

# Abraham and Nimrod

Douglas Cho, Ph.D./D.R.S.

## Genesis 12:1-4, NKJV

*Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.*

*I will make you a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.*

*I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

## 1. Post-flood generation and Nimrod's evil dominion

Abraham, whose life is recorded in the Bible, has been revered as the common patriarch of the Jewish, Christian and Islam faith traditions. Abraham, however, was neither a king or a powerful ruler, although he amassed a sizable fortune engaged in animal husbandry. As we can read from the verses above, Abram (his name before being called Abraham later by God) received a call by God and responded to the call by leaving his home country of the present-day Iraq, and followed God's leadings in the foreign land of Canaan, which God promised to give his descendants as an inheritance. Here, we come to wonder why he had to leave the fertile land of Haran in the tributary area of River Euphrates and move into a strange land of Canaan. Why did God give Abram such an instruction? Why did Abram obey this strange call from God and lived as a pilgrim and stranger, moving about from one area to another all his life, only looking forward to the heavenly city of God in the faith toward Jehovah?

As a background information for understanding Abraham's life, we begin with Genesis 10, which records the world after the great flood of Noah. Noah had three sons from whom the entire humanity descended. We read that Cush, who was one of the four sons of Ham, produced six sons and one of them was Nimrod. So, Nimrod was a great-grandson of Noah and he was a mighty hunter [Genesis 10:9]. His might and popularity grew because God blessed him. Nimrod thus became a mighty king that established and ruled numerous cities around River Euphrates. Relics of some of these cities Nimrod established remain to this date.

*[Genesis 10: 8-12] Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).*

Nimrod, although he became great thanks to God's help, turned against God. Noah and other forefathers could not control his rebellious attitude. So, he became the champion of the anti-God movement of the era. In Genesis 11 we read that this rebellious group erected a huge tower in Babel in their pursuit to reach the heaven. 'Ancient Book of Jasher' is the unique, authoritative Jewish history book, which has been quoted by Joshua, David and apostle Paul [Joshua 10:13, 2 Samuel 1:18, 2 Timothy 3:8]. Book of Jasher records in detail the Tower of Babel event, Nimrod's rebellious and evil dominion and the life story of Abraham, who was a tenth-generation child of Noah including his birth, growth and spiritual journey of believing and following God. Genesis 11, however, records the essence of the Tower of Babel rebellion and the subsequent spreading of the people by God throughout the earth.

Book of Jasher is silent on how Nimrod became anti-God and the idol-worship champion of the era. Like most of evil power men throughout the human history he might have become evil due to his megalomania and the popular support of the foolish mass, very much like how Hitler became a grossly evil leader of Germany. It turned out Nimrod and Abraham had a very bad relationship from the start of Abraham's life to the end of Nimrod's life. Abram's father, Tera, was the chief general under Nimrod. Like most people of the era Tera grew up in the tradition of God worship. But he gave up his faith in God in favor of worldly success as a subservient general in Nimrod's service. Tera lived a life of a hypocrite who made himself an idol-worshipper in active promotion of Nimrod's anti-God dominion of the known world then.

When Abram was born to him and Nimrod sought to kill the baby because a very obvious celestial sign was shown that indicated that a child born that night would become a great ruler, Tera hid his son and gave out a maid's baby born the same day. Thus, the little child Abram was raised in a secret cave for ten years hidden from Nimrod's death threat. When he turned ten years Abram was sent to the home of Noah and Seth, who were living then,

where he lived for 39 years serving these two revered patriarchs. These two God-serving ancestors taught young Abram how to fear and serve God and the early Genesis history from the creation to the post-flood era. This period provided the fundamental background of how Abraham became the great patriarch of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

At age 50 Abram returned to his father's house and found it to be full of a dozen idols. He became very angry and destroyed all of them with an axe and confronted his father Tera with a faith-based challenge, "How could you serve these lifeless idols while disregarding God of Heaven and earth?" Tera became angry at Abram and reported this incident to Nimrod including the confession about his having lied to the king about the identity of his baby son on the day of his birth. Thus, Abram and his elder brother Haran were put into prison for not worshipping the idols. Both were put into a furnace of extreme hot fire where Haran died leaving no trace of his body while God protected Abram from the fire, just as He protected the friends of Daniel centuries later. At seeing the power of God being strongly with Abram, Nimrod let him out of the fire and released him.

Abram then married Sarai, the daughter of Haran, and obeyed God's call to leave the land of Haran to go to Canaan, where he spent the next 15 years engaged in animal husbandry and worshipping God wherever he lived. However, he could not forget his own family back in his home country and felt compelled to pull them out of the idol-worship culture. He decided to return to Haran at age 70 and spent five years trying to persuade his father and family to go with him to the land of Canaan unsuccessfully. So, when he was 75 years old, God calls him again to leave the land and go to the land where He would bless him. Abram led a large group of 70 some people and left his home country permanently. Genesis 12:1 says, "Lord had said to Abram," signifying that this call happened twice, and the Book of Jasher details how the two calls of God were played out. When he obeyed God's second call, he had to give up on his own family and home country permanently when he went out of Haran trusting in God's promise of blessing, leaving behind his own father and family. He resumed the life of a sojourner in a foreign land, not knowing how God would bless his life. After 14 years of sojourn in the land of Canaan God blessed him and changed his name from Abram to Abraham.

