

# Abraham, My Friend: 03 Known Unto God

by Ron Bailey

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*God is at work in all places and situations, even when we do not know it, and he will use all things to do in us what will last forever.*

**Duration:** 14:27

**Scripture:** Genesis 11:28, Numbers 21:9, Matthew 6:33, Luke 2:51, John 12:32, Acts 17:30

**Topics:** "Abraham"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the concept of God's providence and how it relates to the lives of believers. He highlights the idea that while we may not fully understand God's plans in the present or future, looking back in retrospect, we can see His hand at work. The speaker uses the example of Jesus feeding the five thousand to illustrate how God already knows what He will do, even when we are unsure. The sermon also touches on the importance of doing the will of God, as it leads to eternal abiding. Overall, the message encourages listeners to trust in God's providence and to seek His will in their lives.

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## Transcript

Well, hello again. You're listening to a Bible Base podcast, and I'm your host, Ron Bailey. These 60 or so meditations on the life of Abraham were first published on the sermon index.net website, where you can still find the original text versions.

The aim of the series is to discover the way in which Abraham became a praying man and the friend of God. This is episode 3, Known unto God. In British war cemeteries throughout the world, you often come across the words, known unto God, engraved on tombstones.

It signifies that the person whose remains lie in this spot cannot be identified. At one and the same time, it's a bleak comment on the lonely, anonymous sacrifice of so many, and a reminder that, in truth, we are never alone. Our two sparrows sold for a farthing, said Jesus, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your father.

Modern translators feel an urge to complete this sentence and add words like, without your father's will, or without your father's knowledge, or without your father's permission. Perhaps it's better just to leave it as it is. Nothing happens without your father.

And then to think about the implications. He cannot be excluded. Nothing happens without your father.

An old story is told about an atheist shoemaker. He was visited by his granddaughter and he decided to make use of the time by sowing his atheism while she was young. He wrote out the sentence, God is nowhere, and got her to copy it onto her slate while he went back to his shoemaking.

He returned expecting to find the sentence copied out several times on the slate and engraved in her mind. However, the slate was too narrow for a child's large letters so she had found it necessary to break up the largest word to make it fit. The shoemaker looked down on the slate and found a sentence repeated several times, it read, God is now here.

There are no God-forsaken places, and God is at work in them all. Christ's own testimony was, and I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. John chapter 12.

He was lifted up and he is drawing all men to himself. Contrary to the impression given by some modern Christian choruses, this statement has nothing to do with our praise but is a simple statement of fact. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

This is not to say that all will cooperate with God's drawings, but in every place and in every soul the drawing is at work. As Paul said in Acts chapter 17, God now commands all men everywhere to repent. Abraham's hometown of Ur of the Chaldees, ten miles west of Mosn, Nazarea in Iraq, could never have been called God-forsaken.

If anything, it was God-infested. It's impossible to be completely accurate with dates, but the Bible record and the lifestyle details of Abraham indicate that his story begins approximately 2000 BC. As a rule of thumb, we can work on those kind of dates.

Abraham, 2000 BC. Moses, 1500 BC. David, 1000 BC.

The rebuilding of Jerusalem, 500 BC. Room 56 in the British Museum is full of fascinating artefacts from the royal tombs of Ur, based around 2600 BC, right through to the time of Abraham. Ur was a capital city for much of this time.

The delicate skills of its craftsmen were amazing, working in gold, silver, lapis lazuli, ivory and bronze. They've left us an eloquent description of land between the rivers, the real meaning of Mesopotamia. They had four ass-powered four-wheel chariots with replaceable wheels, where the warrior had an armoury of throwing spears and his own driver.

They had a written language and law codes and highly regulated patterns of life. Ur's position on the Euphrates gave it ready access to exotic imports through Basra, where the Euphrates meets the Tigris and the Persian Gulf. Its merchants traded in precious stones and metals and its agriculturalists worked complicated irrigation systems which guaranteed them rich harvests.

