and incidental references to Canaanite religion and certain legal terms give it "at least a ring of authenticity" (Miller & Hayes, 1986: 64). Due to the weakness of the evidence on both sides, the best solution appears to be to hold this area of the discussion in abeyance, and allow archaeological research to fill the gaps on our knowledge (Wright, 1962: 50-51).

3.1.3 Eliezer's Inheritance. At least two texts from Nuzi have been used to explain Abraham's fear that his servant Eliezer would become his heir (Gen. 15:1-4). These texts describe how childless couples might adopt a son to serve them in their old age and in turn inherit their property upon their demise, after fulfilling the appropriate mourning rites. This

practice was widespread in the Ancient Near East, but despite the popularity of this explanation it has now been largely rejected.

The main difficulty, apart from the translational difficulties inherent in the text of vv. 2-3 (which are great), is that the Nuzi tablets state that once adoption had been carried out the adoptee could never be completely excluded from the inheritance, even if a son were born to his adopted parents - he would then take second place to the natural son. However, this shared inheritance is never mentioned in Genesis, but is explicitly excluded (Selman, 1980: 109). Rather than argue that Abraham was flouting the accepted practice of his day it is far easier to accept that too much is being read into the text from the supposed parallel. Eliezer is not called 'a slave' (the servant in Gen. 24 is not named) and the text does not say that he had been adopted, although Abraham may well have been planning to do so if he had had no son of his own (Wenham, 1987: 329).

3.1.4 The purchase of a Burial Site. In Genesis 23 Abraham buys the Cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite as a burial place for his dead wife Sarah. The resemblance between this account and Laws 46 and 47 of the Hittite Laws has led to another incident of *parallelomania*, as the unwarranted drawing of parallels with extrabiblical material is sometimes called. According to these laws, the sale of a man's entire property freed him from all feudal responsibilities connected with the land, whereas if he disposed of only part of it, these would remain his. This has led some to conclude that Ephron took advantage of Abraham's predicament to free himself from taxes (or whatever form these feudal responsibilities took) (Barker, 1986: 134). The main problem is that this interpretation must supply the story with missing point of comparison and then reconstruct the text to agree with it (Selman, 1980: 111). These missing parts in the account are any references to feudal service, and any indication that Ephron was selling his entire property, which was unlikely. This passage is not a precise parallel with a Neo-Babylonian 'dialogue document' but it is more likely that it represents an early form of bargaining, which later developed into the sophisticated ritual of the Neo-Babylonian (Selman, 1980: 117).

3.2 Alleged Anachronisms. The presence of anachronistic references has long been used as a test for its dating. One example, the reference to Ur "of the Chaldeas" has already been noted above (2.1) and indicates the work of an editor's efforts to clarify the exact location for a later audience. Edwin Yamauchi makes an important point concerning such deliberate substitutions:

...it is a universal practice for later editors or translators to make updated substitutions which are quite necessary to make certain items clear to later readers without elaborate circumlocutions. It would be quite captious to place these deliberate substitutions in the same incriminating heading as erroneous anachronisms (Yamauchi, 1973: 35).

Two of the more significant alleged anachronisms are references to camels and Philistines in the Genesis account of Abraham.

3.2.1 Camels. The mention of 'camels' (*Camelus dromedarius*) in the Genesis narrative (12:16; 24; 30:43; 31:17, 34; 32:7, 15; 37:25 - 28 references in all) has long been viewed with scepticism; many scholars still citing it as a clear example of an anachronism. One Old Testament scholar refers to them as "...no more than anachronistic touches introduced to make the stories more vivid to later hearers." (Bright, 1980: 81). Others have argued that camels were first domesticated only in the first millennium BC (van Seters, 1975: 17). The writer was therefore not being anachronistic, but rather being consistent with Abraham's 1st millennium context. Despite these dogmatic claims there is now a great deal of evidence for

the accuracy of the references to camels. The debate has its roots in some basic facts of archaeological history.

