

### *Hebrews 11:8-10*

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.

This story of Abraham's has always been so powerful and potent in my life because it is where I first learned what we talked about last week; about the way God looks from eternity future through the filter of the cross into eternity past and does not see our failings or our rebellion. Instead He attributes the righteousness of Christ to you and me and all men and women who choose to believe in Him by faith.

What a powerful truth. This truth about how God views us is to be like a tent peg that is hammered deep into the ground to which we tether our lives. Our God is so gracious and compassionate that even though we fail and fail and fail, God literally tosses it all away and in His eyes we are these great heroes of faith.

If you can imagine, He even says all these great things about us (like He did with Abraham) which is so hard to believe; after all, we know what we are truly like. I am sure Abraham would have choked and maybe even hacked a bit if he knew about the amazing testimony that God left regarding his life.

Most of us still believe that God is all disappointed in us when we fail Him; but He is not. That is simply not the truth. All of the Father's disappointment over our

failings was already expressed toward Jesus when He volunteered to take the blame for everything we have ever done or ever will do. Jesus took the blame so you wouldn't have to. That is how much He loves you.

I hope you remember that beautiful passage which the Spirit spoke over our lives in **10:17**, "I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds." He does not remember our sins and all our ridiculous acts of rebellion because sin was completely eradicated on the cross; Jesus dealt with it once and for all. And by the one offering of His body, He perfected forever all of us who have chosen to believe in Him (**10:14**). As a result, like in the case of Abraham, God remembers only our obedience of faith because He has removed our rebellious acts as far as the East is from the West (*Psalm 103:12*).

Now, when the Father looks at you and me He sees us clean, He sees us as pure, He sees us as holy, and He sees us as His precious children. He loves us so much and it is such a relief to know that I don't have to live from all of my failure; I can actually chuck it all away and by faith move forward in my life and live from the reality of how God sees me and relates to me. Again, some of you need to tether your life to this truth. It is firm, unmovable, safe, and you would be so foolish to ignore this truth and continue to live under the oppression of your failure when you don't have to.

I say all of this to help frame this passage about Abraham. Sure it starts off by telling us that Abraham was obedient to God when the Lord called to Him and commanded Him to go to this strange and foreign land; however, the Bible also makes it very clear that Abraham was, how shall we say, less than obedient when God first called him to leave his family and his homeland. In fact, Abraham was

downright rebellious and defiant for a long period of time before he finally relented and followed the Lord's instructions. So this story of Abraham is a great reminder of God's faithfulness, mercy and compassion even when we don't deserve it.

By the way, I just want to say that I love the way the Bible reveals to us both God's perspective of our lives but also the truth of what we are really like. The Bible never tries to make its heroes larger than life, but it exposes all their faults and sins and just lays it out for all to see. This gives me great confidence in the authenticity of the Bible and the fact that it was written by men who were inspired by the Spirit of God who always deals in truth.

You have to understand, that is not how most historical books are written; they are written to make their heroes seem as if they are themselves god-like. The greater the hero is portrayed, the greater pride and glory can be found by a people in their own history. But the Bible just lays it out for real. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Saul, David, Solomon, all great heroes whose faith was forged in utter failure, disobedience and downright defiance.

Let's look at how this story of Abraham (who was then known as Abram) was first recorded for us in Genesis.

***Genesis 12:1-5***

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with

contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan.

It seems to start off ok. God commanded Abram to go "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him" and "he departed from Haran." If that is all you pay attention to it seems like Abram was a good obedient servant of the Lord who deserves to be in the hall of faith; the Lord commanded and Abram obeyed.

But I hope you noticed that he was actually quite disobedient from the get-go. The Lord told Abram to leave both his relatives and his father's family; yet, for some reason he took along his nephew Lot. Which if you are familiar with the rest of the story, Lot ended up causing Abram a lot of trouble. But there is more to Abram's disobedience than might first meet the eye.

Do you remember when we studied **11:2** I explained how the Holy Spirit has sprinkled truth across all 66 books of the Bible and you have to pretty much know your entire Bible in order to get the whole story. Well this is one of those instances. So one day I was reading in Acts and found myself more than shocked when I learned the "rest of the story" about Abram.

