

7. The Man Abram

Biblical material: Genesis 11:27-15:21.

Quotes

- To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved. *George Macdonald*
- A man who doesn't trust himself can never really trust anyone else. *Cardinal de Retz*
- The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when you discover that someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you with a friendship. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Questions

How do we know when God is calling us to do something major in our lives? How do we decide what comes from God? What does God ask of us? How is the example of Abram's decisions helpful for us today? Is it OK to tell a little "white lie" as Abraham did about his wife (twice!)? What do we see about the relationship between Abraham and God?

Discussion

God's call to Abram to leave Ur and venture into the unknown is simply stated and Abram's response is definite. No discussion is referenced. That is not the same thing as stating that no discussion took place. The first question to raise is how Abram knew this was God talking. What was their relationship before the call? Often the call is presented as coming "out of the blue," since there is no previous mention of Abram in scripture, but it would be wise not to presume too much. In fact, it would be better to assume that God and Abram had a long-term relationship, for the picture of Abram responding to the unusual call of an unknown God hardly provides a helpful model.

The revelation of God, the coming of God to human beings, is called a "theophany," and is always associated with life-changing experiences. Like Abraham to whom God appeared (see Genesis 12:7) and led him out of the satisfied comfort of his country, his people and his family to a new land. A vision of what was to be, of what Abraham was to become—even needing a name change! God was Abraham's vision—the only guarantee of a future as he and his family took their first steps on their journey to Canaan. *That's* the kind of vision God seeks to provide—a vision that inspires to trusting action based on the promises of God who is known and trusted.

These chapters invite much in the way of question and comment. For example: How could one man and his servants defeat an army of four kings that had just defeated a combined army of five kings? Where did Melchizedek come from, the priest of the Most High God? How could he also be king of Salem (Jerusalem)? "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6 NIV). What does this really mean?

Comment

How does God approach us? To Abraham: "Do not be afraid, Abram." (Genesis 15:1). To Isaac: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." (Genesis 26:24). To Hagar: "What is the matter,

Hagar? Do not be afraid.” (Genesis 21:17). To Jacob: “‘Jacob! Jacob!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. ‘I am God, the God of your father,’ he said. ‘Do not be afraid...’” (Genesis 46:2,3).

All down through time, God comes to us, and tells us not to be afraid. To Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Solomon, Zerubbabel Jeremiah, Daniel—God says, “Don’t be afraid.” God does not come as an enemy; He is not hostile. He comes as Friend; He comes to help and do good. And when God came personally, the angel announced the Visit in the same way: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people...” (Luke 2:10).

God himself invites us: “Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord.” Isaiah 1:18 NIV. His appeal is based on reason. So, like Job, we expect logic and reason: “Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God.” Job 13:3 KJV. Or as the NIV puts it, “But I desire... to argue my case with God.” The expectation is that God too will make sense to us, that there is at least a “fair trial”!

This, despite the recognition of how much God is superior to us in every way—that even so, God still makes sense to us. Then comes the appeal to evidence—the essential part of the method. “Taste and see that the LORD is good,” Psalm 34:8 NIV. Experiment. Check it out. Find out from your own experience.

The same invitation is given to God, the other part of the experiment: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts.” Psalm 139:23 KJV. For we must be reasonable and logical too: “Should a wise man utter vain knowledge? Should he reason with unprofitable talk?” Job 15:2-3 NIV.

The difference between the wise and the foolish is exactly that: making sense. “The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going... The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.” Proverbs 14:15, 18 KJV.

Jesus linked reason to the mind (Luke 5:22), and invited careful consideration of his message and mission, asking “who do you say that I am?” This is no faith based on command and compulsion, but rather through invitation and appeal: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7, 8 NIV.

Asking, seeking, knocking. Sounds very much like a reasoned and logical process of investigation and discovery. The command that does come is not a command to believe, but to experiment: “Test everything. Hold on to the good.” 1 Thessalonians 5:21 NIV. Test everything. That is the advice of the God who makes sense, who wants agreement that things do make sense, agreeing that they *should* make sense.

Ellen White Comments

During the centuries immediately preceding the Flood, success had attended Satan’s efforts to bring about a worldwide prevalence of rebellion against God. And even the lessons of the Deluge were not long held in remembrance. With artful insinuations Satan again led the children of men step by step into bold rebellion. Again he seemed about to triumph, but God’s purpose for fallen man was not thus to be set aside. Through the posterity of faithful Abraham, of the line of Shem, a knowledge of Jehovah’s beneficent designs was to be preserved for the benefit of future generations. ...Not without the most determined opposition was the divine purpose carried out. In every way possible the enemy of truth and righteousness worked to cause the descendants of Abraham to forget their high and holy calling, and to turn aside to the worship of false gods. And often his efforts were all but successful. For centuries preceding Christ’s first advent, darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. Satan was throwing his hellish

shadow athwart the pathway of men, that he might prevent them from gaining a knowledge of God and of the future world. {PK 687}

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