*[Hebrews 11:8-10] By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

## 2. Abraham's Choices and Our Choices

Now, let us summarize the important life choices of Abraham and derive some lessons that might apply to our choices today:

- A. Much like the life of young David who was subject to unjust, harsh persecution from an evil king Saul centuries later, young Abram's life was threatened by king Nimrod and he had to live hiding in a cave under the protection of his mother and a nanny. As he was growing up, he must have learned there were forces of good and evil in the world—those who were on God's side and others on the side of dark evil. When he turned ten years he was moved to the protective care of Noah and Seth, who were great patriarchs and Nimrod dared not to encroach upon their authority. He was there for 39 years, serving these great God-serving patriarchs, learning from them the history of God's work from the creation to the post-flood era. And he learned to communicate with the God of heaven and earth and to love Him as his own God and protector. Do we teach our young generation about God the Creator and the One who rules heaven and earth? Do we teach them to love the Almighty God as their God? How well are we protecting our children from the spiritual dangers, including the idol worship cultures, in the present world?
- B. Abram returned to his father's home at age 50 and destroyed all 12 idols in the house, being full of righteous rage, very much like how Lord Jesus destroyed the tables of merchants in the temple of God in Jerusalem many centuries later. Abram hated the idol worship because he knew God hated idols and hated people worshipping them while forsaking to worship the God of heaven and earth. The second of the Ten Commandments is as follows:

*[Exodus 20: 3-6] "You shall have no other gods before Me. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*

Are you in an idol-worshipping religion, where you bow down or pray before an image, statue or sculpture that represents a god, an animal, or any human being whom you may regard as holy or godly or consecrated? Whatever that might be, whoever that idol might represent, God wants you to forsake idol-worship religions or traditions and turn to the Almighty God who is invisible, without form and yet resides in fulness throughout the universe, even within your heart and life.

- C. When he turned 50 Abram went back to his father's house no longer fearing the threat of the evil king Nimrod. Abram challenged his hypocrite father, Tera, to leave the idol worship tradition. He was not afraid when he was put into a prison by Nimrod, nor was he afraid when he was thrown into an extremely hot burning furnace. God gave him complete protection and he came out of the fire without a trace of fire on his body or clothing. This extraordinary experience of testing for God in the face of a huge physical and spiritual threat from the king of the world must have formed the solid faith in Abram and God could call him 'my friend.' And Abraham became the patriarch of the Jewish people and of the entire people of God spiritually. As an adult are you still holding onto the true faith in Jesus Christ and Almighty God without compromising with the forces of the evil and of the world? Can God call you a friend as you befriend Him as your friend daily?
- D. Abram left his home land the first time at age 55 and lived in the land of Canaan for 15 years. Then, Abram and Sarai went back to Haran so as to rescue their family from idol worship and lead them to the promise of God's blessings. They spent five years in Haran without much success. Their family did not accompany them but others did so that there were some 70 people in the group when they left Haran permanently. Some of us are much concerned about the spiritual welfare of our own family and we make attempts to rescue them. However, if the process endangers our own spiritual welfare and the futility of our own efforts become evident, we need to leave the work of saving them to God and depart from them as God directs us. We are better off choosing God's side than our own family. Such sacrifices might be called for as we follow God's instructions in our journey of serving Him as our Lord and King.

God dispersed the people after the Tower of Babel incident throughout the world [Genesis 11:9] and divided the one continent into multiple continents [Genesis 10:25]. Some creation scholars say the continents were divided as a result of the huge tectonic movements during the great flood. As we view the contours of the continents, it is obvious that they were all connected at one time. Scripture tells us that the earth was divided in the days of Peleg, who was a fifth generation of Noah, a great grandson of Shem. This puts Peleg one generation after Nimrod. So we deduce that the continental partition might have occurred either before or after the Tower of Babel incident, but in the generally same era. Peoples of all continents possess legends of a great flood. Some of the Chinese characters strongly indicate that the early settlers of China knew about the story of the creation and of the great flood. Accordingly, we deduce that the spreading of the people to many parts of the earth must have occurred prior to the continental partition.

The descendants of Abraham, however, formed a unique band of people knit by blood and by the religious tradition of serving the Creator God, called Jehovah. Bible tells us that this band of people, called 'Habiru (now called Hebrew)' descended into Egypt and they were later forced into serving the Egyptian kings until their liberation led by a God-chosen leader Moses in 1491 B.C. They roamed in the wilderness of the western Arabia and eastern Sinai Peninsula before conquering present-day Jordan and Israel. Based on God's promise to give this land to Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel still claim that the present-day Palestine is their God-given inheritance.

You and I may not become a patriarch of a people in a long shot. However, we have the same privilege as Abraham by accepting the all-powerful creator God into our life and following His instructions so that His blessings and friendship might be ours to cherish and to enjoy. We can become spiritual children of Abraham and enter into the promises God gave to him as apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in the first century. And when this life is over,

we will have the pleasure of meeting our great patriarch Abraham in heaven, just as the beggar Lazarus did [Luke 16: 19-31], and listen to his highly interesting story of journeying with God long ago.

*[Galatians 3: 28-29] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*