

By Faith Abraham

by G.W. North

Abraham's faith and obedience to God's call led him to a new place of faith, where he experienced hope and ultimately fulfilled God's purposes for his life.

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-4, Romans 4:20-21, Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 11:8-10, James 2:23

Topics: "Obedience to God", "Faith"

Description

G.W. North emphasizes the profound faith of Abraham, who obeyed God's call to leave his homeland for an unknown land, trusting in God's promise of inheritance. This journey symbolizes the spiritual journey of faith, where true fulfillment and purpose are found in obedience to God's call. Abraham's faith was not just about reaching a physical destination but about entering a deeper relationship with God, characterized by hope and perseverance. Despite never finding the city he sought, Abraham's faith and hope kept him moving forward, illustrating the essence of living as a pilgrim in faith. Ultimately, North highlights that true faith is rooted in love for God, which empowers believers to trust Him fully, even in the face of trials.

Transcript

'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went'. When God calls a man He always calls him to a new place. When that place is finally reached, and only then, that man shall live as he should live: his inheritance is there and therein he shall serve God. The place to which God calls is the place of faith. To be of any proper use to God or to himself on the earth a man has to reach that place. The man who does so inherits all God has for him; not until then though. There is no mystery about this: man only inherits all things then because that is where and when God inherits all there is of him, as He so rightfully should: the inheritance of the saints is among those who are sanctified. Earlier we noted that faith is natural in man; it is quite impossible to be a man and not have it to some degree: (Paul's word to the Thessalonians is 'all men have not the faith: faith and the faith must not be confused'); in order not to exercise faith man has to act contrary to his nature. Not so with Abraham though: he heard, he listened, he obeyed and his faith eventually led him to a new land (or place) of faith altogether. Natural faith, though fundamental to a man's make-up, knows nothing of this, unless God speaks to him. Saving faith cannot rise in a man as of nature because of sin; it can pass from the 'natural' to the spiritual if the heart will obey God.

With the rise of faith in Abraham's heart hope rose also. O what a place (plateau, position) is faith! God was going to give Abraham a place and an inheritance on the earth, that is on the natural plane. The spiritual position God had in mind for him was not mentioned -- he must attain to the natural plane first, and then only if he would go all out for it. Abraham did just that. For God's earthly plans it was important that Abraham should first inherit the land, everything else would follow from that. This was not the most important thing though, the all-important thing was Abraham's inward heart position. To God's great joy Abraham had ascended to the position of faith even on the natural plane. At first God made no mention of the spiritual place and position He had in mind for Abraham, he was not yet ready for it, he would not have been able to receive it even if God had been ready to reveal it. Man only rises to all the greatness God has planned for him by degrees, or short steps of faith; not all at once does God give all His fullness; He always fills to capacity, but man is such a tiny being, one who knew wrote, 'of His fullness have all we received'. For Abraham God had planned a unique position in His kingdom and glory, but beyond the first command He never divulged any of that to him in the beginning.

Everything God had in mind for Abraham was in the original statement of intention He made to him: to whomsoever God speaks this is always so. He does not say everything all at once, if He did so man would be overwhelmed; He might even engender unbelief also, because of man's incredulity. God, in His wisdom, first set out to bring Abraham into the place of faith, that having arrived and proved God therein he should go on into all God had prepared for him; God's purpose in bringing Abraham into the promised land was to prepare him for all that was to follow. Abraham did not know exactly where his earthly inheritance was; he did not greatly care; in heart he had found the place of faith from which he could proceed and he went out from where he was with determination and in high hopes. God had not spoken to him of the things he hoped for but he had heart-faith, and according

to the truth of the faith in his heart he found substantial ground for all the hopes building up there too. 'After', that was the key word, both to him and to God; first the word, then faith, then obedience, then afterwards the inheritance; therein all the hopes of God and his own hopes would be fulfilled; it would be wonderful. It was, but fulfilment was gradual; it had to be, it was so vast.

