

Abraham: A Traveler by Faith

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

Reconstructing the religious world of Abraham's day is difficult. First, based on the genealogy of **Genesis 11**, Noah lived until Abraham was 58. Shem lived 33 years after Abraham died. However, there were 9 generations between Shem and Abraham. That is, Shem was Abraham's great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather. Since we live in a time when only the long-lived few see their great-grandchildren, we can hardly know how much influence Shem or Noah would have had over Abraham. Yet, I am hard-pressed to think Jehovah God who caused the flood could have been completely forgotten while Noah and Shem lived. Their stories of the flood and their trip on the ark and how they knew to build it and be prepared must have been known and been passed on. Yet, sometime before Abraham, the descendents of Shem, Ham and Japheth were scattered at the tower of Babel (**Genesis 11**). We really have no way to know what Abraham knew of Shem and Noah. With all this in mind, we read **Joshua 24:2** to learn that Terah, Nahor and Abraham served other gods. We have no idea what Abraham really knew of Jehovah when he was called. We have no idea exactly what Jehovah God did to call Abraham. We see no burning bush. We do not see generations of patriarchal training. We simply see a polytheist having been taken from his homeland by his father and then left in Haran when his father died (**Genesis 11:31-32**). At that point, Jehovah called Abraham to continue the trek Terah had started. For a man serving fake idols who never spoke, it must have been a shock to be called by the true God represented by no idol whatsoever. Yet, Abraham listened. Talk about faith. From that point on, Abraham became the Father of the Faithful. He is the great example of faith for all time, not that his faith was perfect, but his faith allowed him to travel to Canaan, into Egypt, back into Canaan and eventually to paradise. We must not miss the implication that paradise in the story of Lazarus and the rich man is called "Abraham's bosom" (**Luke 16:22**).

Most of us know the great story of Abraham. If you do not, I encourage you to read **Genesis 12-25**. In this lesson, instead of following all of his travels step by step, I want to examine the faith by which he traveled as revealed in **Hebrews 11:8-10**. Abraham was fundamentally the same as us. Surrounded by a cacophony of error, one voice of truth called out to him. He followed. We are in the same situation. If we wish to travel to Abraham's bosom and then on to heaven, we must follow Abraham's footsteps of faith. Examine these verses and learn how to travel by faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. (ESV)

Discussion:

- I. Abraham traveled by faith.
 - A. **Hebrews 11** is not about Abraham. It is about faith. Everything these characters did, they did by faith. According to **Hebrews 11:1**, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (ESV). This hope is not wishful thinking, but earnest expectation. Further, it is not earnest expectation that flows against the evidence. Rather, it is the earnest expectation based upon the word of God (**Romans 10:17**). Abraham had received God's word. He believed it. He didn't have to see anything, he merely had to hold on to God's word.
 - B. **II Corinthians 5:7** says, "We walk by faith, not by sight." That was Abraham. He had not seen God. According to **Exodus 6:3**, Abraham did not even know God's name. He had simply received God's word and, therefore, put one foot in front of another no matter what kind of ground was before him. A wonderful illustration of this faith is seen in the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. While working his way through the secret passages to find the Holy Grail, Jones is stopped by a chasm without any apparent means of crossing. He examines the notes his father had made in which a man walked by faith and not by sight across a gaping chasm. Believing his father's research, Jones lifts one foot in front of him, closes his eyes and allows himself to fall forward. At the seeming last moment, his foot found solid ground. Then we, the audience, are allowed to see the camouflaged bridge. Only after Jones crosses the bridge is he able to see with his eyes what he had done by faith. That was Abraham's journey, repeatedly

stepping out into the chasm because God said so and repeatedly finding a foothold just as God had promised.

- C. Abraham traveled by faith and so must we. **Hebrews 11:6** explains, without faith, we cannot possibly please God. Until we are willing to hold God's hand, close our eyes and step out into the chasm, we are not fit to be God's servants.

