

We're continuing a series about the amazing peculiarities of Abraham, a man whose lifelong narrative is a top candidate as the pinnacle reference for a full life in God in the Old Testament—he certainly gets my vote! Today we're focusing on the key influences that did—and didn't—shape Abraham. Let's dive in!

Here's the point: we can identify four major influences that warrant discussion in thinking about Abraham's situation and faith as compared to modern-day believers in Jesus. Those influences are reference points to, first, family, friends, and community; second, allegiance to a nation or land; third, religious laws, rules, and observances; and fourth, most importantly, knowing our Creator, God Himself. Let's summarize these four influences as *peoples*, *places*, *rules*, and *Creator*. When considering these four powerful influences, we realize that most all religions market a potent mix of 3-4 of these. And, whenever any of these are negative in influence and impact, breaking free from them can be very difficult!

Hey, take much of the New Testament itself, starting with the Gospels revealing resistance based on these factors, like from Pharisees or from towns. Then the historical book of Acts and many of the Epistles were often documenting and addressing thorny, persistent obstacles to the Gospel—these obstacles were very often false, thorny notions about peoples, places, rules, and the Creator.

Well, when it came to Abraham, God perfectly navigated Abraham through those four factors.

First, God removed Abraham from his family, his "*people*." Well, except that, in his departing, Abraham allowed his nephew Lot to come along. While Lot was a younger man not in authority over Abraham, he was still adult enough to partner with Abraham and caused, as we podcasted earlier, a "lot of troubles." The undesirable influence of Abraham's *people* was substantially removed by God when Abraham obediently departed Ur, then made more complete when Abraham and Lot parted ways.

Second, God removed Abraham from his land, a very powerful influence we often call "*place*" that we are so often deeply drawn to, for better or for worse. This removal was a stretching experience of faith!

For our third influence, we call upon our research principle called out in a podcast of the "dog that didn't bark"...you recall, the persuasive evidence that the superb detective sees that is not visible to the ordinary person. You see, God did *not* institute special *rules* or laws for Abraham like He did later for Moses and the Israelites. No, instead, God relied on directing Abraham solely on what he heard and saw directly from God. Yeah, no "rule book," just a "faith book"—Abraham *simply obeyed* what he saw and heard from God!

Fourth, God called upon Abraham's unique placement in the context of his era—that with a full endowment of understanding of the sordid history of humanity's divergence from God...yeah, like the Fall, Cain and Abel, and the Flood. But Abraham also knew the "good" stuff—like the fact that, early on, Enoch had "walked with God" (Genesis 5:24) and certainly all about his ancestor Noah. Genesis 6:9 says it all about Noah in 13 words: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God." This was *Creator* influence for Abraham—God and very key, righteous folk who "walked with God."

So, there we have it for the four influences. Abraham obediently moved away from his *people*. Abraham obediently moved away from his *place*. No detailed religious *rules* to distract him from true obedience. But what was intact was awareness of the *Creator* and Abraham's own opportunity to walk with God!

Let's look at unmistakable parallels with Enoch. In the context of the Bible verses surrounding his epitaph, Enoch walked with God—his Creator. Enoch alone was "taken by God" to a wholly different place and did not die, living on for that later likely role as one of the two witnesses in the end times. (Revelation 11:3) Enoch alone was taken from his people by God. And by Enoch walking with God, he was following the only

rule that really matters. So...Enoch's four influences were much like Abraham's: swept away from place, swept away from people, not constrained by distracting rules, very connected to the Creator.

Now, let's look at key, unmistakable parallels with Noah. In the flood story, Noah was directed to do the seemingly ridiculous by God...his *Creator*. Only Noah and his family were taken by God to a wholly different *place*, uniquely lifted on the surging sea. Noah and his family were exclusively taken from their *people* by God. And when Noah built that ark, he was following the only rule that really mattered, walking with God. So, those four influences, much like Abraham: lifted away from place...instructed away from people...unimpeded by distracting rules...very connected to his Creator.

Indeed, Abraham could soak up and apply the stories of Enoch and Noah. So, with constraining *rules* not a factor inserted by God, Abraham left both *people* and *place* and vigorously pursued his *Creator*. Then, a *grand covenant*. And Abraham had faith, and God credited it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

But, in due time, God appointed a special people, Israel. And God appointed a special place, the Promised Land. And God gave special rules to the people, the Law of Moses. In due course, the *people* of Israel failed in following the *rules* of the Law of Moses and lost their *place*—the Promised Land—to enemies. Did they then do as Father Abraham would surely have done *in faith, go fully* back to their *Creator*? No—and God sent prophets to testify against them. Even since the Cross, many still cling to a land, *place*...they cling to the Law, *rules*...and they cling to their *people*...but still essentially crowd out the *Creator*!

So, indeed, in the fullness of time (see Galatians 4:4), God had sent His Son to save the world. Yes, Jesus the Christ went to the Cross to offer eternal life to whosoever would believe. And, then, 2,000 or so years after Abraham, God unveiled a very similar but fresh structure addressing the same four influences: people, place, rules, and Creator. Here are the four influences revealed in the New Testament.

Peoples. Paul taught the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Old peoples past...a new, eternal people here!

Places. “[God] has...transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” (Colossians 1:13-14) and we are called to disciple all nations (Matthew 28). That's right, a *place* transfer only made possible by the Cross!

Rules. So, “you are not under law but under grace.” (Romans 6:14b) And “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” (Galatians 5:4) So, *grace* “rules”!

Creator. “My sheep hear my voice...I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27) Just like Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, we have the pleasure of personally knowing our Creator...and following His voice! Wow!

But, for millennia, the first three authentic influences often have been stumbling blocks in churches. Sadly, some churchgoers work more zealously on their national citizenship than their heavenly citizenship. But right place *matters*. And churchgoers have often divided into peoples—and often those peoples are political or theological, with fallacies broadly embraced in many quarters. And yeah, to this very day, many churchgoers trump God's gift of grace with their futile strivings to fulfill the Law of Moses. But grace rules!

So, what's *the* key? Every person knows that peoples, places, or rules can gain a thorny stronghold in our hearts. But the *Creator* is the supreme answer! God certainly structured the primacy of the Creator with Abraham. Likewise, in the New Covenant, God calls us out of distracting or constraining peoples, places, and rules into an elegant, grace-full relationship with the Father! Wow...for a full life in Christ, that means we must reject and shed any stumbling blocks grounded in peoples, places, and rules—instead, striding fully into an amazing walk with God! No wonder those walking in faith can be called children of Abraham!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Is your walk with God often distracted with an unhealthy preoccupation with issues of peoples, places, or rules? Discuss.
2. Does your church oftentimes focus on issues of peoples, places, or rules—even such that the Creator is crowded out? Or does your church tend to crowd out such distractions very well...to the glory of God? Discuss.
3. In your heart, do you believe you can walk with God—like Enoch, Noah, or Abraham? Or how about walking with God like the Apostle Paul or the Apostle John? If not, why not?