

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:4-9

INTRODUCTION

Rom 1:16-17 – “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”

Martin Luther

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483 in Eisleben, Saxony, which was then part of the “Holy Roman Empire.” The next morning, he was baptized as a Catholic on the feast day of St. Martin of Tours.

Luther originally looked at Abraham’s call to leave his house as an example to enter the monastery. He entered an Augustinian monastery in 1505 to become a priest.

By 1507, Luther had become a priest and celebrated mass and service in the monastery – none of which provided peace to Luther’s inner conflict and personal sin. Luther began to rightly understand Abraham as an example to all Christians.

Luther became preoccupied with the question of his own salvation. He became more and more distressed with the enormity of his sins and his inability to satisfy a righteous God.

At the suggestion of a friend, Luther set aside his Roman Catholic Church’s theological books and turned to the study of the Bible. It was the Roman Catholic Church’s position on works-based salvation was increasingly distressing.

Luther followed the life of a monk in every detail: prayer, fasting, night watches, self-mortification, and confession.

Later he wrote, “If ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, I would have gotten there.”

Luther studied the Pauline epistles, pondering day and night “the righteousness of God” and the “faith” by which a righteous man shall live (Rom 1:16-17).

He was brought to the conviction that the sinner is justified by faith alone without works of law. Luther came to understand justification as a single act of God. Luther was saved in the monastery while reading the Scriptures.

There are many fundamental principles of the Reformation:

- *Sola Deo Gloria*
- *Sola Scriptura*
- Church of Believers
- Priesthood of All Believers
- Sanctity of All Callings

But the battle cry issue of the Reformation is *Sola Fide* (faith alone). This is the Shibboleth, the dividing line, between biblical Christianity and every false belief system in the world.

Salvation by faith alone (*Sola Fide*) is the **heart of the Gospel**.

→The biblical poster child for *Sola Fide* is Abraham.
Abraham is saved by faith alone (**Gen 15:6**).

Proposition: 2 Fundamental Components of Abraham’s Saving Faith:

- I. His Saving Faith **Works**
- II. His Saving Faith **Witnesses**.

READ Gen 12:4-9

So That:

1st Fundamental Component of Abraham’s Saving Faith ...

- I. His Saving Faith **Works** **Gen 12:4-6**

Point – Journey to the land. Journey of faith. Obedience.

Proof – **“⁴So Abram went forth”**

→ Obedience! He obeys the Word of God!

Gen 12:1 – **“Go!”** → 12:4 – **“Abram went”**

The word of God was “go” and Abraham went.

His obedient faith works - despite **obstacles**, despite **opposition**.

Abraham’s **Obedient Faith Works** ...

A. Despite Obstacles

Point – Forsake all (wealth/security of Mesopotamia) and follow. Faith in the promises is demonstrated by obedience to the call - to all the commands God has given.

Proof – **“⁴So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.”**

“seventy-five years old” – Abram was middle-aged at that time. Not an easy thing! It is one thing for a young man, a young couple to forsake and depart ... entirely different thing for a middle aged man, a middle aged couple, especially at that time.

“⁵And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.”

Lot again?? He is mentioned for the fourth time since 11:27 (11 verses)

- this is an indication that something important is coming
- Gen 13

“the persons which they had acquired in Haran” – all of their possessions and all their people - logistical obstacle

- 318 “trained men” (fighting – Gen 14:14) – so probably at least 1000 men, women, and children in his care
- an indication that Abram is gaining wealth
- the **land of Canaan** approximately 400 miles SW from **Haran**

word **“persons”** – נַפְשׁוֹת – literally means “souls” – Gen 2:7

- emphasizes spiritual
- there is a different Hebrew word for servants/slaves but God had Moses use this word to describe these people
- These are converts – Abram has already been sharing his faith in Haran.

Abram is seeking the *shalom* of those around him

- **Jer 29:7** – “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.”

Illustration – We had a LGG Board of Directors meeting yesterday. There is an expat LGG envoy in Jordan. The Jordanian government is actually expelling some Westerners for their protection against ISIS. This expat wants to stay there despite the very real risk to his life.

Luther – *“Faith is a lively and powerful thing; it is not merely a drowsy and idle thought; nor does it float somewhere upon the heart as a duck upon the water, but it is like water warmed through and through by a good warm fire”*

Application – We need to believe the One who has given you the call and believe the One who has made you the promise. That is what Abram did.

Abraham's **Obedient Faith Works** ...

B. Despite Opposition

“^{6a}And Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh.”

Shechem – this is a pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Jacob purchased land there and also built an altar there (33:18-20)

“oak (terebinth) of Moreh” – **hr,Am** means “teacher”

- may describe this place as an ancient shrine where instruction was given (a **terebinth** tree was later used for idol worship – Hos 4:13)
- hostile environment of opposition
- supported by **“^{6b}Now the Canaanite was then in the land”**

Remember **9:25** – “Cursed be Canaan”

- third being to be cursed – serpent, Cain, Canaan
- also, recall the original audience on the Plains of Moab, getting ready to enter and take the land

Abram built the altar and worshipped in the midst of hostile pagan territory

- a visible evidence of faith

Illustration – **Shechem** – became the place of choosing

- blessing & cursing [Gerizim (S) and Ebal (N)] (Deut 11:29,30)
- Joshua's last charge (Josh 24)
- Kingdom of Solomon torn in two (1 Kgs 12)

Application– Faith is to be proclaimed (even in hostile environment).

2nd Fundamental Component of Abraham's Saving Faith ...

