

## The Significance of Abraham

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Hebrews 11:8-19

Today, I would like for us to consider together “The Significance of Abraham.”...

Dr. James Montgomery Boice said: “With the exception of Jesus Christ, Abraham is probably the most important person in the Bible.”

We will discuss a number of reasons why this is so, but first and foremost, I want to point out that Abraham is a **PROTOTYPE** of all who believe. ... **Romans 4:11** says Abraham is “... ***the father of all who believe.***” ... **II Corinthians 5:7** suggests that the most significant distinction between genuine Christians and the unbelieving world is: “... ***we walk by faith and not by sight.***” [i.e. **Abraham is the father of all who “walk by faith and not by sight.”**]

A few weeks ago, I preached a sermon titled “Without Excuse,” based on Romans 1. In that sermon I referred to R.C. Sproul’s teaching series on “The Psychology of **Atheists**” [People who do NOT walk by faith]. ... I pointed out that Jesus himself taught that the vast majority of the world’s population are, in effect, ‘atheists’ [i.e. Matt. 7:13-14]. ... Romans 1 points out that these people “***suppress the truth***” of God [Rom. 1:18 ff.] and deny the most obvious evidence of an intelligent designer. ... **The same people deny much of the revelation God has given in His Word, the Bible. Liberal scholars have denied the actual historical existence of Adam and Eve, Abraham, and other O.T. characters;** ... they deny much of the history of the bible and they reject the accounts of miracles.

I myself did undergraduate work in a liberal Methodist college. In the few instances when I took classes on the Bible, I was exposed to the liberal line of thinking [which is very much influenced by atheistic thinking and philosophy]. I was taught that many of the books of the bible were not written by the authors whose name appears as the heading of the book [Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc; ... i.e. a pseudo-author, who wrote much later, adopted their name for credibility and authority]. I was taught that we must let go of the accounts of miracles in the bible because they are unscientific and were only manufactured/“make-believe” stories designed to teach certain moral principles. [InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, an on-campus conservative, biblical ministry for college students, helped maintain my sanity during these years.]

Later, I did graduate work on a second master’s degree at Wheaton College, where many of my professors were conservative evangelicals, who held to the credibility of the bible, its human and divine authors, and the bible’s accounts of miracles. One of my professors was **Dr. James Hoffmeier**, a conservative biblical scholar who had done archeological research and other studies regarding the historicity of Israel’s bondage in Egypt and the Exodus, ... events many liberal scholars deny ever actually took place in history ...

[...other O.T. events, such as Joshua’s conquest of the promised land and the fall of the walls of Jericho are **also denied by liberal scholars as actual historical events**; – ... and, of course, the list goes on to include God’s judgment of the world by a world-wide flood in Noah’s day, the story of Jonah in the belly of a whale, and the literal existence of Adam and Eve, etc., etc..

**NOTE:** Dr. Hoffmeier commented in class about his experience attending some of conferences featuring these liberal ‘scholars’, many of whom turned out to be the children of legalistic, fundamentalist parents – rebelling against the religion of their childhood.

It may surprise some to discover that some liberal “scholars” actually have argued that there never existed a literal, historical Jesus – and the suggestion that he was just an idea! ... [An article by Cambridge scholar, **Dr Simon Gathercole**, says: ... “The historical evidence for Jesus of Nazareth is both long-established and widespread. Within a few decades of his supposed lifetime, he is mentioned by Jewish and Roman historians, as well as by dozens of Christian writings” : [NOTE: Many of whom were eyewitnesses!] – He is referring, of course, to the biblical writers [Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the Apostle Paul, etc.], ... as well as the first century secular writers: Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus **AD 93**, and about 20 years after Josephus, ... Roman politicians Pliny and Tacitus, as well as Suetonius, the chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian. ... And this is in contrast to many commonly recognized historical personalities such as Greek Philosopher, **Plato**; ... no one questions his existence; ... yet the earliest copies of his writings today are from **1,300 years** after his book was written.

