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In the Steps of Abraham

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Abstract: This series is a travel journal of many Bible lands. The sixth part covers Jerusalem.



Panorama of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Large area in the foreground is the temple area. A moslem mosque now occupies this area where the Temple of Solomon stood.

In the Steps of Abraham

by Stanley Kimball

PART 6

IN GENESIS we are told that Abraham saw all the promised land. Moses, we are told, also had this experience from atop Mt. Nebo. Palestine is such a small country that from certain vantage points it is entirely possible to see the whole of the land at once. Such a place was Nebi Samwill, one of the highest points in Judea. It is situated on the direct route from Bethel and Ai to Jerusalem. It may have been from this promontory that Abraham saw the promised land. I climbed this hill and was able to view "from Dan even unto Beersheba" (135 miles) and from the Mediterranean "over into Jordan" (fifty-five miles).

The Arabs claim descent from Ishmael and the Jews from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Unto this day the prophecy regarding the unwanted Ishmael and his posterity has been fulfilled.

Abraham's influence on Judaism is incalculable. A prominent Jew has recently written, "At the head of our religion stands Moses. He deepened the faith whose more ancient beginnings may be traced to Abraham."⁴⁹ For the last four thousand years, since the seed of Abraham considered themselves the "children of the promise" they have cherished their own dreams, followed their own way of life, and worshiped their own God, the God of Abraham, "hopelessly at variance with every species of gentile worship."⁵⁰

Even Zionism, a comparatively new development in Judaism, "has its roots in hoary antiquity. The Patriarch Abraham was the Zionist prototype."⁵¹ The Arabs' claim to the Holy Land is based upon tenure, and they also state that inasmuch as they are descendants of Abraham through Ishmael that they have as much right is the "promised land" as the Jews do through Isaac.

Abraham's life never lacked excitement. Following this upset in his household, we find him dragged into the War of Four Kings in order to rescue his nephew, Lot. This war took place in the "Vale of Siddum," generally considered to be the desolate area around the Dead Sea.

Abraham obtained much spoil from this war, and here is where we meet

Melchizedek, King of Salem to whom Abraham paid tithes.

I spent nearly ten weeks in and around Jerusalem. What a privilege! The Mt. of Olives, Garden of Gethsemane, the Holy Sepulchre, temple area, all were as close as a neighborhood shopping center. I never did get used to their nearness.

There were several places in Jerusalem that were of particular interest to me in connection with Abraham. I dug out the following ancient and modern, possible and improbable sites:

The Jaffa Gate; since this gate also opens on the road to Hebron (tomb of Abraham) it is called by the Arabs, El Khalil, The Friend of God; The Church of the Holy Sepulchre; in this edifice, reared over the traditional site of "the tomb," are also found the Greek convent of Abraham, the traditional spot where Abraham found the ram, and the Church of Abraham; and Mt. Moriah. It also contains the "prayer-niche of Abraham" in a cave on Mt. Moriah.

I visited the Jaffa Gate only once and then was not able to enter or exit through it, for this gate now is on the edge of no-man's-land be-



As in the time of the Christ, three languages are still necessary in Jerusalem. Here we see a road marker in English, Arabic, and Hebrew.



tween the fighting Jews and Arabs. The Greek convent of Abraham is to the right of the atrium or court of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The traditional place where Abraham found the ram is marked by an olive tree.

Abraham was commanded by the Lord to take his son Isaac and proceed unto the "land of Moriah," to "one of the mountains" which God would point out.

Just where Abraham actually prepared to sacrifice Isaac is not known, apparently.

Solomon built his majestic temple on Mt. Moriah. Today the mighty rock atop Mt. Moriah, fifty-eight feet long and fifty-one feet broad, is

venerated by the Moslems as the place from which Mohammed arose to heaven astride his steed, El Borak. Indeed, the very footprint of the prophet is shown in the rock along with the fingerprints of the angel Gabriel. The story goes that as the prophet rose, the stone started to follow him, and it was necessary for Gabriel to restrain it.

The Al Haram al Shariff, the Noble Sanctuary, one of the most important mosques in all the Moslem world, today protects the rock and occupies part of the site of Solomon's Temple.

From the temple area atop Mt. Moriah, one of the highest parts of the city, I could look off into the world of Abraham on all sides. I was

especially interested in gazing to the southeast, in the direction of the Dead Sea.

I had always been fascinated by this strange body of water. One day a group of us took a picnic to the area to bathe in the saline water and to visit the cave where the famous Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

We were told the following story:

"In the bleak area surrounding the Dead Sea, Arab herdsmen find little of interest to do. Rock throwing is a favorite pastime. One day in the summer of 1947 a hurled stone struck something and caused a curious sound. Upon investigation several earthen jars containing the scrolls were found."

An important part of the cache was a scroll of Isaiah that is reported to have antedated any previously known manuscript of the Old Testament by one thousand years.

Some of the other scrolls included a commentary on the book of Habakkuk and an interesting manual of discipline of a sectarian group of pre-Christian Judaism.

LEAVING the Jerusalem area the next point on my itinerary was Hebron, about thirty miles to the south. I happened to be at this particular part of my journey at Christmas time. The very contemplation of being in Bethlehem on the traditional eve of the Savior's birth filled me with joy.

The actual visit was almost overwhelming. Through friends in Jerusalem, we were the guests of the

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The "Harem Ramet el Khalil," the Sanctuary of the Hill Top of a Friend. These impressive ruins date from the time of Herod.