Before 1950 animal bones found on digs were regarded as having little or no importance. In addition most of the early sites were in interior hill country in which the camel played a very small role (Davis, 1986: 144-145). With the recent increase in interest in faunal remains a number of writers now place the domestication of the camel in the fourth millennium BC. Evidence discovered so far includes a mention of a Camel in a list of domesticated animals during the Old Babylonian period (1950-1600 BC) in a Sumerian Lexical Text from Ugarit; reference to camel's milk in another Old Babylonian text (Davis, 1986: 145). Pierre Montet found a 2nd millennium stone container in the form of a camel in Egypt (Blaklock, 1983: 115-116). Parrot uncovered a picture of the hindquarters of a camel on a jar at Mari, also c.2000 BC, and camel bones dating from the pre-Sargonid era (c. 2400 BC) (Day & Harrison, 1979: 583-584). There is also evidence that by the 3rd millennium BC camels were in use, together with donkeys, as slow moving beasts of burden, but were not domesticated on a large scale until c.1500-1250 BC (Wiseman, 1979: 316). It is therefore not necessary to regard the patriarchal references to camels as anachronisms (Day & Harrison, 1979: 584).

The controversy over camels has tended to overshadow a far more important fact. That is that the first reference to horses in Scripture is not until the time of Joseph's administration in Egypt (Gen. 47:17) some time in 18th - 16th centuries BC. When it was first introduced to the Middle East in about 2300 BC, the horse was very valuable, serving as a beast of burden as well as being used for riding. A writer in the 1st millennium wishing to emphasise the wealth of the patriarchs would have been more likely to have substituted 'horse' into the account rather than 'camel' as by the 1st millennium camels had become much more commonplace, while horses were still expensive (Millard, 1980: 50).

3.2.2 Philistines. A second alleged anachronism is the record of Philistines in the patriarchal narratives (Gen. 21:32, 34; 26:1, 8, 14, 15, 18), as the fierce race of warriors from Caphtor (Crete and the Aegean Isles) settled on the coastal plains of Canaan in the 12th century BC (Kitchen, 1973: 56; Stieglitz, 1982: 28). Therefore references to 'Philistines' in this region earlier than this date must represent an example of an 'unconscious' anachronism (Millard, 1980: 49). However, Kenneth Kitchen has argued persuasively that the name is a replacement for an earlier race of immigrants from Caphtor. These people were different to the 12th century Philistines in that they dwelt around Gerar under a king (Heb. *Melek*), rather than in the five cities of the plain, which were governed by a 'ruler' (Heb. *seranim*) (Kitchen, 1973: 56). It is also possible that the earlier 'Philistines' were identified with the Canaanites and may have inherited the name of a southern Canaanite people group called 'Palishti' "(note the interchange of 'Philistines' and 'Canaanites' in Josh.13:2-4 & Judg. 3:3. Note also the expression "the Canaanites who dwell in the plain" Josh. 17:16, almost certainly a reference to the Philistines, since they had chariots of iron.)" (LaSor, 1986: 846). 'Palishti' was later transferred to the 'prst', the Egyptian name for the 12th century Philistines (Kitchen, 1973: 56; LaSor, 1986: 846).

4 Abraham's Faith

4.1 Means of Revelation. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of God speaking many and various ways (Heb. 1:1). This was certainly true of his dealings with Abraham. It is unclear what form the command to leave Ur (Acts 7:2) and later Haran (Gen. 12:1) was given. At other times the Lord is said to have "appeared to him" (12:7; 17:1; 18:1) in various forms. On one occasion he appeared as a "smoking pot and a blazing torch" (15:17) while at others he is

identified as the angel of the Lord (16:7-11; 18:1, cf. 19:1) evidently in human form (18:2).

