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### **A Biography of Abraham and Joseph**

Abraham was the first of the patriarchs and exhibited great faith in God and obedience to Him (Assad 46). The patriarch Joseph was the beloved son of Jacob (later named Israel) and the great-grandson of Abraham. According to Bright, there is much uncertainty as to the date of the patriarchs of Genesis chapters 12-50, but the period probably fits "between about the twentieth and seventeenth centuries [B.C.]" (83). The biographies of Abraham and Joseph portray individuals who trusted God through the difficulties of life. Believers of all ages can learn and apply much from their exemplary lives.

Abraham and his two brothers, Nahor and Haran, were sons of Terah and descendants of Shem. According to Archer, Haran was probably Terah's oldest son since he was the first brother to die (Gen. 11:28), and Abraham was most likely born when Terah was 130 years old since Terah died at the age of 205 (Gen. 11:32) just before Abraham, at the age of 75, emigrated to Canaan (Acts 7:4; Gen. 12:4) (378). Abraham was born in an ancient city of Mesopotamia called "Ur of the Chaldeans." Archaeology confirms that the city of Ur was built by the Sumerians and was culturally advanced in regards to architecture, education, and commerce (Assad 47). Ur was known as a city of people who worshipped its chief deity "Nanna, the Sumerian moon-god" (Lasor 951). Terah probably worshipped the moon-god and other gods (Josh. 24:2) and was a "maker of idols" according to ancient Jewish tradition (Horton 141).

In the midst of this polytheistic pagan worship in Ur, the "God of glory" revealed Himself to Abraham "when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran and said to him, 'Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you'" (Acts 7:2-3, NASB). Bruce notes that the title "God of glory . . . implies that God manifested himself to Abraham in glory so compelling that Abraham had no option but to obey" (133-34). At 70 years of age, Abraham attempted to journey with his father, his nephew Lot (son of Haran), and his wife Sarai (later called Sarah) to the land of Canaan, but they settled in Haran (Gen. 11:31). While Horton says that they may have "settled in Haran because it was the center of worship for the moon god in western Mesopotamia" (141; Allis 31), Lasor says that they may have settled "possibly because of Terah's ill-health, which eventuated in his death" (954). "At the death of his father the call to Abraham was renewed" or "repeated" in Genesis 12:1 (Vos and Harrison 12; Assad 51). Bruce says that Genesis 15:7 and Nehemiah 9:7 support the idea "that Abraham received a divine communication" in Ur as well as in Haran, later, and that the writings of "Philo and Josephus concur" (134). According to Horton, "It is not clear from the Hebrew of Genesis 12:1 whether God again spoke to Abraham at the time of his father's death, or whether he simply remembered what God had said in Ur of the Chaldees and now was free to obey by leaving not only his land but his relatives also" (141).

Abraham's "instant and complete obedience to God's call indicates his greatness" (Assad 51). Allis says that this was a call for Abraham to "separate himself" (30). After hearing God's call, Abraham took Sarah and Lot from Haran "to Shechem and Bethel before going down to Egypt to escape from a famine in Canaan" (Harrison 16). After a confrontation with the pharaoh over Sarah, Abraham and his group left Egypt and returned to Bethel. Because of strife between Abraham's

herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen, Abraham asked Lot to select the land that he would like and separate to that place. Lot chose the best land and departed toward Sodom. After Lot was captured by an enemy, Abraham showed "freedom from desire for revenge against Lot" and rescued him (Assad 52). Afterwards, Melchizedek king of Salem and priest of God Most High (Gen. 14:18) blessed Abraham, and in return, Abraham gave him a tenth of all.

God promised to reward Abraham as a result of his separation from his home and kindred by blessing his seed (or descendants), the land, and the nations. Allis further mentions that "Abraham's life-story is a testing of his faith and obedience in respect of these three elements of the promise" (31). God's promise of blessing upon Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 is renewed as a "covenant" in Genesis chapter 15, being confirmed by offering sacrifices (Assad 53). Abraham's faith was tested when he and Sarah were not able to conceive a child. In order to have an heir, Abraham accepted Sarah's suggestion to sleep with her handmaid, Hagar. She conceived and bore Ishmael. God renews the covenant with Abraham in Genesis chapter 17 and institutes circumcision to be a part of the covenant (Assad 53). God further promises that Sarah will bear a son named Isaac and that the everlasting covenant will be with him. God fulfilled this promise when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90. Years later, Abraham encountered a "supreme test" of faith when he was asked by God to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, who was to be the heir of the covenant. Abraham passed the test by believing that God would somehow bring Isaac back from the dead (Heb. 11:19) and fulfill His promise; Thus, Abraham showed that he loved God more than anything or anyone else in the world, and God spared his son.