In **Acts 6-7** we have the story of Stephen (and early disciple of the Lord) who was arrested for believing in Jesus. We are told that Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and had performed all sorts of miracles and signs among the people. And when certain Jews tried to debate him we are told that no one was able to

stand against the wisdom and Spirit by which Stephen spoke. So the Jews who were annoyed by Stephen did what they felt was justifiable and warranted given the circumstances; they found some men to lie about Stephen and accuse him of all sorts of troubling accusations. It's the same thing they did to Jesus.

Anyway, Stephen was brought before the Jewish High Council to be tried for blasphemy and in due form he was given the chance to present his defense. Stephen started his argument by first retracing a bit of the familiar Jewish history. And it is in this defense that we find the "rest of the story."

***Acts 7:2-4***

This was Stephen's reply: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia before he settled in Haran. God told him, 'Leave your native land and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.' So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran until his father died. Then God brought him here to the land where you now live.

Did you catch that? In **Genesis 12:4** we were told that Abram obediently departed from Haran and came into the land of Canaan; but in this passage we actually find out that God had first given this command for Abram while he was still living in the land of the Chaldeans before he settled in Haran.

In ***Genesis 11:31*** we are told that Abram left his homeland, Ur of the Chaldeans, with his dad, Terah, with Lot, his nephew, and his wife Sarai and

ventured off to the land that of Canaan, but they never made it. They stopped just over half way into their journey at a place called Haran and settled there. Let's look at a map. Ur was located in what we now know as Iraq and Haran is way up North West in southern Turkey near the border of Syria. So they traveled to the peak of the crescent and did not venture down the other side.

**Genesis 11:31** makes it all sound so innocent and matter of fact. But the Spirit through Stephen tells us that Abram had already received direct instruction from the Lord to leave behind his father's family and all his relatives and go to a land that the Lord would show him. He just refused to obey. He took his dad, his nephew (again in direct defiance of God's commands) and never went beyond the land of Haran. In fact, it is clear from **Genesis 11:31** that Abram waited until his dad died before he was willing to be obedient to at least part of the command—the part about leaving the land. What was that all about?

In **Joshua 24:2** we find out a little interesting piece of information about Abram's dad, Terah. He was an idol worshiper; so maybe Terah threw a big fit about Abram leaving and following this unknown God instead of the "god's" of the Chaldeans. And being the patriarch of the family, he probably insisted Abram obey his wishes.

According to **Daniel 2**, the Chaldeans were all astrologers, mystics, priests, and magicians. The central god that they worshiped was the moon god "Sin" (appropriately named). And it should not surprise you that the two chief seats of worship of Sin were in the cities of Ur and Haran. The chief sanctuary in Ur was named "house of the great light" and the sanctuary in Haran was named "house of joys." By the way, the name "Ur" is identified with fire and is indicative of the

type of worship that was practiced in the religion; it was probably filled with sacrifices and such.

Sin was known as the chief of the pantheon of “gods” in the region of Mesopotamia and he was given such designations as the “father of the gods,” and the “creator of all things.” Sin was also associated with ascended wisdom practiced in astrology. So you can imagine what a shock it was when God, the true God, came and spoke to Abram and told him to leave this land and all its forms of worship.

A little side note. I hope you can see why it is important to know your entire Bible. Just to understand this story we had to go to Genesis, Acts, Joshua, and Daniel. And we are not yet done with looking to other passages of scripture to get a full understanding of this story.

This little insight provided by Joshua also gives us a view into the family drama that must have been going on in the household. **Genesis 12:31** makes it clear that even though Abram was given the call and they all left and “headed for the land of Canaan,” Abram’s father Terah, the patriarch of the family, took the lead. Clearly, he was not ready to let Abram lose to go to some strange land following the voice of some strange God; and clearly Abram was not quite ready (or at least not yet brave enough) to let loose of his family and trust himself fully to God.

So this is one of those instances where between the lines you can see that there was real family drama and I am sure the conflict was not pretty. This was a patriarchal people and the head of the family was kind of like the king. What he said was the rule of law and it applied to all in the household.