And they built enormous temple mounds for all those gods, including the famous great ziggurat of Ur, a kind of step pyramid which stood over 60 feet tall and more than 200 feet wide, which would have dominated the skyline for all of Abraham's growing years. They worshipped and propitiated a pantheon of gods, both heavenly and from the underworld, developed an elaborate priestcraft. Many fascinating legal seals have been discovered which show aspects of religion in Ur of the Chaldeas.

One shows a supreme god seated and approached by two goddesses with right hands raised, a symbol of allegiance and supplication. The goddesses are leading a man into the presence of the greater god.

Archaeologists sometimes call these minor goddesses intercessors.

By their action they bring men into the presence of god. It's an interesting insight into a role that one day Abraham would fulfil, not by pagan ritual but because he became Abraham, my friend. Around the time that Abraham was born, Ur of the Chaldeas fell under violent incursions from nomadic Amorites.

The empire of Ur-Nammu collapsed and for the next 200 years, Ur was the centre of turbulent times as other cities vied for supremacy. Tira, Abraham's father, raised his family in Ur at this time and at the ripe age of 130 he fathered Abraham, his youngest son. Tira was an Urite through and through.

He had seen Ur-Nammu and his empire arrive, he had watched the development of his dynasty. The empire and the religion had outlasted him but now the city was in turmoil. At some point during his time in Ur, his eldest son Heran, that's Lot's father, had died in his father's presence, the Bible says.

I wonder what tragedy lies behind this simple statement. Was this one of the factors which unsettled Tira? Did he leave Ur for the safety of his remaining family? We have no answers to these questions other than to say all the answers were known unto God. God was not excluded from the ebbing and flowing of empires nor was he missing when Heran died in his father's presence in the land of his nativity in Ur of the Chaldeas.

We often hear of Abraham's faith and we'll come to that soon but the first account of Abraham's departure from Ur is contained in the words and Tira took his son Abraham and his grandson Lot, the son of Heran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abraham's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan and they came to Heran and dwelt there. That's Genesis chapter 11. Tira took them.

This seems to make Tira the prime mover in these events. Now this raises a further question. Can God be at work in the decision of an idle worshipping head of family whose decisions are based on fear and who has no knowledge of the true God? An old preacher friend of mine once told me, when you are newly Christian you will marvel at the way that God intervenes in answer to your prayers.

When you get older you will see that God's grace is even more evident in his providences. Have you been nicely settled in Ur, enjoying its sophistication and predictability? It may be that God will have to loosen your ropes with events that disturb and bring pain. It may be that he will unfold his will through actions of someone who doesn't even know him.

Sometimes he even speaks through your enemies. As King Josiah once discovered to his loss, sometimes your worst enemy's words are actually from the mouth of God. Read 2 Chronicles chapter 20.

Don't be too quick to shake off the dictates of secular or family authority. God knew what he was doing when he placed you there. Even though you are born again and have insights that your parents may lack, this may be a time when you are to be subject to them.

It says of Jesus and his family, They understood not the saying which he spake to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them for another eighteen years. The circumstance that chafes so persistently may yet be God's unique provision for you.

In terms of providence, we learn very little in prospect looking forwards, a little more in context in the middle of it, but most of all in retrospect. And best of all, we discover that while we were fretting and

wondering what we should do next, it was already known unto God. I love this phrase from the story of the feeding of the five thousand.

When Jesus then lifted up his eyes and saw a great company come unto him, he says to Philip, Where shall we buy bread that these may eat? And this he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Don't fret, little bird, trapped in your narrow cage. He knows what he will do.

Empires will rise and fall, but in the midst of all the fog of war, he is silently planning for you in love, and he will use their rise and fall to do things in you that will last forever. And the world, says John in his first letter and the second chapter, the world is passing away and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever. If you'd like to find out more about Bible Base, do come and join us on [www.biblebase.com](http://www.biblebase.com). We look forward to seeing you.

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