Many of his hopes, those that could be, were immediately fulfilled as soon as Abraham arrived -- he had come into the promised land -- what anticipation. He traversed it, north, south, east, west, viewing it, enjoying it; it was his. 'All this is mine', he must have thought, 'but where is it? Where is that for which I am looking?' He could not find what he wanted, in hope of which he had left his roots; faith he had, but not yet did he realise his hopes; he was restless in the land of promise, he could not settle anywhere. If he had thought that the days of his pilgrimage would end once he reached Canaan and that he would find all he was looking for he was wrong; in various places he pitched his tent and searched around for a while, but not for long -- he could not stay; hope drove him on. Where was the city of his desire and his dreams? And where was the child he felt he must have and both he and Sarah so much wanted? He had responded to the call, he now had the land, he was living in it, it was his, he had the land rights, but he felt a stranger there; he was always moving on, looking, searching, waiting, wanting. When O when would his hopes be fulfilled? Time came when the dearest of all his natural hopes was fulfilled and Isaac was born; it took another visitation and another promise from God to bring it to pass though. Abraham and Sarah rejoiced in their son when he came, he was their chiefest delight, but still no city for him to live in. Where was the city? Time went by. Jacob was born to Isaac, but Abraham was still living in a tent, so were his son and grandson; the search was fruitless. Disappointment!

Abraham never did find the city. He expected to find it, but he never did, it was not there. The expectation of faith did not turn to bitterness in him though, instead it came to fruition; a hope kept his spirit buoyant and sweet. Faith and hope took him to the land and kept him residing there in a tent, always ready to move on. Faith and hope are constant companions wedded together by God, and as surely as faith is the substance of hope, so hope, if it be firmly grounded thereon, is the spur of faith. Hope is not fanciful, it is living; hopes that are of God are faith's goals as well as its goads; faith is the evidence that, although as yet unrealised; informed hopes, firmly rooted in faith, are of faith's substance and shall one day be fulfilled. Faith causes a man to become a pilgrim, hope keeps a man a pilgrim, it ensures that he remains a traveller, always living as a stranger, even in the land of promise God gives him for his inheritance. The hope that beckoned ahead, as well as the faith that drove him on, made Abraham great; he purposed to settle down and live in a city that had foundations, but not unless its builder and maker was God. From the splendour of his hopes, already perhaps in heart he built the city; he had the substance of it in him. He knew it was there somewhere -- it just had to be.

It is impossible for a man of faith to desire a city of righteousness where all is peace and joy and love and it not be in existence; it is, and its architect and artificer is God. It is not possible for man to have high moral standards for daily living and there be no God who made a man to hold such standards. It is not possible for there to be a sun in the heavens if there be no heavens for the sun. Abraham was a pilgrim by both the law and the logic of faith; he was a stranger to the philosophies of men content to live in cities

defiled by the iniquity and injustices of a degenerate culture. Abraham approached and appraised many such cities; he abominated them and abandoned them: they were cities of sin. Abraham had vision as well as taste, ideals as well as ideas; above all he had fixity of purpose. So had Abel, so had Enoch and so had Noah. There was no city for Abel to seek, no garden of Eden given to him either; his father had forfeited it. Abel sought God and found Him, and he died finding out his brother man.

Enoch's and Noah's and Abraham's spiritual heredity derived from Abel's; though he had no children of the flesh he was their 'father'. He heard no voice speaking in Eden, no man set him an example or instructed him in the ways of righteousness. From whence then came his desires for it, and who suggested to him the need of sacrifice and the way of offering to God? No one; not any man. He would almost certainly have been instructed in the words and works and ways of God by his father and mother, but always with shame and in self-reproach. The fall had not obliterated Eden from the minds of Adam and Eve, but all Abel heard from them about God was drawn from memories of former days, now long gone. God walked and talked with them in the garden then: now He never came; He had departed from them and was gone. Because of their sin against Him God had expelled Abel's parents from their paradise; they had lost Him and he had 'lost' them; they had forfeited their 'promised land', consequently Abel was born outside of paradise. What his hopes were we cannot be sure. Whether Abel believed that it was possible that he, and perhaps his father and mother and brother, would be restored to Eden's earthly paradise no one knows; we can be sure of little else than that he sought God. The fall, be it noted, and what he had inherited from his parents thereby, had not destroyed either his natural faith or the hope which was sister to it. Perhaps also he hoped for reconciliation, if not of restitution and rehabilitation with God. Who knows? Surely these hopes could not have been destroyed. Longings to know God had not been obliterated from the human heart, nor shall they ever be -- sin could never do that. Knowing this, whenever God speaks to the human heart He does so with this in mind and therefore directs His word to it; He knows that man is able to believe, and this being so is able to believe God if he will. Other factors are involved in this and have bearing on the soul, affecting vital decisions; but none is as basic and as important as this.