So where did this put Abram? He knew he heard from God, he knew what God wanted him to do, but there was this problem of his dad. I am sure he went back and forth at being mad at God for telling him to do something that would have been considered to be treason and betrayal and then he was probably mad at himself for not having the courage to follow through with what God had commanded. I am sure that his soul was tortured.

Then Abram also had to deal with the rest of the family and their expectations of him. That is one of the reasons why he was dragging around his nephew Lot. Everyone expected him to do the “right” thing for the family and that did not include leaving the land and leaving everyone else behind.

Who knows maybe Abram convinced himself that in some figurative way he was obeying God. After all he left Ur, which he might argue was technically the land of his father. Besides, only religious fanatics take things so literally. After all, leaving his dad, nephew and the entire family would not be very loving and surely a God of love would not ask him to do such a harsh and cruel thing.

We go through that kind of rationalization all the time when we believe what God asks of us is too difficult and will cause too many practical problems with our family and friends. We try and make things all figurative as if God did not really mean what He so clearly said. I know that some of you have been in a very similar situation to Abram in terms of the lack of family support for what God has asked of you.

God has led you to Boulder to be a part of this fellowship and He has asked you to focus your time and efforts on what the Lord is doing here and your relatives are simply not in agreement with your choices. Some of you have taken a lot of



flack over this and the pressure has not been subtle. They do not understand how your “God” would not naturally want you to go home and be with your family. They do not understand why you are not out pursuing your dream job or the career you went to school for. They simply have no place to fit in their construct of life the kinds of choices you have made in your faith.

Anytime we are put in a situation where we feel as if we have to choose between God and our family it is absolutely miserable and the pressure is overwhelming. Despite what we know God wants, we feel as if we are being disloyal, rebellious, hurtful and unloving; and we feel that way because that is what our family members say to us. It is a hard thing when God has different plans for our lives than everyone else. But true faith, active faith, requires us to choose God above all else. I want to turn our attention to one of the most personally disturbing passages in the Bible found in ***Matthew 10:34-38***.

***Matthew 10:34-39***

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Wow, this is hard and quite disturbing; which is why most people deal with it in a figurative way or just skip over it all together. But this is how serious the call to follow God really is. He says, “Get out of that old country and go forth; it’s pulling you down.” To be a man or woman of faith you simply must be willing to love God more than all else in this world. You must be willing to live in truth; and, if He demands, to abandon all in order to enjoy the benefits of a living and thriving relationship with God. You must be willing to take your cross and die to all that this world has to offer you. It must all fade and become dull and worthless before you. Your call is not unlike the call God gave to Abraham. He wants you to go forth!

Sadly, Abram bowed to the family pressure and he let his idol worshiping dad have the final say. I find it interesting that Haran means, “A dry land.” That is so picturesque of our lives when we choose to follow our own path instead of the one God set before us. Everything loses its flavor and beauty and life becomes so barren. I know you know what I mean. I know you have experienced that form of desert dwelling.

Now you might be thinking that maybe the reason they stopped in Haran was not out of rebellion but because Terah was too old to travel any further; after all, according to **Genesis 11:32** he was over 200-years old. That may be, but Terah should not have been on the trip in the first place so we cannot get away from the fact that Abram was intentionally disobedient to God.

Further, because of the comment we found in **Joshua 24:2** about Terah being an idol worshiper, and the fact that the second seat of worship of the God Sin was in Haran, I think there might have been more to their stop in Haran than meets

the eye. When it came down to it, I don't think Terah wanted to leave the land of his "gods" and go to some unknown land with an unknown God.

You have to remember what we have learned about so called other "gods" and the unseen world of demonic activity. We know that demons are very territorial and are organized much like an army with ranks of demons that are over larger and larger pieces of territory. We see that in ***Daniel 10:20-21*** where Gabriel explains that he helps Michael fight the territorial spirits of ruling empires (Babylon, Persia, Greece, etc).

We also see it in a much smaller scale where the legion of demons that Jesus cast out begged Him not to cast them out of the region (***Mark 5:9-10***). So demons stake their territory and from there they start their deception and before long they have men and women believing they are some sort of "god" and they evoke all types of idolatrous worship.

