

Chapter Nine ***ABRAHAM***

Hebrews 11:8 - 11 *By FAITH Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By FAITH he sojourned 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 looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

The classic example of the life of faith, used by Paul, James and the author of the book to the Hebrews, was the wanderer Abraham. His story is recorded in Genesis, chapters 11 to 25. The writer of Hebrews emphasises here the faith displayed by Abraham as a sojourner, one without any ties to his own possessions.

As we compare the verses of Hebrews above with the historic account found in Genesis 11:31 we see that, though God was calling Abram (later Abraham) to the promised land of Canaan, it was through his father Terah, that he left Ur of the Chaldees. God often leads his children through the decisions of others. It was not until he had left Haran that God spoke directly to Abram.. He was the chosen vessel through whom God would establish His people and their land.

Unlike Noah, Abram was not chosen because he was righteous - indeed he lived in an idolatrous country with little knowledge of God. Among the men who came before him there were many who worshipped God but none of these was chosen to be the Father of the great nation of God's people. Abel was good, - he offered sacrifices according to God's will but he offered for himself alone. He was not specially chosen. Enoch and Noah were also as individuals in their walk with God. All three worshipped the true God but none of them was specially chosen to start the recovery of what was lost by Adam. It was Abram whom God chose and he was an idolator! (Joshua 24:2). God called Abram because He had a special reason - Abram was to be the starting point of divine recovery from the fall. When we turn to the New Testament, the first words we read are *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.* God starts His good news (the Gospel) with Abraham!

When God spoke, Abram obeyed. He did not understand, nor did he stop to discuss plans with God. He just obeyed and 'went out'. He could have complained that he was already seventy five years old and too old to start wandering, but he did not. He went out not knowing where he was going. He had heard of a land, a kingdom that was to be his inheritance. He had heard the promise that his name would be great and that he would be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Though he had not known God before this time, there was planted a confidence in him to believe that the promises of God were sure. So he went out ...

God is looking for men and women today whose eyes are fixed on His kingdom and not the vanity fairs of this world. The hymnist declares,

*I am a stranger here within a foreign land,
My home is far away upon a golden strand.
Ambassador am I of things beyond the sky,
I'm here on business for my King.*

Another has expressed it this way

*This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through.
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door,
and I can't feel at home in this world any more!*

The apostle John exhorts us not to love the world, nor the things of the world. (1 Jn 2:15). Of course, we are to love the people of this world and its beauties which cause us to worship God. John is referring to the systems of men's makings; its politics and guile, its secular humanism and compromise, its vanity and materialism. Abraham had no interest in such things for he was a sojourner, one passing through, and his was a walk with God, a walk of faith.

I am reminded here of the prodigal son in the parable told by Jesus. (Luke 15) He went out and wasted his portion of the inheritance on the pleasures of the world. Coming to his senses, he returned home in penitence saying. "Father, I am not worthy to be your son. Please make me as one of your servants." However, the father receives him warmly, clothing him with the best robes, putting shoes on his feet and arranging a party for him, much to the chagrin of the older brother. Though I recognise myself in the prodigal, knowing my guilt and acknowledging the love of the Father who still accepts me as His son, I see little in him to commend him - until I compare him with the elder son! The latter complains to the father about the treatment given to the prodigal. "He has brought shame to us, he has wasted his inheritance lusting after this world, while I have remained faithful at home. Why have you killed the fatted calf for him? You have never treated me that way!" What smug hypocrisy! The father replies, "My son, all the fatted calves belong to you! Your inheritance is all this farm!" Whereas the prodigal had lusted after the pleasures of this world, he had now come to his senses in penitent remorse. The elder son also lusted after things of this world - not wine, women and song, but his possessions. He owned the farm and didn't want anything to rob him of his inheritance. In truth **the farm owned him!**

It is not wrong to have possessions in this world but the walk of faith demands that, like Abraham, they do not own us! Hold on to them lightly so that, when the Lord calls you to go, nothing will be holding you back. It certainly is the reason why believers should never be in **debt**. When we owe someone some money and are unable to meet that obligation at a moment's call, we are in bondage to that person and not free to answer when the Lord calls us 'to go out'. In truth we are serving Mammon and not God at that moment. I would suggest that this is such a serious matter to the Lord that we should not even bring our tithes and offerings to His altar if another has something against us. ie; we are in debt to him. We should get out of debt even before giving our tithes to God. (Consider Matt.5: 23-26, noting, in particular, the last phrase).

Maybe this is what the Lord meant when He said "let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest" (Luke 22:26). The difference between the prodigal younger son and the older

brother, was in their attitude to things of the world. The older brother was concerned lest his inheritance be wasted on a party for the prodigal returnee. He wanted no one to rock his boat, he was content with the status quo. His motto was, *Leave well alone!* Similarly, Esau would sell his birthright for a present, temporary satisfaction, while his younger brother Jacob, though a deceiver, was a wanderer who walked - and wrestled - with God. Like the prodigal, Jacob was brought to repentance but not Esau. One had his inheritance in God; the other in a "mess of pottage". It is striking that God would declare, "I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau" (Mal.1:3). It is further worthy of note that the promises given to the idolator Abram were repeated to the deceiver Jacob, and he also, was to become one of the three great patriarchs of the Jewish people, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God is looking for men and women like Abraham, willing to be led by the Lord, when and where He wants to lead them. To us He still says "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*" (Matt 6:23).

We shall consider Abraham again in a later chapter where we see more evidence of his faith walk with God, evidence also called up by James and Paul the apostles, in their writings.

Summary

Abraham is presented to us in Hebrews 11 to teach us these principles:

- 1. God does not chose a man because of anything he might claim to be. Instead He chooses weak and foolish things, low and despised things, so that no man may boast. (1 Corinthians 1: 27-29)**
- 2. People of faith are those whose eyes and heart are fixed on a heavenly kingdom; whose attitude is that of the 'younger', having loose attachments to this world.**
- 3. God started the work of redemption in a man who would become the prime example of the walk of faith, demonstrated in obedient trust.**