Abel chose right, so did Enoch, and in course of time so did Noah: God brought him from the old (antediluvian) world through the flood into the new age. Generations were born and passed away between Noah's death and Abraham's birth, but it was because of Noah's faith and labours that life on earth was sustained and eventually Abraham was born and in his day became such a great man. Insofar as it is possible to be hesitantly sure, it is almost certain that, had the righteous line not been kept intact during and throughout the corruption and violence of the pre-flood society, there might never have been an Abraham. Not knowing the mind and ways of God and what He might have done in His sovereignty, it is not possible to surmise or even assume what would have happened, but humanly speaking, except there had been an Abraham, the true faith by which men's souls are saved would not have become known. It was spoken of Abraham by the Lord Jesus that he saw His day: Abraham never had a more harrowing or more important experience than that. Wonderfully enough men of faith and understanding can see Abraham's day, and by that faith rejoice with that faithful man. He never found the city he was looking for, but he saw Christ's day and was glad; both for him and for God that was all-sufficient. Although Christ never said this of the three great men who were elders of the race before Abraham, these also saw something of the Lord's day, which is to say that to a degree they each exhibited something of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and the work He accomplished during the 'day' of His earthly life. Whether they recognised what they saw and rightly assessed it and rejoiced in it as did Abraham in his day we have no certain knowledge, but each had a part in the unfolding of the pre-incarnate revelation of the Christ.

Abel 'saw' the substitutionary death and sacrifice of the lamb and the laid-down life, wholly acceptable to and totally accepted by God: Enoch 'saw' the eternally approved, completely acceptable and translatable life of Christ: Noah 'saw' the day of grace which commenced with the coming of the Holy Spirit and shall extend throughout the day of salvation to the end of the age. In Christ all these things find fulfilment, but unto those men who never knew Him because they lived at the beginning of things so many thousands of years ago, this was the privilege given them. Although unknown to each other, between them they individually and collectively served God and His as yet undisclosed purposes in Christ. In and through them God set forth a mystic preview of Christ's great day of salvation: how necessary then is faith. Who in any age knows what great things God has laid up in store for each individual believing and obedient heart?

Perhaps one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, of all the things revealed in Abraham's life is that it is essential to live in a place where all God's purposes for a man can be fulfilled in his life. God was not prepared, nor was He able to do with Abraham what He wanted to do in the place where he was when He first spoke to him. For many reasons, which God did not disclose to Abraham while he was in his native land, he had to go to another place, a foreign land, yet he, unquestioningly, went there. Being wise after the event and having the scriptures to assist us, we may be able to set down a variety of reasons why God insisted upon Abraham leaving the place he was in and journeying to Canaan. Abraham did not have that advantage though: 'he went out, not knowing whither he went'. If anyone other than his immediate relatives knew what he was doing they might have considered him to be foolish, if not downright stupid: 'You say you do not know where you are going? You are a misguided man!' may have been the least uncomplimentary remark made to him. But although we may discover all the reasons for his departure from Chaldea, we should find nothing as important for the implementation of them as the faith which made him go: 'By faith Abraham, when he was called ...' obeyed. Everyone must realise that the call of God which reaches the heart is far more than an invitation; it is authoritative, an imperative command to be obeyed immediately. The call of God is always to a calling; Abraham was being called to a life and a lifetime work, which life and work is the calling. The calling of God is greater than the actual call, that is,

the occasion and the act of calling; it is intended by God to be the introduction to the calling, a person's first awakening to it.

