

The Jewish people descended from Abraham. It is not unusual for them to call him “Father Abraham.” I smile when I hear that term. I also called him Father Abraham. He was my father. My name is Isaac.

Much of what I will tell you came from my father and my mother, Sarah. I couldn’t tell you from experience, because I was not born until my father was 100 years-old. Let me back up a few years before that to tell you about the story.

The story starts with a very peculiar event. The Lord came to my father in a vision, and told him that he was my his shield and great reward. As if he needed reminding, my father told the Lord that he was childless and his servant would be his heir. The Lord told him that his servant would not be his heir, but God would provide him his own son. He lead Abraham outside to see the sky, and said his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. The next sentence in the Bible doesn’t make much sense until you realize Abraham and Sarah were far past child-bearing age. It says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” My father had complete trust in God, which makes the next scene a little mystifying.

The Lord told Abraham that he had brought him out of the land of the Chaldeans to let him take possession of the land of Canaan. “Lord, how can I know that this will happen?” Abraham questioned him. And this is where is gets a little peculiar. Well, maybe more than a little peculiar.

The Lord told Abraham to bring him a three-year old heifer, goat and ram, along with a dove and a young pigeon. Abraham did so, and cut the heifer, goat and ram in two, arranging the halves opposite each other. Near dark, Abraham fell into a deep, trance-like sleep. The Lord told him that his descendants would be slaves in a strange country for four hundred years before coming out with great possessions, along with some other strange promises. When darkness fell, a smoking firepot with a torch appeared and passed between the pieces. Weird! Well, weird to you, but not to Abraham.

That strange ritual meant that the Lord had made a unilateral, unconditional promise to Abraham that he would have many descendants, and they would inherit a vast amount of land centered around the land of Canaan. He didn’t say when or how this would happen, but promised it would happen.

I need to drop back a little further in time to when Abraham was about eighty-five years old. My mother, Sarah, was childless and knew she was past child-bearing age. She convinced my

father to impregnate her Egyptian handmaiden so he could have an heir. Abraham slept with Hagar, and she quickly got pregnant. This made Hagar arrogant, haughty, and she despised Sarah.

Sarah got so angry that she began mistreating Hagar, badly. So badly that Hagar left the camp and went into the desert. The angel of the Lord found her by a spring, and commanded her to return to the camp and submit to Sarah. He encouraged Hagar by telling her that her descendants would become too numerous to count, although they would live in hostility with their relatives. She returned to the camp, and bore Abraham a son, and they named him Ishmael. Ishmael, my half-brother.

When my father turned ninety-nine, God appeared to him again, and reaffirmed his covenant to make my father into the father of many nations and the possessor of the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. And, that he would be the god of Abraham's descendants. However, Abraham and his descendants must keep the covenant by being circumcised. That very day, my father, Ishmael, and all the male members of the huge household were circumcised.

God also told Abraham that he and my mother would have a son from whom nations and kings would come. My father fell facedown, but inwardly he laughed. He knew that a hundred-year old man with a ninety year-old wife could not have a son. God mandated that he name this son, Isaac, and that God would have a covenant relationship with him. God said he would make Ishmael into a great nation, but Isaac was to be the son of promise, the son of covenant. Isaac, that's me. I was born a year later.

Eight days after I was born, Abraham circumcised me as the Lord had commanded. My mother, Sarah, was thrilled to have birthed me. She bragged that God had brought her laughter and knew everyone would laugh along with her. Well, not everyone. Hagar and Ishmael were not exactly happy that I was born.

On the day I was weaned, Abraham threw a great feast. My mother saw Ishmael mocking me, she was furious. She demanded that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away so there would be no dispute about the inheritance.

Abraham was resistant because Ishmael was his son, but God told him to do as Sarah asked. God reaffirmed that he would make Ishmael into a great nation because he was Abraham's son, but said that it would be Isaac through whom Abraham's descendants would be established.

Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness. Although they had a very tough time, God protected them, and was with the boy as he grew up. His mother, who was from Egypt, found an Egyptian wife for him.

My childhood was rather boring and uneventful. My father was rich and well-respected, so we could move from place to place with little trouble. The years slid by until one fateful day. The day when God tested my father.

“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you.”

The next morning, Abraham loaded his donkey with firewood, and took me and two servants to Moriah. On the third day, God pointed out the mountain of sacrifice to Abraham, and instructed him to leave the donkey and two servants behind. He told them to stay behind while he and I would go worship, and then we will come back. Did you get that...WE will come back. Abraham's complete faith never wavered.

Abraham loaded the wood on my back, while he carried the knife and fire. From that, you can gather I was at least an early teen. I had seen my father sacrifice before, so I knew something was odd. I asked my father, “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” He answered that God would provide it, so I walked on, in complete innocence and trust.

When we reached the place God had specified, my father built an altar and placed the wood on it. So far, so good. Then things went crazy. He had me lie on my back and close my eyes. He bound me with ropes, picked me up, and placed me on the altar. I never said a word, but my eyes had a look of innocence, surprise, trust, and questions all at the same time.

Silence.

My eyes fly open to see my father, knife raised high over head to cut my throat. The knife came toward me... “Abraham, Abraham,” a voice from heaven cried out, “Do not harm your son. Now I know you honor and trust me because you have not withheld your son, your only son.”

He passed the test. Abraham passed the test, and I had a front row seat! His level of faithfulness led to him being the father of the Israelite nation.

We heard a noise, turned and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. My father released me, and we sacrificed the ram. Once again, the Lord reaffirmed his covenants with Abraham.

That's the story as you usually hear it. Believe me, you cannot even imagine what my father thought. Sacrificing your only son, knowing you could never have another. Burnt offering, like the pagan sacrifices of children that God seemed to hate. Never to have the descendants God had promised. Awful thoughts, like you and I would have had. But Abraham was different than you or me.

But let me give you some more information that the Apostle Paul revealed in the New Testament. Abraham took all of the facts into account. He trusted that everything God had promised would come true. So, Abraham reasoned that it was ok to sacrifice me, because God would raise me from the dead.¹ Never been done before. No evidence it could happen. But

¹ Hebrews 11:19

through his great faith, Abraham reasoned out that answer. As Paul would later write, Abraham was fully persuaded that God had the power to do as he had promised.² Paul also wrote that God did raise me from the dead, figuratively speaking.³

My mother died when I was about twenty-seven years old. My father purchased the Cave of Machpelah for her place of burial from the Hittites. The cave became the burial place for our family that is still revered today. That cave is in the modern city of Hebron.

My father lived almost four decades after my mother died. He married a second wife who gave him six more sons, who had a great number of descendants themselves. While Abraham was still living, he gave gifts to his sons, but sent them away to the east so they would not interfere with my inheritance. At his death, he left everything he had to me. That made me a very rich man.

My father died at the age of one hundred and seventy-five. My half-brother, Ishmael, and I buried him with his first wife, Sarah, in the Cave of Machpelah.

I knew my father for seventy-five years, and the one event that still amazes me is when God told him to sacrifice his only son, whom he loved. He did not question, he did not hesitate. I hope you will notice somebody else who did not question or hesitate to sacrifice his only son, whom he loved. Only in that event, the son was sacrificed and came back from the dead, literally, to be the start of a new nation.

² Romans 4:21

³ Hebrews 11:19