II. By faith, Abraham obeyed.

- A. If we stop with point one, as so many students of faith do, we will not really know what faith means. We will speak only of mental assent. However, for Abraham faith was not a mental event, it was a very practical event. It impacted his daily life. **Hebrews 11:8** does not merely say, "By faith." It says, "By faith, Abraham obeyed..." That is the key. Abraham's faith saved him not because he had faith, but because he had enough faith to do what God said.
- B. God said, "Leave Haran and travel to Canaan." Abraham obeyed. God said, "Let circumcision be a sign of our covenant." Abraham obeyed. God said, "Let your firstborn son, Ishmael, and his mother, Hagar, be cast away from you. Through Isaac your seed shall come." Abraham obeyed. God said, "Sacrifice your son, Isaac, on an altar." Abraham obeyed.
- C. **Romans 4:12** says we must "walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had..." That doesn't mean give a mental assent to what God has said, that means believe what God has said so much that we do it. When God says He will give us all things if we seek first His kingdom and righteousness, do we believe it enough to do it? When God says to go to our brethren and restore them when we see them in sin, do we believe Him enough to do it? When God says we must not let the sun go down on our wrath because that opens the door for the devil, do we believe Him enough to deal with it? When God says the husband is the head of the home and the wife is to be submissive, do we believe Him enough to follow His pattern? When God says if we spare the rod, we spoil the child, do we believe Him enough to discipline our children? On and on these questions go. Think about how those around Abraham must have thought of him as he abandoned the idols they could all see for the voice of a God no one had seen. Yet, Abraham believed. He did not follow the cultural mandates. He did not live by the societal taboos. He did not allow the ridicule of others to sway him. He believed what God said and therefore he obeyed.
- D. Remember **James 2:17-24**. If we are satisfied with a mere mental assent that does not impact our daily lives, we are no better off than the demons. We have enough faith to shudder and be afraid of God, but not enough to obey Him. That demonic faith will do us no good. Only the faith that is strong enough to obey will justify us. Let us follow Abraham's footsteps and increase our faith in God to the point that we will surrender our lives to His will, obeying Him when He says, "Take this step out into the chasm. I will keep you."

III. Abraham followed God without knowing the way.

- A. According to **Hebrews 1:8**, Abraham obeyed God by faith even though he had no idea where he was going. Abraham didn't know anything about Canaan. Further, he had no idea following God would lead him into Egypt. He had no idea it would lead him to do battle with the five kings in order to rescue his nephew, Lot. He had no idea when he would have children. He had no idea how many children he would have. He had no idea where his meals would come from once he got to Canaan. He had no idea how his family would be cared for. Keep in mind this was not a bed of roses. He endured a famine while following God's directions. He simply knew that God had called him to travel this way and he went. Further, he went with the willingness to go anywhere God told him, simply because God told him.
- B. Where will serving God take us? Some, in order to follow God, have to leave jobs. Some, have to leave marriages. Some learn to stay in marriages that are troubled. Some lose friends. Some are ostracized by family. Some struggle with troubled congregational relationships. All of us, at some time or another go through famines in life. Don't misunderstand, the Christian's life is not one misery after another. There are plenty of good times and lots of blessings. However, following God is not always a walk in the park. Sometimes following God means lying down in green pastures and drinking from still waters; other times it means walking through the valley of the shadow of death and eating in the presence of our enemies (**Psalms 23**). Whichever path we

take, we must let God be our shepherd, allowing His rod and His staff to comfort us. Whether we are eating the overflow of blessings, fleeing a famine or suiting up for battle, we must follow God wherever He leads and we must be willing right now to make that commitment. That is the Christian's commitment. We sing a song that says, "Where He leads me, I will follow." Do we mean that? What if He leads us through trouble? What if He leads us through turmoil? What if He leads us through self-sacrifice? Are we willing to follow even though we don't know where God will lead us? Abraham was.

