

#5 Abraham | February 18, 2018

Some Important Background | Genesis 11:26-32

- Abraham was the second son of Terah, and was born in the Ur of the Chaldees (Mesopotamia).
- His brother Haran died young, having given birth to several children, including Lot.
- His younger brother Nahor married Haran's daughter (his niece) and became the great grandfather of Leah & Rachel.
- For unknown reasons, Terah moved his family toward Canaan, but ended up settling in Haran, still in Mesopotamia.

The Call of Abram | Genesis 12:1-7

- God promised to lead Abram to a new land, and to make a great nation – Verses 1-2.
- God initiated a new dispensation in verse 3, a promise that fundamentally changed man's relationship with God.
 - The promises and instructions of vv. 1-2 are introductory, but make no fundamental change.
 - With the promise of v. 3, one would have to be right with Abram in order to be right with God.
- The ultimate promise of this new dispensation was that of a *nation* that would inhabit particular *land*.
 - The nation is later shown to be through Abraham's son, Isaac.
 - The land is later shown to be committed by God to the decedents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 13:15, 17:8).

Abram's Faith | Genesis 15:1-6

- Much has been made of Abraham's faith as the basis of his righteousness. Perhaps more has been made of it than the Scripture teaches.
- *What did Abraham believe? That God would give him an heir who produce a great nation, and that this nation would inherit a particular piece of real estate.*
- Most in the church today use this to prove that individuals have *always* been saved *by faith without works*. Here is the problem with such a claim:
 - One must ask, *faith in what?*
 - One must also ask, *why did Paul make so much of the fact that now one is saved by faith without works if it has always been that way?*
 - One must ask why Phineas was justified by works – Psalm 106:30-31.

- Did Abraham receive a credit of righteousness because of his faith? *Yes indeed!*
- Did Abraham's works *prove* his faith? *No, not always.* (The Calvinist, under Covenant Theology, must deal with this when they claim that faith must be displayed or it is not "saving faith.")
- Could anyone other than Abraham have ever been saved by believing the same thing Abraham believed? *No!*
- Conclusion: It is dangerous ground to build your salvation theology based on one verse in Genesis.

A Conflict of Biblical Proportions | Romans 4:1-5, James 2:21-24

- Romans 4:1-5 is written as a theological treatise concerning the new dispensation of Justification by faith without works. Abraham is used as an example.
 - Verse 1 is very clear: it speaks of what Abraham found **as pertaining to the flesh**. To equate it to what he found *spiritually* would be comparing apples to oranges.
 - Verse 2 – Abraham's justification *pertaining to the flesh* was by faith, not works.
 - Verses 3-5 – Paul lays the claim that *grace* and *works* are incompatible. Works create debt, not grace. Abraham did not work, he simply believed.
- James 2:21-24 is written prior to the beginning of the new dispensation, and is written to those who were Jewish believers in Jesus as the Messiah, still living under the old dispensation (because nothing new had been revealed to change their belief system).
 - Verse 21 tells us that James is *not* talking about Abraham believing God's promise. He is talking about Abraham's obedience to God's instruction.
 - Verse 24 tells us that James, speaking under the Law to those under the Law, recognized that the Law *required* works and not just faith.
- Only by dividing the dispensations will Paul and James be compatible. And when you recognize that James was written 4-5 years *before* the Council at Jerusalem, things become very compatible.
 - Be careful to avoid statements like John Piper's, "Even when his words may seem to be in conflict with Paul, is the meaning in conflict?"
 - The truth is that we get our meaning from the words, and to do otherwise is to open the Biblical text to a world of abuse.