

ROMANS 4:1-25
By Abri Brancken

THEME: ABRAHAM – JUSTIFIED BY FAITH (4:2-3)

THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM

In order to better understand what Paul is saying in Romans chapter 4, we need to have the basic understanding of the life and faith of Abraham. Let's take a closer look at Abraham's life.

WHEN DID ABRAHAM LIVE?

Abraham lived around (roughly) 4000 years ago. It is difficult to determine the exact date when Abraham lived. We can place the birth of Abraham with some degree of confidence between 2100 and 1800 BC.

WHO DID ABRAM WORSHIP?

In the times of Abraham, tribes within nations, worshipped a variety of gods. According to Jewish sages, Abraham's ancestors were idolaters and polytheists (worshippers of many gods). He lived during a time when there was no Bible, no Law, nothing. Joshua reminds the people, "Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods" (Joshua 24:2). We also know that Abram and his family were wealthy.

Archaeology shows that both Ur in Lower Mesopotamia and Haran in Upper Mesopotamia were centers of moon worship. Even the names Terah and Milcah contain elements that reveal allegiance to the moon-god.

WHERE DID ABRAHAM LIVE?

He was born in Ur, the capital of Mesopotamia at the height of its splendour as a highly developed ancient world and he moved to Haran with his father Terah. Abraham was born Abram, but God later changed his name to Abraham.

ONE DAY, GOD CALLED ABRAHAM

God called Abraham to leave his home and go to a new land that God would show Him. The Bible traces Abraham's steps from Ur to Haran (north of Canaan), through the land of Canaan, into Egypt, and back into Canaan (which later became Israel).

Genesis 12:1-3

12 Now the Lord had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." He was 75 years old when he left his home.

Abraham was the first man specifically called by God's purposes for salvation. God wanted to send the Messiah Jesus to save humanity from sin and therefore God had to separate a people through whom He could achieve it. Abraham and his descendants were the vessel (people) God chose to work with. Abram was in Haran at age 75 when he got the call from God to leave his home and family behind and follow God into a strange land that He would give him.

God promised to give Abram a son through his wife Sarah who was barren (unable to bear children). Through this son, a mighty nation would arise and also an uncountable amount of descendants, and One of those descendants would be a blessing to all the nations in the world.

God promised him the land known today as Israel.

Abraham was called the first "Hebrew" which probably means "to cross over" because he was supposedly so foolish for thinking that there was just one God and if he crosses over the Euphrates river that he would find this new land that God had promised.

THE PROMISE OF DESCENDANTS

This promise seemed impossible because they were so old but Abraham believed what God said, though later he doubted and tried to force God's hand by having a son through Sarah's servant girl, Hagar. Hagar was from Egypt. His son from Hagar, Ishmael, turned against Isaac, Abraham's son of the promise, who was born 13 years after Ishmael, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90. So Ishmael had to leave Abraham's household. Later, Abrahams descendant would end up being slaves in Egypt.

Abram was 75 years old (Genesis 12:4) when he was first promised by God to become a "great nation." How many years would pass before God fulfilling His promise? 25 years!

ABRAHAMS JOURNEY

Abram took his wife, his nephew, Lot, and his possessions and departed. At God's call, he travelled to Canaan and lived for a while in various localities, in particular: Shechem, Hebron, Bethel, and the Negev desert, with sojourns to Egypt.

WHY DID ABRAHAM GO INTO EGYPT?

A famine in the land forced Abram and his people to move on to Egypt. Fearful that Pharoah would kill Abram for his beautiful wife, Abram asked Sarai to pretend she was his sister instead. Pharoah noted Sarai and took her as a concubine. For this, God struck the Pharoah with a plague and revealed Sarai's true identity. Angry with Abram, Pharoah returned Sarai and asked them to leave Egypt. Abram left with carts of wealth.

THE DISPUTE BETWEEN ABRAM AND LOT

Abram returned to Canaan with Lot and Sarai, but Lot and Abram had a dispute over grazing land for their herds. Breaking with tradition, Abram allowed Lot—the younger of the two—to choose the land he would take. Lot chose the fertile plain to the east, and Abram took the hills to the west. Lot's land included the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Gen 13:1

"So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company:"

After Abram was again settled, God came to Abram and renewed his promise; that Abram would inherit for his descendants all the land he could see in every direction.

Lot moved to Sodom and was captured when local tribes attacked the city. Abram—who had grown wealthy and distinguished—armed his men and pursued Lot's kidnappers, regaining Lot and his possessions. Again God affirmed his promises to Abram, Abram now being well advanced in years and without offspring. God reaffirmed that He would give the land from the Nile to the Euphrates to Abram's descendants, but only after they had spent 400 years as slaves.

