

Abraham's Early Life

By Nissan Mindel

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Very little is told in Chumash of Abraham's early life. Except for a few hints, here and there, hardly anything is told in the Torah of the father of our nation until he was seventy five years.

Such an important event as Abraham's defiance of Nimrod, the king and leader of all the heathens and idol worshippers of his time, which led to Abraham's being thrown into a burning furnace, is only hinted in the Torah. The full story of this and other important events in Abraham's early life was only told by word of mouth, from generation to generation, until the details were finally recorded by the Sages of the Talmud in various Midrashim. Some of them we have already told you in our previous TALKS, and we will here fill in other interesting details about Abraham's early life, until he reached the age of seventy five.

Abraham (who was first called Abram) was born in the year 1948 after Creation (1813 BCE). (According to one tradition he was born in the month of Nissan; according to another, in the month of Tishrei.) His father's name, as you all know, was Terah, who was seventy years old when Abraham was born. Abraham's mother's name was Amathlaah. The town in which he was born was called Cutha, in Mesopotamia. In the Torah, Abraham's birthplace is called Ever-haNahar ("Beyond the River").

Abraham was the tenth generation removed from Noah, being a direct descendant of Shem, (Noah's son), the father of all the "Semitic" peoples. When Abraham was born, Shem was 390 years Old, and his father Noah was 892 years old. Abraham was 58 years old when Noah died. These are important facts, for, as we shall see later, Abraham spent many years in the house of Noah and Shem, and received instruction from them. Thus he learned all the details about the Flood from the very men who built the Ark and survived the Flood. (Noah knew Methuselah for many hundreds of years, who in turn knew Adam for many hundreds of years, which means that Abraham received reliable information about everything that happened since the very first day of Creation!).

Terah, Abraham's father, was the chief officer or minister of the first king mentioned in the Torah, the mighty King Nimrod of Babylon (also known by its former name, Shinear, and the land of the Chaldees). Terah was an idol worshipper, like his king, and their chief god was the Sun.

We have already told you what a close brush with death Abraham had on the very night of his birth. For Nimrod's stargazers told the king that Terah's newly-born son would one day be a danger to his throne. Nimrod ordered Terah to send him the baby, to be put to death. Terah, however, outwitted the king. Instead of sending his real son to the king, he sent the baby of a slave who was born on the same night as Abraham, and Nimrod killed the baby with his own hands, believing that he was now safe from the threat.

The baby Abraham, with his mother and nurse, were hidden in a cave for ten years.

At the age of three years, Abraham knew that it was silly to worship the sun or any other idol, but that there was a great G-d, who created the sun and the moon, and the whole world, who, though Himself unseen, sees everything and knows everything, and is the real King of the World, more powerful than Nimrod. And since that time, Abraham's faith in G-d grew stronger every day.

At the age of ten, Abraham decided to leave the cave and to go to old Noah and Shem, of whom his mother had told him many wonderful stories. Unknown to anybody, Abraham made his way from the low country to the mountainous region of Ararat in the land of Kedem, where Noah and his family lived. He was made welcome by old Noah and Shem, who taught him all they knew about G-d and the ways of G-d.

Abraham stayed there for nearly 39 years, until the year 1997. It was at the end of this period, when he was 48 years old, while still at Noah's house, that Abraham heard about the world-shattering event of the Tower of Babel, which took place in the land of Shinear, where Nimrod reigned supreme. Nimrod and his people wanted to build a tower that would reach up to heaven, so that they might establish their reign upon the heaven as well as on the earth. It was the height of arrogance and defiance of men against G-d, and it led to confusion and to their dispersal and division into seventy tongues and nations. Abraham decided that it was high time for him to go out and teach them the truth about G-d, and about the falsehood and worthlessness of the idols. He knew that in defying Nimrod, and even his own father, he would be risking his life, for Nimrod had proclaimed himself god and demanded that all the people worship him.

At the age of fifty (in the year 1998) Abraham returned to his father's house in Babylon.

Terah was a high priest of the idol worshippers. He had twelve chief gods, one for each month of the year, and other idols. In fact, there was a workshop in Terah's house, where idols of wood, stone, silver and gold were made. People came to offer sacrifices to these idols, or to buy them, and Terah had a thriving business. Terah appointed Abraham to be the salesman and take charge of the business. How "well" he conducted the business, we have already told you.

Abraham's activities, in words and deeds, aroused Nimrod's anger. Both Abraham and his father were ordered to appear before the king. Here the king's stargazers at once recognized Abraham as the one about whom they had warned the king. Terah was taken to task for deceiving the king, and he put the blame on his older son Haran, who was 32 years older than Abraham. Haran had secretly followed Abraham, but he was not quite sure whether he was wise in doing so. He thought that he would come out openly on Abraham's side, if and when Abraham would come out victorious. Nimrod ordered that Abraham be thrown into a burning furnace.

When Abraham came out unharmed, Haran declared himself on Abraham's side and chose to be likewise thrown into the furnace, and he was burnt to death. Abraham, on the other hand, whom G-d" had so wonderfully saved from the fire, was acclaimed by all the people, and they were ready to worship him. But Abraham told them to worship G-d, who had saved him from the burning furnace, and that he himself was nothing but a human being. Nimrod was greatly afraid of Abraham. He gave him many precious gifts, among them Eliezer, a member of the king's household, who became Abraham's trusted servant and friend.

Abraham, and his remaining brother Nahor, married two sisters, their nieces, the daughters of their brother Haran. Nahor married Milkah, and Abraham married Yiskah, better known as Sarai, (later-Sarah).

Two years later, Nimrod had a strange dream and once again his counsellors interpreted it to mean that as long as Abraham lived, his kingdom would be in danger. Nimrod, who had been worried about Abraham all the time, decided to try again to kill him, and sent men to capture him. Fortunately, Eliezer learned of the plot and informed Abraham in good time. Abraham, with his band of followers, numbering over 300, fled to Noah. About a month later, his father Terah came to visit him there. Abraham persuaded him to give up his idolatry. He pointed out to him, moreover,

that his life was also in danger, for Nimrod would not spare him. So Terah gave up his high position at Nimrod's court, and decided to go with Abraham to the land of Canaan, where they would be free to worship G-d, out of reach of Nimrod.

Thus Terah, his son Abraham and his wife Sarai, and Lot, Haran's son, and all their household left Ur of the Chaldees in Babylon and set out for Canaan. On the way they came to Charan, where Nahor lived, found it a good place, and stayed there.

Three years later, when Abraham was 55 years old, G-d appeared to Abraham and told him to take his wife and household and go on to Canaan. This Abraham did, and he stayed there 15 years. At this time, when Abraham was 70 years old, G-d made a covenant with him, and soon afterwards Abraham returned to Charan, where he stayed for five years. Then, once again G-d appeared to Abraham and told him to leave his father's home and native land for good, and go to the land of Canaan. This time, Lot his nephew (and brother-in-law) accompanied him. Terah died in Charan, and Nahor remained there with his family.

Thus, at the age of 75, Abraham came to dwell in the land of Canaan, the land which G-d had promised him to be the chosen land for his children as an everlasting inheritance.

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