

## Honoring Our Father Abraham

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The Bible reveals Abraham as "the Friend of God" (James 2:23). As God's friend, Abraham prayed successfully for God to spare righteous Lot from the destruction of Sodom. Later, "Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac . . . Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:17,19). The Bible also identifies believers in Christ (Jew and Gentile) as "the children of Abraham." Indeed, God's promise that in Abraham "shall all nations be blessed" is accounted as a preview of the gospel. "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Galatians 3:7-9). Thus, Abraham's faith is presented as a role model for all Christians.

Sadly, God's people today often fail to honor Father Abraham in this manner. Rather, implicit in common readings of Genesis, Abraham cowered behind his wife's skirts putting her at risk. He repeatedly deceived his neighbors into believing Sarah was his sister to save his own skin. After all, Abraham even apologized for his action saying, "I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake" (Genesis. 20:11). Such distorted reading, however, overlooks social facts revealed in Genesis that augment biblical teaching about our Father Abraham.

First, in his daring rescue of Lot, Abraham demonstrated courageous leadership. The fact is that Abraham personally armed and led "his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan" (Gen. 14:14). Second, Abraham's neighbors regarded him as "a mighty prince among us" (Gen. 23:6). The fact is that Abraham's house can be conservatively estimated at some 1,500 to 2,000 souls, including wives, children and aged parents of Abraham's 318 warrior servants. Third, a ruthless king, intent on killing Abraham to get the beautiful Sarah (Gen. 12:11-12), would have to massacre Abraham's warrior servants. Abraham was concerned, as was Jacob later, that "I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house" (Gen. 34:30). In fact, Sarah was seized on two occasions by officers of Pharaoh and King Abimelech respectively (Gen. 12:15; 20:2).

God punished both royal houses with plagues (Gen. 12:17; 20:3,17-18). God commanded King Abimelech to "restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine. . . . And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife (Gen. 20:7, 14). As the psalmist later observed of the patriarchs, the Lord "suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (Psalm 105:14-15).

As a "mighty prince," Abraham had a standing policy in agreement with Sarah, to say that she was his sister (Gen. 20:13) to restrain the menace of lawless neighbors to God's people. Similarly, when Samuel was in personal peril from King Saul, he used a God-given cover story to keep the truth about his anointing of David from Saul. "And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD" (I Samuel 16:2). After Abraham's death, God declared that "Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:5). Allegations of deception, in effect, slander Father Abraham contrary to God's command to "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12).