This is why, in the days of old, "gods" were all localized and were most often associated with the productivity of the land and fertility of the people. We see this so clearly in the behavior of the Assyrians after they had conquered the northern tribes of Israel. The Assyrian strategy of conquest involved deportation of the indigenous people to other conquered lands and the importation of various foreigners from those other conquered lands. When these foreigners were living in Israel, they started to worship the gods of their old lands. So God, the one and only true, God, sent lions to tear them apart.

The Assyrian government recognized that the God "of the land" was too powerful so they took a deported Jew and sent him back to Israel to go and teach the foreign settlers how to worship the God of the land (***2 Kings 17:25-28***).

So it does not matter that they did not know that the God of the land was the God of the entire universe, the point I wanted to make was about their mindset and how in their experience the “gods” they knew and worshiped were all localized and territorial and tied to the land; which makes sense since the territorial demons were the true power of these so called “gods.”

So with all that said, there is a big possibility that Terah did not want to actually leave what he thought was the comfort, safety, and familiarity of the moon god—and the territorial demonic spirits who ruled that land. This is why Terah took the family right up to the end of what was then known as the Babylonia Empire in Mesopotamia and then just stopped.

If you think about this aspect of the story, it starts to make sense why God instructed Abram to leave his native land and all his relatives behind. God was not just being mean and cruel intending to torture Abram by having him make such a harsh decision. No, the Lord had chosen Abram to know the true God and to experience His righteousness and like a loving father He wanted Abram safe. He wanted Abram far away from all that spiritual demonic corruption as well as the family pressure to compromise that He knew would be placed on Abram. That is why He told Him to just leave it all and go.

So this brings us back around to **Genesis 12:1**. It is not as if once Terah died that Abram was off again on this grand adventure of faith. No; God had to come to him a second time and once again command him to leave his native country, his relatives, and his father's family, and go to the land that God would show him. Even then, after a second visit from God, it is apparent that his dad's ghost still haunted Abram (in a proverbial way). I say that because it seems that Abram was

motivated by guilt and duty to bring along his nephew Lot instead of honoring the command of the Lord which was to leave his Father's family behind.

So it seems that the compromise within Abram's soul was great. He not only allowed himself to be controlled by his dad, he had also himself become reluctant to leave what he had known so well and the land where he felt safe.

Keep in mind; Ur and Haran were both cities with the conveniences, at least for that time, of a modern city. Yet, according to our passage in Hebrews, Abram was going as a foreigner into the land of Canaan where he would live as a roving vagabond sleeping in tents. Just the idea of living like that for any extended period of time, much less your whole life, would make anyone reluctant to leave the convenience of a nice bed.

But guess what? Abram finally left and obeyed God. He left the conveniences, he left his friends, he left his family, he left his religion, and he left all that he had known and ventured off into this unknown land. As such, Abram became a hero of faith and commended as a man who obeyed the Lord.

If you stop for a moment and think about the things that God has asked you to do, and the struggle that you went through, the fits you threw, and so on before you obeyed, you can't take too hard of a line toward Abram's rebellion and disobedience. What God was asking him to do was rough. All I can say is that I am so thankful that God sees us through the filter of the cross and rejoices in our obedience of faith because for some of us it takes a long time to get there.

As it says in **2:17-18**, He is so patient with our weaknesses, He is so merciful in our failings, and He is able to help us when we are tempted. After all, He has been there; Jesus became like us in everything so that way He can be our good and

faithful High Priests who advocates for us and mediates the new covenant on our behalf with the Father (**8:6; 9:24**).

God led Abram into the land of Canaan and despite all his previous shenanigans, Abram finally obeyed and according to **11:9** by faith he went to live in a land of promise, as in a foreign land. Let's stop for a moment on that phrase "by faith." This means that although God led Abram He did not force Abram to go. Abram still had to make his own decision to let the Word of God be the ultimate authority over his life and bet his life on that Word. That is exactly what Abram did and that is why he is remembered and honored.

We must also be careful to not extract Abram's decision to follow the Lord in such a way that does not capture the intensity of this decision. His dad issues set aside, this was still a treacherous journey. It was over 400 miles from Haran to the land of Canaan and Abram would have had to travel through some tough terrain and across a vast part of the Arabian Desert. This would have been no fun and quite dangerous at that.