**Simon Gathercole says:**

It is worth noting, ... , that **the two mainstream historians who have written most against these hyperceptical arguments are atheists: Maurice Casey (formerly of Nottingham University) and Bart Ehrman (University of North Carolina). They have issued stinging **criticisms** of the “Jesus-myth” approach, branding it **pseudo-scholarship**.**

The **same sort of confusion** exists among modern, liberal, theologians and historian regarding the existence of O.T. characters; such as **Abraham**; and O.T. events, such as the bondage of Israel in Egypt and the Exodus, etc. **Dr James Hoffmeier** cites a quote by **Edwin Yamauchi**, in which he says: ... “**Though scholars** (i.e. liberal scholars) **are united in their lack of confidence in Scripture and supremely confident in their own theories, they are highly critical of each other’s views.**”

**Jesus’ confirmation of a historical Abraham:**

Therefore, we will not go further into that debate with liberal (& atheistic) theologians and historians; ... except to point out that [as Peter says in **I Pet. 1:19**] “*we have a more sure word ...*”, i.e. in the fact that **the Son of God** who became incarnate in human flesh indicated His own belief in the historical person, Abraham! In **John 8:58**, Jesus said: “*Before Abraham was, I am.*” ... And **He spoke with the Jews about Abraham in such a way as to indicate that He himself shared their acceptance of the reality of a historical person called Abraham, and that he was the actual biological father of the Jewish people.**

**There is another powerful verse that indicates the significance of Abraham in Romans 4:13 ...**

“... For **the promise that he would be the heir of the world** was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” [NKJV]

This statement has enormous significance, and it implies many extraordinary truths about the descendants of Abraham.

I came across an important article by **Nelson S. Hsieh**, Ph.D. Candidate at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, that deals with this phrase in Romans 4:13 – Abraham – “HEIR OF THE WORLD.” In this article, Nelson Hsieh [“Say”] argues that “**Abraham is not inheriting land, but people – namely, his innumerable spiritual descendants from all the nations of the world**”, throughout history. ... This has profound significance:

1. In the first place, it implies that the greatest inheritance for Abraham has to do with the great number of redeemed souls of every generation in the history of the world. [i.e. not merely a small piece of land in the middle east called "Israel."
2. Secondly, this is consistent with the redefinition [clarification] of what it means to be a "Jew," or an "Israelite" in the New Testament:

a. **Romans 2:28-29** [ "*A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.*" ...

b. Also, **Galatians 3:16 & 26-29 – v. 16** "*The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed,"<sup>1</sup> meaning one person, who is Christ.*", and verses 26-29: "*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,<sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*"

c. And then there is **1 Peter 2:9-10** – "*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.<sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*" [This is taken from a passage in the O.T. – **Exodus 19:5-6!**] ... and applied by Peter to the N.T. Church – which includes Gentile believers. This suggests such Gentile believers share in the promises made to Abraham's descendants.

d. And, there is the benediction the apostle Paul gives in his letter to the N.T. church at Galatia in Galatians 6:16: "*Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.*"

3. Finally, the idea of Abraham as "*the heir of the world*" [**Rom. 4:13**], as Hsieh ["Say"] comments in his paper, suggests the question of whether or not the land of Caanan should be considered a type of "rest" and a type of "paradise" that finds its fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth of eternity. **Psalm 95:7-11** uses the word "*rest*" to describe the promised land [implying a deeper, "spiritual" meaning]. This same terminology is used in **Hebrews 3:11 & 18**; and **4:1-7**, in the N.T.]

Abraham, "**The Friend of God**" ...

As Christians, we are involved in a quest to "know" God [**John 17:3** – ... "*this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*" In Phil. 3:10 Paul says: "*I want to know Christ ...*"

**Abraham** is called "*the friend of God*" three times in Scripture. And in one it is God Himself, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, who calls him "*Abraham my friend*" ... [Isa. 41:8].

Also, it was said of **David**, another 'faith hero' in the bible, that he was "*a man after God's own heart* [and in Acts 13:22 it is God Himself who calls David "*a man after my own heart*"]

Obviously, each of these men's lives demonstrate important keys about how we can grow closer to God! Every Christian, like Abraham, has been brought into a special position of privilege and favor before God because of Christ [adoption, translation out of darkness into light, citizenship in heaven, "*access into the grace wherein we stand*" –

Rom. 5:1-2]. Jesus himself called faithful disciples his "friends"; ...

John 15:15 – "*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*"

Prov. 18:24 – “... *One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*”

James Boice pointed to Abraham’s hospitality to the three men who appeared to him under the trees at Mamre [in **Genesis 18**]. Boice, and others, believe that this was a preincarnate appearance of Christ; ... and Abraham showed kindness/hospitality to strangers preparing a meal.

Boice, and others have seen a connection with **Hebrews 13:2** – “*Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.*”

Boice also called attention to Genesis 3:8, where the Lord was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, ... **readily accessible** to Adam and Eve.

The image conveyed is the idea of closeness and friendship! ... **Abraham** enjoyed this sort of relationship with God **and** his relationship with God is meant to reflect this relationship to God for all who believe!