**(Taken from “The Old Testament Made Easy” by Julie Tatum)**

**Terah**, a descendant of Shem, is famous because he became the

**father of Abraham**. He was also, by another wife, the father of

Sarah, who married her half-brother, Abraham. Nahor and Haran

were also sons of Terah. The family lived in the southern part of

ancient Mesopotamia, not far from the Persian Gulf. Ur, now Mukayyar

in Iraq, was a prosperous and highly civilized city in Babylonia

(Chaldees). Sumerian ruins uncovered there show that

civilization was reached in Ur about 4000 B.C., 2,000 years before

Terah's time.

In his era the great Hammurabi was King of Babylonia,

and his famous laws were based upon the statutes of ancient

Ur. So Abraham was undoubtedly familiar with the Hammurabi

Code and attended schools, where he was taught to read and write.

Babylonian laws and customs may well have been handed down

from his time to Moses' time verbally as well as on tablets of clay.

Terah, (Hebrew "idol-maker"), was probably a prosperous

man, for there were many gods and goddesses in the Babylonian

pantheon; records show that there were as many as 65,000 in one

era! Thousands of temples were dedicated to the moon god Nannar

(also known as Sin) and Bel, or Baal, the earth god. They worshiped

a patient mother goddess who interceded for them with stern male

deities. Our word Easter comes from Ishtar, the name of the most

popular Babylonian and Assyrian goddess. She was known in Egypt

as Isis, in Greece as Astarte (also Aphrodite), and in the Bible as

the Canaanite goddess Ashtoreth.

In many primitive societies the supreme deity was not a god but

the Great Mother, the fertility goddess, the source of life itself. This

is easy to understand, for the part the human male played in reproduction

was not known for many centuries. It was believed that

women became pregnant by the moon, the mystical fertilizing force.

Only women could make things grow, so it was natural to worship

a female deity. There are many indications that the earliest primitive

societies were matriarchal; for centuries they were matrilineal ancestry

was traced through the maternal line.

While the men of the tribe were off fighting and hunting, women invented agriculture

and domesticized animals, thus providing a steady source of food.

Agriculture brought about a great change; the nomads settled

down to living in villages, and civilization followed. Terah's tribesmen

were probably nomads who had not been villagers for very

long and became tired of such a settled form of life. They easily

slipped back into a pastoral existence when he decided to move to

the land of Canaan. They traveled north and westward to Haran

(HAY -ran), where Terah died. It was there and then that Abraham

received direct orders from God to separate from the other members

of the tribe and go to Canaan.

**ABRAHAM (Heb. "father of a great multitude"), also ABRAM**

(see Part I: Chapter 2)

One of the greatest religious leaders and reformers in the history of

the human race, Abraham is the spiritual ancestor of the Jews,

Muslims and Christians. He caught a glimpse of the great truth that

there is only one God, and also perceived the evil of human sacrifice

in an era when it was common to burn babies on the lap of a fiery

god-especially if the baby was the firstborn son of the tribe's chief.

For the gods had to be constantly coaxed and placated into producing

bountiful harvests and victory in war.

Abraham is really the founder of the Hebrew nation and of its

unique religion, although it is true that it was his great successor,

Moses, who welded together the often rebellious multitude of ex-Egyptian

slaves into a newborn nation.

But the Yahweh (Jehovah) of Moses spoke first to Abraham, and parts of the Mosaic Code are

similar to the Hammurabi Code with which Abraham must have

been familiar. The word Hebrew probably comes from Habiru,

meaning "wanderers," and may originally have been Eber-ew,

meaning a descendant of Eber, an ancestor of Abraham.

Later generations referred to this great patriarch as "faithful Abraham,"

and he lived up to his name, trusting God even when it seemed

impossible that God's covenant (promise) could be kept. A covenant

implies mutual obligations, and Abraham was always obedient

to God's commands. He was rewarded with a son, Isaac, born when

Abraham was one hundred years old and his hitherto barren wife,

Sarah, was ninety.

We can easily imagine how Abraham doted upon Isaac, but it is

hard for us to comprehend how he could possibly have even contemplated

offering this beloved child as a human sacrifice. The

firstborn son of the tribe's chieftain would naturally be considered

the group's most prized possession, and so he would be the one

most likely to please the god.

Abraham was developing toward the understanding that God is our altogether

loving Parent, but we must

remember that he had only just emerged from the polytheism of his

father, Terah, the idol-maker. We can never know what were the

exact words God spoke to Abraham which he understood to mean

that he must sacrifice his only legitimate son. We can only interpret

God's messages at the state and stage of spiritual consciousness we

are in at the time. There can be no doubt that this was a testing

time. Perhaps Abraham was idolizing this wonderful son of his very

old age-loving him more than he loved God.

However, no matter how he misinterpreted the message, he immediately obeyed. And

Faithful Abraham trusted God right up until he actually held the

sacrificial knife above the body of Isaac, bound and laid upon the

altar. Isaac must have trusted too, for there is no indication that he

struggled or cried out. Of course the right sacrifice was there all the

time: a ram in the thicket.

Just as there was a well right beside Hagar, dying of thirst in the wilderness of self-pity.

Hagar and Ishmael learned from that experience that they could

always trust God to take care of them; and He did. Abraham learned

from his testing time that the God he was slowly learning to understand

did not require human sacrifice. And civilization ascended a

notch on the ladder spiritward. The Mosaic law states, "There shall

not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter

to pass through the fire" (Deut. 18: 10).

Although the Hebrews rose above human sacrifice-except in rare cases such as Jephthah's

daughter (Judges II )-they clung to animal sacrifice for many centuries.

In all primitive people fire has always been used in connection

with worship of the deity; sometimes fire itself was the god.