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Drawing near the river they found it to be a turbid sheet of water, scarcely two feet deep. The banks were devoid of brush or trees. Loose sand made their teeth grate when they drank the water.

"A little corn meal in the cup will settle it." Grandma Tolliver always had a remedy for every ill.

"Lookee across the river," Jerry Saunders said. Like his mother he never missed much that was happening.

"Buffalo, buffalo," the cry went up and gathered in volume as more saw two big fellows. The company were hungry for and in need of this kind of food. There was excitement as the younger men grabbed their guns for the hunt.

(To be continued)

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mayor of Bethlehem, and of the governor of the Jerusalem area. The elaborate processions, the religious services and other activities make for a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

On one of my several trips to Bethlehem I continued on to Hebron. The route is studded with fascinating archaeological sites. We passed Rachel's Tomb, the Pools of Solomon, "Ain Ed Dirveh," the traditional place of the baptism of the Eunuch by Phillip. At one place there stands the remains of an ancient Canaanite town, Halhul.⁵²

By some strange dichotomy of reality, the Moslems have the "real" tomb of Nebi Yunis (Jonah) here in the mosque of the modern village of Halhul.

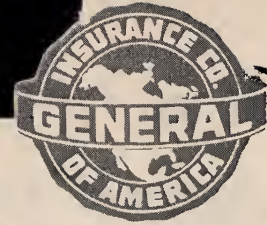
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There are still money changers in Jerusalem. This picture was taken near the entrance to the temple area.

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Two miles from Hebron are the remarkable ruins of Haram Ramet El Khalil (the Sanctuary of the Hill-top of the Friend). For ages "This site has been venerated as the dwelling place of the patriarch, Abraham, when his abode was under the Oak of Mamre."⁵³ I saw some walls and foundations from the time of Hadrian and Constantine and others "unmistakably Herodian."⁵⁴

There are also the remnants of a church, "probably those of the basilica of Constantine, of the fourth century." Here Abraham received the three angelic visitors announcing to him that he would have a son.

I had to receive special permission from the Supreme Moslem Council in Jerusalem for the privilege of entering the Haram Al Khaleel. This area dates from the time of Herod. Abraham bought the field of Ephron the Hittite with its cave of Machpelah for a family burying place after Sarah died in this vicinity. (Gen. 23.) Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and Leah, as well as Abraham, were also interred here.

Inside the holy area I saw the cenotaphs of those buried beneath in the cave. Each of the cenotaphs was quite large and was covered with beautiful gold embroidered silk brocade, green for the patriarchs and crimson for their wives. Supposedly these markers stand over the burial places in the cave beneath. Ingress into the cave has been rigidly barred for many centuries. However, some intrepid individuals claim to have entered.

At the magic hour of dusk I ventured to see Abraham's Oak. Tradition has designated this tree as the "Oak of Mamre." Here is to be seen a truly ancient patriarch of living things. This tradition goes back to the sixteenth century but is highly improbable. The other "Mamre" at Haram Ramel el Khalil is much more convincing.

Regardless of the "exact" site of Abraham's sojourn near Hebron, this still was the home of the Patriarch for some time, and his eventual burying place. From here my road lay farther to the southwest, to the jumping-off place of Beersheba, and still farther to that Land of Mystery,

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Egypt, where Abraham wrote a greater treatise on astronomy than Galileo, Copernicus, or the savants of Palomar.

⁵⁰Loc. cit.

⁵¹J. Mitchell Rosenberg, *The Story of Zionism* (New York: Block Publishing Co., 1946).

⁵²Joshua 15:58.

⁵³Genesis 18:1.

⁴⁹Samuel S. Cohan, *What We Jews Believe* (Cincinnati: Union of Hebrew Congregations, 1931), p. 77.

⁵⁴W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Penguin Books: Harmondworth-Middlesex, 1949), p. 156.

NOTES

The Root and the Tree

Richard L. Evans

FREQUENTLY we see people come to places of prominence or achieve pre-eminence in some particular profession. But what we frequently fail to see is the groundwork, the long growth, the prolonged preparation that goes into the making of a man—the discipline, the study, the work, and the waiting to achieve solid success. Of course there are some who have a sudden flare of seeming success, of publicity and prominence. There are some who seem to mushroom with little groundwork to explain their growth. But men don't suddenly acquire an earned eminence without a long period of preparation. We may see a majestic tree and much admire it, but what we seldom see is the root system. Below the ground is as much or more of sustaining strength and substance than there is above the surface. There is always a price to be paid for putting roots down deeply. And though it may seem otherwise, men simply don't suddenly become successful. At least they don't suddenly acquire the qualities of success. Of course there are political accidents and unearned increments; there are engaging personalities; there are people who catch popular approval; there are some who seem to have an undeserved success. But before we could be sure even of these, we should want to see something of what went into the making of such men. (And even beyond what we see of the present picture, we should need to know something of the eternal root system, something of the pre-mortal past, before we could say with sureness what was or was not an undeserved success. There may be and doubtless are qualities that come with us as we enter the mortal scene which now we see. When a young prodigy plays the piano, when a small child shows great gifts, there is evidence that he brought with him here, endowments which some of us don't have. But this is departing upon a parenthetical thought.) As to the present picture: The long period of preparation, the long hours of patient practice, the consistent unseen effort, are vastly important in the making of a man. When we see and admire the lofty tree, we may know that there are unseen roots that make it great and keep it growing. And a man, also, for all he is, is much more than can be seen on the surface—and much more than can be explained within the limits of this life).

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