THE FIRST SON, ISMAEL

Sarai, Abram's wife, made a suggestion. In the ancient world, it was a custom to offer a substitute to bear a child to ensure the continuation of the family. Sarai offered her Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, to Abram to bear them a child. Remember, Hagar was from Egyptian descent. Abram consented, and at the age of 86

Hagar bore him a son, Ishmael. But, Ismael was not God's purpose for Abraham. God would not use Ismael through which the Messiah would come, but Isaac, the son Abram would have with Sarai many years later.

ABRAMS & SARAI'S NAME CHANGED

God changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means "the father of many nations," and He changed Sarai's name to Sarah, meaning "princess" (Gen 17:5,15). God also revealed that the promises would not come to Abraham through Ishmael, but through another son that would be born to Sarah in a years' time (Gen 17:19). Abraham laughed, because Abraham was 99 at the time and Sarah was 89. God said the boy's name would be Isaac, which means "he laughs."

ISAAC IS BORN

God came again to speak to Abraham, in the form of a traveller with companions (who were two angels – Gen 18). During God's and the angels' visit, Abraham served them Bedouin hospitality (Gen 18:6-8). The companions (angels) were on their way to Sodom to destroy the city for its wickedness. Abraham asked God mercy on behalf of Lot and other possible righteous people living in the city. If there were just ten righteous people in Sodom, God would not destroy it.

God could not find even ten righteous in Sodom, but spared Lot's family by warning them to leave before he destroyed the city. Lot's wife was turned to a pillar of salt when she turned to view Sodom as she fled.

A year later, Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

HAGAR AND ISMAEL SENT AWAY

Sarah grew increasingly jealous of Hagar and Ishmael, and Abraham relented to allow Sarah to send them out into the wilderness. God saved Hagar and Ishmael and promised Ishmael would also father a great nation through 12 sons, assumed by tradition to be the 12 Arab tribes. According to Christian and Jewish scripture, God stipulated, though, that the covenant would flow through Isaac's line.

OFFERING OF ISAAC

As Abraham grew stronger in faith, God told him to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering to prove his faith (Gen 22). This had to take place on Mount Moriah, where Jerusalem is today, opposite the mount of Olives and next to mount Zion. This was just a test. Will Abraham sacrifice, give up the most important thing to him for the Lord's sake? God is totally against human sacrifices. This is very clear in the Bible. God spoke to Abraham within the context of what he understood. Human sacrifices was a common practise in those times. Children were often sacrificed as burnt offerings to a variety of deities.

Abraham obeyed and brought Isaac to Mount Moriah, laid him on the altar and at the last minute the Lord told him not to kill Isaac and gave him a ram for the sacrifice. Here we see Abraham's faith (Heb 11:17-19) and a beautiful picture of Christ. Abraham offering his son is a picture of God offering Jesus for our sins. It was in the same area where Jesus was crucified 2000 years later. Isaac was about 30 years old when God asked Abraham to offer him. The Bible calls Abraham a friend of God:

Isa 41:8 "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend.

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM

Abraham became 175 years old (Gen 25:7). After Isaac, he had more children.

Gen 25:8

Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.

Isaac had a son Jacob and Jacob had 12 sons, the tribes of Israel.

Hebrews 11:17-19 - The Faith of the Patriarchs

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. The Hebrew Scriptures announce justification by faith.

FACTS

1. Yahweh (God) initiated Abraham's destiny, not Abraham
2. Yahweh (God) gave Abraham a son, Isaac. It was God's initiative and God performed the miracle. Abraham did nothing, but to believe that God can and would do it
3. Yahweh (God) was the absolute reality fulfilling His own promises, apart from Abraham's human efforts
4. Yahweh (God) sustained Abraham throughout his journey
5. God was the Source and the Fulfillment of what He did in Abraham's life. The beginning and the end!

WHAT DID GOD REVEAL TO ABRAHAM?

God showed Abraham that salvation encompasses the total work of God by which He seeks to rescue us from the ruin, doom, and power of sin and bestows upon us the wealth of His grace encompassing eternal life, provision for abundant life now, and eternal glory.

(Eph. 1:3-8; 2:4-10; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; John 3:16, 36; 10:10).

Romans 4:2-3

2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Paul makes it clear: Abraham's righteousness did not come from his performance of good works, but from his belief in God's ability to do the humanly impossible.

There are not two ways of salvation; Saved by works or law and/or saved by grace through faith. Everyone who has ever been saved - Old or New Testament is saved by grace through faith, through their relationship of trusting love with God.