Abraham's life provides a model for all believers in Christ. Hebrews 11:8 says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going" (NASB). Believers should imitate Abraham's faith and obedience to God, "trusting God's guidance through the unknown" circumstances of life (Assad 51). Abraham demonstrated a spirit of self-sacrifice by allowing Lot to choose the best land for himself, leaving Abraham a less fertile land. Just as Abraham forgave Lot for his selfishness, believers should also forgive those that wrong them, returning a good deed for an evil act that was done. Just as Abraham gave Melchizedek (a type of Christ) a tenth of all, believers should give a tithe of their increase to Christ through the local church. Just as Abraham endured tests, a believer's faith will be tested and proved by trusting God through various trials. Believers should never love or exalt any thing more than God Himself. Assad aptly states, "past and present fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham should help to persuade [believers] that He will fulfill His promises to [them]" also (55). Like Abraham, Believers can deepen their friendship with God by obeying Him.

The patriarch Joseph was the great-grandson of Abraham, the grandson of Isaac, and the son of Jacob. As the first child of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, Joseph was loved by his father more than his eleven brothers, "doubtless also for his excellence of character" (Harrison and Vos 710). Joseph was loyal to his father and reported to him the evil conduct of his brothers. Expressing his love, Jacob presented Joseph with a coat of honor, and his brother's jealousy increased. After Joseph shared his God-given dreams to his brothers about their submission to him, they hated him more and plotted to kill him. Kitchen well summarizes Joseph's life as "the story of a spoiled child and dreamer, sold into Egyptian slavery by jealous brothers, subjected to ups and downs culminating in his becoming real ruler of that ancient land, and divinely placed there, to save his people and countless others in dire need from famine" (1126).

At the age of 17, Joseph journeyed more than 50 miles to Shechem and then to Dothan to find his brothers and determine the welfare of them and their flocks, as requested by his father.

Although Jacob was not a guileless individual, his guilelessness in this request posed a "temptation too great for [Joseph's brothers] to resist" (Allis 46). The moment Joseph was in sight of his brothers, they plotted to kill him, but Reuben suggested to temporarily put him in a pit, which they did. While Reuben was gone, Judah persuaded his other brothers to sell Joseph to a caravan of Ishmaelites that were approaching them. Joseph was sold into slavery for "twenty shekels of silver" and taken to Egypt (Gen. 37:28, NASB); His brothers went home and deceived his father into thinking that he was killed by an animal.

"The same merchantmen who bought Joseph from his brothers sold him to Potiphar in Egypt" (Assad 82). "Because the LORD was with Joseph, he became a successful man" (Gen. 39:2, NASB). God had blessed the house of Potiphar, who was Pharaoh's officer and the captain of the bodyguard, because of Joseph's hard work. Potiphar promoted him to be responsible for all of his master's possessions, except his wife. Potiphar's wife tempted Joseph to be sexually intimate with her, but his loyalty to God and His moral standards prevailed and he fled from her. However, as a result, she falsely accused Joseph of the very thing that he resisted, and Potiphar put him in jail.

Joseph gained favor with the chief jailer who made him responsible for all the prisoners. Because Pharaoh was angry with two of his officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, he put them into prison. Joseph interpreted both of their dreams before they became reality: The baker was hanged and the cupbearer was restored to his position of serving Pharaoh. For two years the cupbearer forgot to mention Joseph to Pharaoh until the king had a dream and desperately needed an interpretation. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream: Since seven years of famine would follow seven years of prosperity, Pharaoh needed to put a wise and discerning man over the land of Egypt to save some of the produce and sell the abundance during the famine. Pharaoh exalted Joseph to this position. After famine hit the land, Jacob's sons went to Egypt to buy food. They did not recognize Joseph who demanded that their youngest brother accompany them next time. Benjamin was arrested and his brothers voluntarily returned to defend him, showing their "love for Benjamin and repentance for having wronged Joseph" (Assad 87).

Since Joseph had been "responsible, honest, and hardworking," he did not deserve to go to prison when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him (Johnston 84). Allis aptly says, "nothing is harder to bear than injustice, to suffer for righteousness' sake (1 Pet. 2:19)" (48), yet Christians are called to suffer unjustly because Christ suffered for them that way (Assad 84). A person's character is revealed by his response to temptation and trials (Assad 83). "In Joseph we recognize the elements of noble character--piety, pure and high morality, simplicity, gentleness, fidelity, patience, perseverance, an iron will, and indomitable energy" (Harrison and Vos 711). Like Joseph, a Christian should have "a God-given sense of destiny which enables him to meet trials, temptations, and vexing delay without losing heart" (Allis 48).

In his book, *Turn Your Dreams Into Reality*, Johnston demonstrates how Joseph was an example of someone who "overfilled" each of his current positions and thus obtained success. Joseph was promoted to positions of responsibility when he "overfilled" his positions as servant for Potiphar and then as servant in the jail. When God knew he was ready, Joseph was exalted over Egypt by Pharaoh (81-86). In spite of the evil done to Joseph, his biography shows that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28, NASB).

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