

Father Abraham

Genesis 17:1-8

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Do you have a nickname, a special name that you acquired in addition to the name that was given to you by your parents? In the church where I served years ago, there were a number of people, especially men, who had nicknames. There was a "Chink" who was a plumber, a "Jiggs" who worked for the Coast Guard and a dear friend who was known as "Pug." People acquire nicknames for a number of reasons, but I suspect that on many occasions nicknames are a reflection of endearment, indicating a special relationship between the person who bears the nickname and the one who gave it to them. Such is certainly the case with one of the most well-known individuals in the Old Testament. His nickname was Abraham and the person who gave him that name was God. For a few moments this morning, let's reflect upon how Abraham acquired his nickname and how it might be related to the holiday we call "Father's Day."

Almost everyone knows something about Abraham, but that does not mean that they know much more than just his name. So let's do a little Biblical research. Abraham first appears in the eleventh chapter of the book of Genesis as one of the distant ancestors of Noah. However, his name is not Abraham but a simpler, shorter name, Abram. It means "exalted father." Since he was the eldest son, there may have been an expectation that he would grow up to be the leader of his father's clan, a man of authority and prominence with many children. Such, however, was not the case. Moving from Ur of Chaldees near the Persian Gulf, Abram's family moved west and north to the hill country of Haran. In that new locale Abram met the Lord. It was the place where he and the Lord entered into an agreement. If Abram promised to obey the Lord and move once again, God would bless him. He and his ancestors would become a great nation, they would receive divine protection and through them they would become a blessing to all of humanity. Abram agreed and moved with his wife to a land known as Canaan, or what is known today as modern day Israel. There was only one problem. He had not lived up to the name given to him by his father. He didn't have any sons or daughters. It's hard to be an "exalted father" if you don't have any children.

That all changed after he acquired his second name, his nickname, his name of divine endearment. In the passage of Scripture that was read today, the Lord met with Abram once again. The first agreement known as a covenant was reaffirmed with additional provisions. Not only would Abram be an "exalted father," but now he would become the "exalted father of many nations." His new name would now be Abraham. As a physical sign and demonstration of his faith and commitment to God, both he and all of the males in his household would be circumcised, a practice which continues to this day among the Jewish people. Furthermore, even at a ripe old age Abraham finally became a father. You are probably familiar with two of his sons, Ishmael, who was born to Hagar, and Isaac, who was born to Sarah. However, here's something you may not know. After Sarah's death, Abraham took another wife named Keturah, who gave him six more sons. Each of

these became the founders of a whole host of peoples in the Middle East. Indeed, the nicknamed Abraham became the “father of many nations.”

But being a father and especially a godly father beloved of the Lord is more than just having a lot of children. Being an exalted father of one or a whole multitude of children means possessing the character traits which makes you worthy of possessing that title. Now Abraham was not perfect by any means. At times his trust in the Lord wavered a bit. Instead of waiting for the promised son that God would give to him through Sarah, he surrendered to her urging and had a child by her handmaid, Hagar. That proved to be a big mistake. Nevertheless, Abraham possessed a number of character traits as a father that we would do well to emulate. Let’s briefly take a look at some of them.

- **Abraham was generous.** He and his nephew Lot had many herds and flocks, too many to graze beside one another. In fact, their herdsmen were quarreling with one another all the time. They needed to separate. So Abraham said to Lot, “You select the land where you wish to graze your animals and I’ll take what’s left. Lot looked at the well-watered Jordan valley and chose that land. Abraham graciously selected the much drier hillsides to the west (Genesis 13:1-18)
- **Abraham was courageous.** Later, when Lot and his entire family were kidnapped, Abraham led a rescue operation against a much larger coalition of foreign enemies. Not only did he attack and disburse these marauders, but he also made sure that Lot and his family were safe and sound, escorting them back home, a decision which ultimately proved to be disastrous. (Genesis 14:1-16).
- **Abraham was compassionate.** He cared about people, especially Lot and his family who were once again facing a dangerous situation. Abraham was glad that he had not moved into the Jordan valley. The people who lived there were wicked. When God told Abraham that He was going to destroy that morally corrupt society, Abraham pleaded with God saying, “If there are fifty righteous people in Sodom, will you not spare it?” When the Lord agreed to this proposal, Abraham continued to bargain with God until the Lord said that He would spare the city if there were only ten righteous people living within its walls. Abraham was a compassionate person who cared about people, including his nephew, Lot, and his nephew’s family. He was willing to plead for their deliverance (Genesis 18:16-33).
- **Abraham was obedient.** I’m sure that most of you know this Biblical story. Years later, after the promised son, Isaac, had been born, God told Abraham to take his son who was now a young man and offer him as a sacrifice unto the Lord. Abraham’s heart was broken, but he was obedient. Even as he was raising his hand to slay his own son, God’s angel told him to stay his hand and instead sacrifice a ram caught in a nearby thicket (Genesis 22:1-19).

- **Finally, Abraham was Faithful.** There are numerous passages of Scripture in the Bible which speak about the faith of Abraham, like the description of Abraham's faith found in the New Testament, Hebrews 11:8-19. Nowhere, however, is Abraham's faith more clearly identified than in that nighttime encounter with God, long before the birth of Isaac. The Lord said to Abraham, "Can you count all the stars in the heavens. So shall your offspring be." In response the Bible simply says that Abraham believed what God had said to him and that it was credited unto him as righteousness, written in the ledger books of heaven that Abraham was in right standing with the Lord of all creation (Genesis 15:1-6).

Abraham became the "exalted father of many nations" because he possessed the character traits that God is looking for in men who wish to be godly fathers. God is looking for fathers and grandfathers today who are **generous**, who know how to give of themselves and of their financial wealth, even if it costs them. God is looking for fathers who are **courageous**, who stand by their convictions even when the world tells them to abandon what they know is right. God is looking for fathers who are **compassionate**, fathers who care about those who are straying from the truth, praying earnestly, especially for those sons and daughters within their own families. God is looking for fathers who are **obedient**, who desire to serve the Lord whole heartedly. Most importantly of all, God is looking for fathers who are **faithful**, who never waiver in their devotion unto the Lord. Standing on the front porch after a fierce hailstorm destroyed all of their crops, a father with bowed head began to sing, "Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee." His son who was watching his father as he gazed upon that scene of devastation said years later, "That was the finest sermon I ever heard."

Today, we need fathers, and we need grandfathers who have received a new name, just like Abraham did. In fact, we need Christians, Christians of all ages, both men and women who have been blessed with a new name, "**Exalted Servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.**"