- IV. Abraham did not waiver when the promise was not fulfilled immediately.
- A. According to **Hebrews 11:9**, Abraham went to the land God promised to give to him. However, he lived there as a foreigner. He didn't get to live there as if it was his homeland. Not only that, he lived there in tents. Nobody lives on their own property in tents. Travelers, sojourners going from one place to another who are just passing through live in tents. When you own your own land and have your own home, you build your own house. When you run your own nation, you build cities and fortresses. However, Abraham spent his entire life in tents sojourning from one place to another. **Hebrews 11:13** explains what this means. Abraham had been given the promise, but the promise was really for his descendents. This land was his inheritance; however, he never really owned it. In fact, that didn't happen for hundreds of years until after the Egyptian captivity.
 - B. Despite the fact that Abraham came to the Promised Land, but never really received it, he continued in faith. Though he remained in his tent traveling from place to place, he still followed God's lead. What about us? How well do we do with that? If things don't go exactly the way we want in our timing, do we think of abandoning God? When we lose jobs, get sick, lose loved ones, endure hardship, undergo trial, do we think God has abandoned us and therefore think of abandoning Him? Abraham didn't. Even though God was acting on His own timing and not in Abraham's, Abraham still followed God's lead by faith.
 - C. The great example of that is illustrated in **Hebrews 11:17**. Though God had said his seed would come through Isaac, God now said to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham did not waiver. He believed he could obey God, sacrifice Isaac and God would still bring about His promises through Isaac's seed. What faith! What obedience!
 - D. That is not to say Abraham never had struggles with his faith. In **Genesis 17:19-21** God had said Sarah would be the mother of Abraham's child of promise. However in **Genesis 20**, when Abraham traveled into the land of Abimelech, Abraham lied about his relationship with Sarah. According to **vs. 11**, Abraham said it was because he feared for his life. What about God's promises? God's promises did not allow for Abraham to be killed yet. Here, I think, is a great comfort to us. Sometimes we also struggle with our faith. However, one of our greatest heroes of faith faced the same struggle and came out in the end. Faith is a growth process (**II Peter 1:5, 8**). Abraham faced these struggles but still made it into the Chapter of Faith. Despite our struggles, when we grow in faith we will be justified by God, just as Abraham was. We must, however, not be turned aside just because God doesn't fulfill His promises in our timing. We must continue on in faith and allow God to pursue His own timetable. As the song we sing based on **Ecclesiastes 3:11** says, "God makes all things beautiful in His time."
- V. Abraham traveled because he could envision the city that was coming.
- A. Abraham was able to follow God without knowing where he was going and was able to live in his "homeland" in tents because he could envision by his faith what he could not see with his eyes. Abraham was able to see ahead and see a city with foundations. He was able to see the city built by God. I believe this verse has dual meaning. Abraham lived in tents, but he was able to see by faith in God's promise the day when God built the cities with foundations for Abraham's descendents. Did he know exactly what Jerusalem would look like? I doubt it. Did he know exactly where it would be? Probably not. However, he knew God's promise. While he dwelt in a tent, he could see God's city (cf. **Psalms 87:1**).
 - B. However, there is further meaning revealed in **Hebrews 11:16**. Abraham was more interested in a heavenly city than in an earthly one. If God's promise to have a homeland did not come in Abraham's lifetime, that was ok with him. He wasn't nearly so concerned about this life as he

was the next anyway. That is the whole key. It is hard to travel by faith if we are bogged down by what we see. As **Colossians 3:1-2** says, we must not be focused on things below, but on things above. As **Matthew 6:19-21** says, we must not put our value on things down here, but value the spiritual things of heaven. Only then can we walk by faith. We must see the city God is preparing. We must envision where we are going in eternity. Only then can we walk with our eyes closed down here. Only then can we faithfully step out into the chasms where God directs us. If we are too worried about preserving what we have here, we will never make it. That is why it is so important to overcome materialism and covetousness. We simply can't walk by faith if our heart is divided between God and earthly things.

- C. Abraham was able to envision the heavenly city of God. Can we? Don't allow your physical eye to obscure your spiritual eye. Meditate on God's heavenly city. Look forward to it. Value it above all else and this walk of faith with Abraham and God will come naturally.

Conclusion:

One of my favorite stories of all time is *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. I know not everyone agrees with me. I have heard several reasons why other people didn't like those books. One of the most amazing, however, was from two separate people who claimed the same reason. They said the story just seemed like a cheap copy of other fantasy literature they had read. What is amazing is *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are the original fantasy stories. Every other fantasy story written has been so in the wake of J.R.R. Tolkien's originality and creativity. That is really like our lives and Abraham's. Too easily, we can look back at Abraham's life and see it through the colored glasses of our lives. However, Abraham is the original. He is the example. He has blazed the trail for us to follow in his footsteps and walk by faith. We must never view Abraham's life as an imitation of ours. Rather, we must let our lives be an imitation of his, traveling to the heavenly city by faith, obeying God though we have no idea where He will lead and maintaining faithfulness as we wait on His timing. That is walking by faith and not by sight. Abraham did it. So can we.