

## **ABRAHAM PART II**

### **Slide 1**

Last week in the first of our series on Abraham we looked at the courageous obedient faith that Abraham exercised in order to take the first step in God's plan for his life.

God's challenge to Abraham was quite dramatic. Leave behind your country, leave behind your home, the only world you have ever known, and leave your relatives and friends.

We speculated as to why God would give Abraham this challenge and suggested that one reason would be to leave behind his idolatrous culture and his apparently idolatrous relatives to follow God to a new land.

Today we want to look at the next steps in the journey.

Now for a moment I want to direct your attention to Genesis chapter eleven verses thirty-one and thirty-two. (NLT)

### **Slide two**

You will see here that it is actually Abraham's father Terah that makes the first move. He takes some of the family, some of the tribe, leaves Ur and heads for Canaan but stops at Haran and settles there.

*“One day Terah took his son Abram, his daughter-in-law Sarai (his son Abram’s wife), and his grandson Lot (his son Haran’s child) and moved away from Ur of the Chaldeans. He was headed for the land of Canaan, but they stopped at Haran and settled there.”*

Now there are four important points to consider when we are trying to understand the significance of these passages.

### **Slide three:**

**First**, Abraham’s call, the tap on the shoulder to follow the Lord to a new place came before he left Ur. This is clearly confirmed in Acts chapter seven verses two and three: (NLT)

*This was Stephen’s reply: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia (that’s Ur) before he settled in Haran. <sup>3</sup> God told him, ‘Leave your native land and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.’*

**Secondly**, the passage from Acts confirms what we read last week in Genesis, that is clear direction that Abraham was to leave his relatives behind.

But we see here that at least two of his relatives begin the journey with him, his father Terah and his nephew Lot.

**Thirdly**, while God specifically called Abraham to this journey it appears now that Terah the father is actually the one leading the group.

**Fourthly**, the journey begins on course toward Canaan, but they get sidetracked to Haran and Terah settles there.

Now we are not sure what Terah's motivation was to move from Ur to Haran.

Perhaps he was hoping to keep Abraham and his family close to him and so perhaps he thought that if he moved with him to a new place that Abraham would be happy to settle there with him.

Perhaps Terah was trying to get away from the idolatry of Ur as well.

But it is rather ironic that rather than continuing on to Canaan, the place of promise, the place of relationship with God, he chooses to settle in Haran and in fact stays there until he dies at the age of two hundred and five.

Haran was a city whose religion centered on the moon God. So Terah takes what on the surface appears to be a positive step, but in essence he moves from one idolatrous culture to another. Ironically the moon god's name was 'sin'.

So Terah takes a first step, but the bottom line was that he was still living in an idolatrous and sinful culture, he chose to remain there and lived the rest of his life in that sinful culture.

Now consider Abram's call from God. God said specifically, precisely, and unambiguously leave your land and your relatives.

But while he courageously and obediently takes a first step, he is not fully obedient to the call, instead of leaving his relatives behind, he journeys with them and his continuing relationship with his father simply takes him from one sinful culture to another.

And for the time spent living with his Father in Haran, presumably until his father dies, Abraham's call, his challenge from God is effectively sidelined.

This picture from the life of Abraham might well be an insightful picture into our own lives.

How many times do we hear or feel the Spirit of God nudging us to do something? Calling us to visit someone? Calling us to share with someone in need. Calling in us to seek restoration in a broken relationship.

And with good intentions we set off to be obedient, but then situations and circumstances conspire to pull our allegiance away from God's calling to the voices, values, and priorities of the world around us.

And we like Abraham, while we may hesitate to admit it, find ourselves sidelined, the initiative God planned for us effectively neutralized.

Then consider Abraham's decision to bring nephew Lot with him. It was probably the normal thing to do, the expected thing to do in that culture but God had told him to leave his relatives behind, and after his father dies and Abram decides to move on his decision to take Lot with him against God's call would eventually cause him lots of problems.

So, think about this for a moment. Abram was partially obedient. He decided to leave his country, but he takes with him his relatives.

Instead of wholeheartedly following the Lord's direction, he finds himself simply moving from one sinful culture to another and sidetracked from his original calling. .

There is a powerful lesson here for all of us. When God calls us to respond to the gospel, when he calls us to respond to the offer of a new lifestyle, he is clearly calling for us to completely leave the old lifestyle behind.

#### **Slide 4**

To the crippled man Jesus healed in John chapter five, Jesus says in verse fourteen (NLT)

*“Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.”*

To the woman caught in adultery in John chapter eight, Jesus says in verse eleven(NIV):

*. “.... neither do I condemn you,”. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

#### **Slide 5**

To the Corinthian church Paul writes in chapter six verse seventeen: (NLT)

*“ Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you.”*

In the story of Abraham, we see first of all a precise and unambiguous call. We see a call to leave behind a sinful culture and even close relatives who were immersed in that culture.

We see God calling Abram to a clean break. “Abram, leave that sinful culture and sinful relationship behind, come with me to Canaan.”

And then we see the response, the response is one of partial obedience. The initial response to leave the sinful culture and his family was only partially obeyed. It resulted first in Abraham spending wasted years in Haran, years that God wanted him to spend with him in Canaan.

