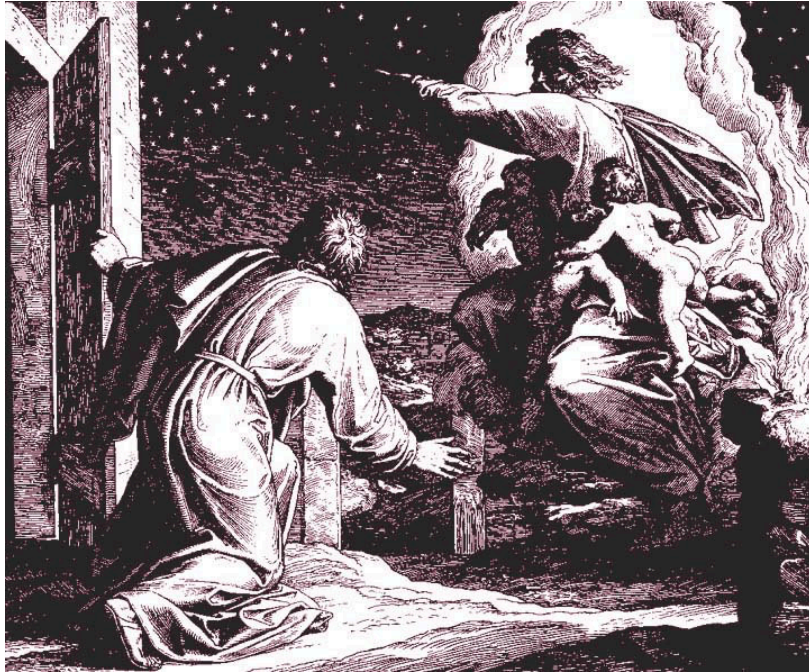


# A Priest and a Rabbi Walk into a Classroom

Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

November 12, 2023 – God’s Covenant with Abraham

[Genesis 12:1-7]



The LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

# **Abraham and the Idols: A Modern Midrash**

By Rabbi Robert B. Barr

Abraham had been in his father's idol shop many times. It was a family business. Terah, Abraham's father, inherited it from his father - who in turn had inherited it from his father before him. The designs for the idols sold there had been passed down from father to son for several generations. Though each added some new idols - the historic ones always seemed most in demand.

As it is in most family businesses, everyone had to help. There was much work to be done. To ensure a profit the family helped out when they could. Displays had to be set up, floors swept, records maintained, bills paid, and purchases delivered. For the most part, Abraham was responsible for delivering the idols.

Terah would help Abraham load the idols upon a sturdy wooden cart and Abraham would pull it to the homes of those who had made recent purchases. Once at their home - the family would eagerly assist Abraham at removing the idol from the cart, carrying it to the special place they had selected, and erecting it with the kind of respect and devotion deserving of an idol.

Typically, Abraham would just shake his head and leave without uttering a word. He could not understand why people purchased idols – and he was dumbfounded by the reverence which they demonstrated towards the sculptures.

Abraham knew how the idols were made - in fact he had helped. For him, the idols were simply stone...with eyes that could not see, ears that could not hear, mouths that could not speak, feet that could not move. But, still people would come to his father's shop - respectfully exploring the idols and choosing the one which most moved them.

Terah had always avoided leaving Abraham alone in the shop, because he knew of Abraham's disdain for idols and those who would purchase them. But, at times, Terah had no choice, as on this day when pressing business on the other side of town demanded his immediate attention. He left his son alone in the store.

As Terah returned, a sense of dread came over him; he knew something was off.

His steps quickened; nervously, Terah hurried to learn what had happened. As he entered his shop, the shop that once belonged to his father and his grandfather, he could not believe his eyes. It had been destroyed - displays were overturned, walls had holes in them, counters were on their sides, and all the idols were broken. Idols that had once been magnificent were now shattered pieces of stone.

Just then, Abraham stepped out from the back room. Surveying his overturned shop, Terah cried, “Who did this horrible thing? Who hated me and my family so much they that would destroy our shop and thus our livelihood?”

Abraham hesitated before answering. And then he offered, “The largest idol did it. He took a hammer and destroyed the others before I could stop and destroy him.”

“Son, do you take me for a fool?” Terah shouted, “These are nothing but stone creations. You destroyed our shop! You destroyed our family’s future!”

“If you know that they are but stone,” asked Abraham, “why do you sell them as divine beings? Why do you allow people to believe that they are more than just sculpted rock?”

“It is not my place to take from people that which they hold dear,” Terah replied, “I am here to give them what they ask for – even though I myself do not believe that what they want is of any value.”

“That is a sham!” declared Abraham, “That is deceitful and dishonest! I will not be a part of such a charade. I will leave this place, to find the true way...”

And with that, Abraham left the land of his birth, his father’s home, and his past.

And he set out on his journey - vowing never to allow the idols of his past to be his security for the future.