II. His Saving Faith Witnesses **Gen 12:7-9**

<u>Point</u> – Journey to the Land	Worship in the Land	
Journey of Faith	Evidence of Faith	
Obedience	Proclamation	
Faith Works	Faith Witnesses	→Proclamation!

“And the LORD appeared to Abram”

First record of God “**appearing**” to man (after Fall)

- called Theophany/Christophany - when God appears

When God appears to Abram, it shows that, although the Canaanites were permitted to occupy the land for a time.... it is God's land.....and God is in the land.

Application – Stand where God has you!

Eric Alexander, Pastor in Glasgow, Scotland – *“There is no ideal place to serve God except the place He set you down.”*

Jim Elliot - *“Where ever God has you, be all there”*

“and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’”

Abraham was never given anything. The only part of the land he ever got (Gen 23), he bought – burial plot.

Abraham has to exchange the known for the unknown and find his reward in what he would not live to see (nation) what is intangible (name) and what he would be to others (blessing).
And now the Land promised to him will be given to his descendants.

Point – There is a paradox here of permanence and pilgrimage:

A. The Paradox of **Permanence**

“^{7c}So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. ⁸Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.”

Abram builds an altar in Shechem.
Then they move again about 35 mi. from **Shechem** to **Bethel/Ai**.
And he **builds another altar!**→ **“to the LORD”**. That is permanence - a permanent testimony.

God had promised to make Abram’s name great. Abram responds by proclaiming the name of the Lord.

“and called upon the name of the LORD.”

- public proclamation or gathering of worship (cf.4:26)
- Martin Luther translated as “preached” (*predigte*) which is good rendering in this context
- Abram proclaimed his faith.

Abram, in contrast to “men of a name” (6:4) and the Tower of Babel (11:4) exalts the **name of YHWH** rather than his own name.

Abraham's saving **faith works**.

And Abraham's saving **faith witnesses!**

“pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east”

Contrast (vs. 8) between	<u>“pitched”</u>	<u>“built”</u>
	for himself	for God
	temporary	permanent

The structure he left behind was an altar to God; no monument to his own wealth or stature

- such a contrast to Tower of Babel!!

When Abraham dies ... the altars remain. Permanence.

Application – In the same way, our focus should be on esteeming God and not ourselves, on extolling God. That is the legacy we should be seeking to build.

2 Cor 4:18 – “we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

B. The Paradox of Pilgrimage

Illustration – The Jehovah's Witnesses built a ten-bedroom mansion in San Diego in 1929 called *Beth-Sarim* (“House of the Princes”). This was in anticipation of another one of their failed prophecies, the return of various resurrected Old Testament biblical patriarchs or prophets such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The idea being that the resurrected saints would need a nice place to reside. It was maintained by the Watch Tower Society and conveniently used as a winter home and executive office for Watch Tower president Joseph Franklin Rutherford.

Point – Abraham lived a life of a nomad. He didn't live in a mansion then, he was living, acting, working and building up souls and his sight was always on the eternal, not the temporal.

Heb 11:9 – “By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise.”

Proof – “⁹ **And Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.**”

Shechem, Bethel/Ai, Negev

- these are the same three sites/area visited by **Jacob** when he returned to Canaan from Haran (when Esau was pursuing him)
- same three sites occupied in **Joshua's** conquest, Israel will go up from the **Negev** to **Bethel/Ai**, and **Shechem**.

We see different ways that Abram's faith is a model for us in terms of the works and witness. There is a pilgrimage aspect to it as well. We aren't called to the nomadic lifestyle but we are called to talk, look and live different than the world.

Illustration– Pilgrim's Progress – *“The Pilgrims were clothed with such kind of raiment as was diverse from the raiment of any that traded in that fair. The people, therefore, of the fair made a great gazing upon them: some said they were fools; some, they were bedlams; and some, they were outlandish men ... few could understand what they said. They naturally spoke the language of Canaan; but they that kept the fair were the men of this world: so that from one end of the fair to the other, they seemed barbarians each to the other ... But that which did not a little amuse the merchandisers was, that these pilgrims set very light by all their wares. They cared not so much as to look upon them; and if they*

called upon them to buy, they would put their fingers in their ears, and cry, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity," and look upward, signifying that their trade and traffic was in heaven."

Application – Pilgrims look different. Pilgrims talk differently. Pilgrims live differently. We are to be in this world but not captured by it, not lured by it. We need to be different. We are not permanent residents of this world.

CONCLUSION

Terah had 3 sons – Abram, Haran, and Nahor. Both Haran and Nahor had cities named after them.

If you were to ask a contemporary in Ur at the time about the sons, you would hear that Haran and Nahor, they were successes! They had cities named after them.

“What about Abram?” They might say “We don’t really know what happened to him. I think he went off to the land of Canaan.” Abram would have been deemed a failure. Haran and Nahor would have been deemed successes.

In fact, the Bible paints the same picture, in a certain way:

Rom 4:19 – “without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;”

Heb 11:12 – “as good as dead”

But then God ...

Rom 4:20 – “yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,”

The fact is, today, nobody remembers Nahor. Nobody remembers Haran. In fact, they would be entirely gone from the annals of history except for the fact they are the brothers of Abraham.

God chooses one man who responds by faith and becomes the epitome of faith throughout the Bible (Roman, Galatians, James, etc.)

Abraham didn't demonstrate his faith with a single act of faith. He demonstrated his faith with an attitude and life of faith.

- Faith That Works
- Faith That Witnesses

Isa 51:1-2 – “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ²Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain; when he was one I called him, then I blessed him and multiplied him.”