4.2 The Divine Name. The Patriarchal narratives (Gen. 12-50) do not provide us with anything like a systematic theology of the Patriarchs. The attention of their writers was centered on “a God who had revealed himself to them, and with their response to that revelation” (Pfeiffer, 1965: 97; Wenham, 1980: 157). Complicating the matter further is the fact that the accounts of the Patriarchs as we know them are all post-Sinaitic, and therefore presuppose and contrast the teachings of Moses with those of the Patriarchs (cf. Exod. 6:3; Josh. 24:14, which state that the Patriarchs did not know God as Yahweh and that they were originally polytheists). This leads logically to the question of whether the later editor(s) of the Genesis accounts read back into them later beliefs, making El-Shaddai equivalent to Yahweh (Wenham, 1980: 157-158).

It has been established that *El* was the name of the head of the West Semitic pantheon in the early second millennium BC, and that there is no evidence of the use of *Yahweh* in any extrabiblical writings of this period. The name *Yahweh* is found more often in the narrative framework of the text of Genesis than in the dialogue. The editor, wishing to identify the God of Moses with that of the patriarchs appears to have added *Yahweh* to the *El* compounds, such as *El Elyon*, making *Yahweh El Elyon* (Gen. 14:22) or *Adonai Yahweh* (15:2). The exception to this is where the actual words of God are being recorded, which the editor apparently did not feel at liberty to alter (Wenham, 1980: 180-182).

If this view is accepted only four passages exist where the narrative records the Lord using the name *Yahweh* to describe Himself. In Gen. 18:14 the saying “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” is “a proverbial statement in the form of a rhetorical question” - the name not being vital to the thrust of the question. Genesis 18:19 is an explanation of God’s motives, not necessarily heard by Abraham, that is, it was probably added later. The last instance is “I am the Lord who bought you” (15:7), which as it occurs 22 times in the Pentateuch in connection with the Exodus, must have been used as a stock phrase “used to draw a connection between Abraham’s departure and the Exodus from Egypt”. It is clear therefore that there is no real difficulty in accepting that the God of the patriarchs is the same as Yahweh, and that the patriarchs knew Him by the name *El* and its compounds: *El Shaddai* (17:1; 27:3; 35:11; 43:14); *El Elyon* (14:18-22); *El Olam* (21:33); *El Ro’i* (16:13), and *El Bethel* (Wenham, 1980: 182; Bush, 1986, 693).

There is no evidence that Abraham engaged in Canaanite religion despite his use of compound names for deity based on *El*, the head of their pantheon. Nowhere do we find and reference to Ba’al by any of the patriarchs. It has been argued that later editors expunged references to Ba’al in line with later Mosaic commands, but if this were the case then references to *El* should have been removed at the same time (Rowley, 1967: 12-13).

Perhaps the most enigmatic of the references to *El* occurs in the account of Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem. Melchizedek is identified as the King of Salem. Later writers record that a certain Adonizedek was King of Jerusalem at the time of the Conquest (Joshua 10:1) and the Psalmist parallels “Salem” with “Zion” in Psalm 76:2 - “His tent is in Salem, his dwelling-place in Zion.” Both these verses indicate that the reference in Genesis 14 was to a Canaanite King living in what we now call Jerusalem. In line with Canaanite custom the king of a city was also the high priest of its patron deity, in this case *El Elyon*, God Most High. In 14:22 Abraham swears by *El Elyon*, identifying Yahweh with Melchizedek’s God. Later in the Old Testament this title is clearly shown to be one of the names of God (e.g. Num. 24:16; 2 Sam. 22:14; Psalm 46:4; 73:11). It is worth noting that this Melchizedek is the first priest

mentioned in the Bible (the significance of this was not missed by the writer to the Hebrews as we shall see later). As priest of the Most High God Abram offers him the traditional gift of a tithe of the spoils of battle and therefore appears to have recognised him as worshipping the same God.