Secondly as we will see later in our study the decision to bring Lot against God’s instruction would cause Abraham significant grief.

We see this so often in our own faith journey and in the journeys of others. We welcome the miracle of salvation.

We love to hear the good news that God loved us and died for us. We love to hear that our sin penalty has been paid, we love to hear that simply by asking for forgiveness we can receive the promise of eternal life.

We love grace, particularly when it is cheap and easy, but when God taps us on the shoulder, when he says come out from that sinful lifestyle from that sinful community and sinful relationships we often respond with partial obedience.

“God’s I’ll make a deal. I’ll go part way with you. I’ll move a little in the direction of that godly lifestyle you are calling me to, but there are some things and some relationships I just can’t part with.

Lord I don’t understand why you are calling me out of these lifestyle issues and these relationships. Why they are not all that bad.”

And so instead of complete obedience, like Abram we bring along our Lot or in some cases lots. ( pardon the pun) We bring along relationships that will continue to bring us problems as we try to follow the Lord’s direction for our lives.

We want on the one hand to live in holiness before God but the Lot or Lot’s in our lives maintain a hold and a drag down our ability to do so.

It’s like trying to take your fishing boat with a six horsepower motor home in a hurry when your anchor is still dragging on the bottom.

Instead of a clean break, many who profess to be believers try to continue to live in an environment where God is not honoured where sin is winked at and where many are eventually swallowed up.

Surveys conducted by the Barna group suggest that there is precious little difference now between the lifestyles of those claiming to be believers and the secular people of our culture.

The story of Abraham calls us to really stop and consider where we are with respect to obeying his call.

As we have seen in his word this morning, the Lord calls us to that clean break, he calls us to our Canaan, calls us to walk and live in relationship with him.

And we will never achieve the relationship he ordains for us, we will never completely achieve the plans he has for us, until we deal with this issue of obedience.

## **Slide 6**

Now I want to turn our attention to something else about Abraham. Abraham was an altar builder.

Let's now look at Genesis chapter twelve, verses six, seven and eight (NLT):

*Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.*

*Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*

## **Slide 7**

*After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the LORD, and he worshiped the LORD. Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev.*



Here as we pick up Abram's story, we see that he has finally obeyed at least the part of the call to follow God to Canaan. And in the space of these few verses, we see that he builds two altars and worships.

The building of an altar is a tangible testimony that the builder believes in a God. We read about many altars in scripture, some built to Jehovah the one true God, but many other altars erected to pagan gods.

But in every case they were a tangible testimony of the altar builder that they believed in a God.

Secondly altars were a place of worship.

The very first time an altar is mentioned in scripture is in the account of Noah. He builds an altar as the flood ends, offers sacrifices and worships. One of the reasons for building an altar was to commemorate an act of God. And so Noah builds an altar and commemorates the end of the flood and God's plan to save the righteous and a portion of the animal creation.

Symbolically and prophetically, it points to another plan of God, his plan to save those who would be made righteous through the sacrifice on the cross.

Abram builds the second altar recorded in scripture, an altar commemorating an act of God. It commemorated the covenant that God made with Abram. "I will make you a great nation, I will give you the land I promise if you will just follow me".

The journey continues and the next altar Abraham erects is an altar of worship and Abraham worships the God who is leading him on.

Now in our twenty-first century Christian culture it is often said that prayer is seriously lacking. And that is probably true.

But I would also submit to you that worship, actively worshipping the God who is leading us on is even more lacking.

We tend to think of worship as the musical part of our Sunday morning service and certainly that part of our service is worshipful.

But worship should be much more than that. Worship that is a deliberate part of our prayer time, worship that is spontaneous in those God moments as He leads us on our journey day by day.

And now for our last thought this morning let's look carefully again at these few words from verse eight:

### **Slide 8**

*After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east.*

These words give us a picture of Abraham's position. Bethel on one hand and the city of Ai on the other.

To the east the city of Ai, a city of Baal worship, Baal being a fertility god with worship that involved sex orgies. Temple prostitutes supported the temple worship of Baal. Its worship was filled with perversion, homosexuality, immorality and sexual promiscuity.

One commentator asks: “Could this possibly be the spirit behind much promiscuity, perversion, homosexuality and pornography in North America today?

In short for Abraham to stray to the east would take him back into the world of idolatry and sin. Take him away from the calling God had placed on his life.

To the west was Bethel, a name which meant the house of God or the place of God, or the presence of God.

So, Abraham seems to find himself in a continuous tension, a tension between the draw and attraction of the idolatrous and sinful world, and the draw and attraction of the presence of God and his call on his life.

And we as believers will find ourselves in a similar tension. There will always be the draw of the world on one hand and the call of God on the other.

The question we need to answer daily as we journey through life is which call will we follow?

In the future Abram would be asked to build another altar, an altar where his faith and commitment to obedience would be stressfully tested. An altar that we will consider in more detail next week. An altar where at the last moment God would supply a lamb that would be substituted for Abram’s son.

An altar we will explore a little more fully on next Sunday our communion day.