Abram had no knowledge of the way. There were no well traveled paths, no road signs or white blazes; he was literally backpacking it and he had many people in tow for which he was responsible. It was not just Abram, Sarai and Lot. From **Genesis 14:14** we know that he had at 318 men, servants, who were born into his household, and then when you add to that the probable number of women and children, it was quite a responsibility and quite an undertaking.

He was going to be traveling into territory occupied by people of a foreign tongue and he did not know if they were going to be kind or cruel to him. I am sure he was worried that they were going to be threatened by this big group

coming into their land and that they would not make it easy for Abram to establish a residence in that land. He would have no inherent right to the land as God said was going to give it to him. Thus, Abram was going to have to wander and wait on God until He did what He said; and, keep in mind, God never gave Abram a time table for when he would accomplish his promises.

This puts some meat on the skeleton, so to speak, on that phrase that we must bet our lives on what we know to be true about God. At this stage, it does not seem obvious to us that Abram even knew that much about God; but clearly he knew enough to leave everything and face a perilous journey. He knew that God was personal and would communicate directly to him; so he decided to trust himself to God.

Come to think about it, Abram probably had heard about God through some faithful men and women that passed Abram's path at some point in his past. I say that because if you remember when we studied about Melchizedek, it is clear that Melchizedek's reputation as a priest of the Lord preceded him. That is why Abram tithed to Melchizedek from his spoils of war. So there were people who knew the living God and for Abram to have left Ur in the first place, he must have been convinced, deep down inside, that this God who spoke to him is the God of all lands. Check out this verse in Malachi, I love it.

***Malachi 1:11***

But my name is honored by people of other nations from morning till night. All around the world they offer sweet incense and pure offerings in honor of my name. For my name is great among the nations, says the Lord Almighty.

Who knows maybe Abram at one point ran into Job or some of his friends; they lived around that time.

**11:10** says that Abraham was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Now there is nothing in Genesis which indicates that Abram was on a hunt for this mysterious city or else we would see him searching like a mad man behind every mountain for this amazing place like the conquistadors searching for Eldorado, the city of gold.

Therefore, I believe that the Holy Spirit is giving us a deep look into the source of Abraham's faith. Abraham knew that this world was not the end of the story. He knew that there was more to come. He knew that the Lord had prepared a place for him and that the Lord would be faithful to bring him into this land. He knew that the land of Canaan was just a type of what will be in eternity. I believe it was Abraham's knowledge of that truth that motivated him throughout his life to cling to the Lord and trust himself to God.

What do you think about that phrase, "the city that has foundations?" That is kind of a weird statement. Again, I think the Holy Spirit is making the point that Abraham knew that this world was not his home. He knew that the earth could not provide him a permanent residence. Therefore, when Abraham left the land of his father, Abraham lost sight of this world. He considered himself to be on a journey whose ultimate stop would be eternity—a city with foundations. He was living for a city that would become his permanent and fixed dwelling place.

Have you crossed over and like Abraham decided that you are no longer living for this world, but merely having to live in this world doing what God has asked



you to do while you wait for that eternal dwelling with God? This is the perspective that God wants us to adopt. This is the perspective of all who come to know that they belong to God.

The world and all our enjoyments in it must be looked upon with a holy indifference and, if necessary, even contempt. We must no longer look upon this world as our country, our home, but as our temporary dwelling and we must not hold on to it so tightly. Some of us are so wrapped up in the world (and it in us) that we have not really left Ur. And then some of us have left Ur but like Abram we have either taken too many things with us that we were to have left behind or we have stopped in Haran not sure that we want to go all the way.

We must live above this world and leave behind all our affection for it. We must place our emotion and our attachment to the future that God has planned for each of us. We must let that be our motivation for living by faith, trusting ourselves to God, doing only what He tells us to do. And when we blow it and fail, we can get right back up and move forward in the promises that God has made for us because like Abram we are His heroes of faith and He does not deal with us on the basis of our sin; for we are forgiven. What a great loving and merciful God we serve. Tether yourself to this truth; it will keep you secure!

Let's Pray.