4.3 Preexisting Tradition. Scripture is clear that Abraham and his ancestors were idolaters before God graciously revealed himself to him. This does not mean that Abraham rejected all of his previous practices when he began to serve the Lord. There are few if any practices in Abraham's worship that are unique, except the object of that worship. Far more important are the elements that are missing, specifically the preoccupation with fertility and ceremonies connected with the yearly agricultural cycle (Pfeiffer, 1964: 86). Earlier passages in Genesis refer to prayer (4:26), sacrifices (4:3-4) and altars (8:20). Extrabiblical evidence demonstrates that many of his other practices were also widespread. In Genesis 14:17-20 Abraham gives a tenth of his plunder to Melchizedek the Priest-King. There are numerous references to tithing in Ancient Near Eastern literature, indicating that the practice of giving tenth was well-established. Clearly both Abraham and Melchizedek knew of it (Carpenter, 1988: 861). Likewise circumcision was already practiced by the Egyptians as early as the 23rd century BC (Pritchard, 1969: 326). The truly unique element of Abraham's faith was the special place that he had in the purposes of God and his obedience in fulfilling those purposes.

4.4 Content of Revelation.

4.4.1 Covenant Relationship. Abraham clearly had a very special role in God's purpose. He was known as the friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23), a friendship based upon an ongoing relationship and acts of obedience to the divine will. He left his home country (12:1, 4; Heb. 11:8), prepared a covenant ceremony (Gen. 15:9-10), had himself and the male members of his camp circumcised (17:11, 24-27) and was even prepared to offer his long awaited son as a burnt offering (22:1-2, 9-18; Heb. 11:17-19) in obedience to God's will. As a result the Lord established his covenant with him (see COVENANT 3.2.1) and his descendants. This unique relationship enabled him to feel confident enough to intercede persistently for the city of Sodom (Gen. 18:22-32).

4.4.2 Covenant Promises. The covenant promises were three fold. **a) The Gift of Offspring.** Began to be fulfilled in his own lifetime with the births of Isaac and his seven other sons, most of whom went on to found tribes and nations of their own. The New Testament points to the church as the fulfillment of this promise (Rom. 4:17). **b) The Gift of Land.** This was not achieved during Abraham's lifetime.

According to the OT the land promise was fulfilled at least twice (in the days of Joshua [Josh 21:43-45] and during the reign of Solomon [1 Kgs 4:20-21]). The prophets of Israel predicted that, in effect, it would be fulfilled in the future as well. In each of the first two instances the land (or at least large portions of it) was wrenched from the people's grasp because of their sin (Judg 3:8 and passim; 2 Kgs 17:1-23; Jeremiah passim; cf. also Ezek 33:23-26). (Youngblood, 1983: 41-42).

According to the writers to the Hebrews Abraham was looking forward to an eternal city with foundations in contrast to his own shifting existence (Heb. 11:10). **c) The Gift of Blessing to Others.** The Hebrew is an imperative here: "Be a blessing". There are few examples in the life of Abraham to point to as a fulfillment of this part of the promise. The New Testament Paul argues that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this promise (Acts 3:25) (see COVENANT 3.6.4).

4.5 Abraham's Lapses of Faith. The Bible presents a realistic portrait of human nature and makes no attempt to cover or hide their failings and mistakes. Abraham was clearly wrong to accept Hagar as a means of obtaining an heir, an act that caused distress to everyone involved and has had repercussions throughout history, even to this day (Gen. 16:1-6; 21:9-14). Likewise twice Abraham lied to national rulers in order to protect himself (12:11-20; 20:1-13).

5 Abraham in Scripture

5.1 Father of Israel. Elsewhere in Scripture Abraham is referred to consistently as the father of the people of Israel and they as inheritors of the promises made to him (Exod. 3:15; Lev. 26:42; Num. 32:11; Deut. 1:8; Josh. 24:2; 1 Chron. 1:27; Neh. 9:7; Isa. 41:8; Jer. 33:26; Matt. 1:2; Luke 3:34; John 8:39; Acts 13:26; Rom.11:1).

5.2 The Father of Faith. Both Jesus and Paul were clear that mere physical descent from Abraham would never make one acceptable to God (John 8:39). To be acceptable to God one must be an heir of the faith of Abraham - what Paul refers to as the true "children of Abraham" (Rom. 4:1-17; Gal. 3:7-9). The New Testament writers cite Abraham as an outstanding example of a man of faith (Heb. 11:8-11, 17; James 2:21-23).

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