God's call is both an election and a selection; it is a directive as well as an attraction. According to the sovereignty of His will God calls men, but lest singularity should destroy hope in a man's heart it is essential to remember that it is not so much who is called but who is calling and to what a man is called. Definition is important here. Abram was called to a place, that was to where he was called. Abram made his calling and election sure as he fulfilled his calling when he got there. When he had been there a while he was called Abraham, 'high father of a multitude', but not until he was also called God's friend, and a prophet; that is to what he was called. See what this man would have missed if he had ignored the call! It is fatal to ignore God's call; if it is obeyed all begins there: if it is ignored all ends there. The man who ignores God's call ignores God: at best this will mean the loss of a whole lifetime on earth: at worst it could mean the loss of heaven itself -- what folly! The moment God calls a man he is at crisis point, therefore at all costs he must become most serious. Paul wrote regarding his call, 'God ... called me by (or in) His grace': that God should call any man is sheerest grace, no man is worthy of calling, even the greatest of men have never deserved such favour. Paul clearly revealed his own sense of unworthiness of the favour and said he was not worthy to be called an apostle; only grace made him what he became in this world and he knew it. But when he heard it he knew that the voice which called him was the voice of authority, and his response to it was 'Lord' -- the call was imperative: he obeyed and so did Abraham when he heard it.

Writing to the Romans Paul makes the call very definite by speaking of those who are 'the called', and then adding, 'according to purpose'. There are many callings and many purposes, but there are not many calls; God did not constantly call Abraham or Paul, He did not have to. By the call they were introduced to the calling into which the call led, and from that point onwards they stayed in the calling with which they were called; their calling and their life were one. Realising this, each in his day made his calling and election sure. At one point, because of what he deemed to be necessary, Abraham did depart from the place to which he was called and went down to Egypt. God allowed him to do it; He neither prevented him from following his own heart, nor did He call him back from the place to which he descended. It appeared that he had forsaken or lost his calling, but God did not call him again, nor did He recall him to the land; it was not necessary. What Abraham had done did not negate his calling: he was the called of God (perhaps the only one on the earth at that time) and that was that.

It may be that recognition and understanding of this provides a key to the understanding also of one of the mysterious passages so hard to understand in the Hebrews letter. The writer says of certain people and a certain condition that it is impossible to renew them again to repentance; the inference drawn from this (perhaps too readily) by many is that as God does not attempt to do so, neither should we, and that therefore such persons have no hope of salvation. Pursuing this thought and reading the relevant scriptures in Genesis, it appears that in process of time Abraham, without a word from God, returned to the place he had forsaken. It seems that he was forced by pressure of circumstances and an inward knowledge, to depart from Egypt in certainty of heart that needed no instruction. Under pressure from without and by conviction within he knew he must get back to the place from which he began to go wrong. Abraham was only at the beginning of his spiritual life then, a learner, but O how quickly he learned -- he never did that again. The point this man made for us is that, having been called of God to go out into a place and inherit it and all God has for us there, we must not under any circumstances leave it. If we should do so He will not recall us; instead, through pressure of circumstances and sundry miracles, as well

as the inward voice, He will work towards the rekindling of desire to be where we once were in hope that we will return.

In the incomparable parabolic illustration written for all to read if they wish, the Lord Jesus reveals the truth. The parable of the prodigal son is an apt illustration of this truth and no better Illustrator of it could possibly be found. In the story the son went into the far country quite voluntarily; the father did not want him to go, nor did he attempt to dissuade him from it, and what is more to the point, neither did he disown him because he went. That he went against his father's wishes cannot be doubted, but wherever he went and wherever he was he was still his son. Strange as it may seem, and contrary to many ideas, at no point in the story do we read that the father went after his son; he did not even send anyone to find him and remonstrate with him either. In his wisdom the father left his son in the far country to taste the bitterness of his folly and to drink of his own misery until he came to himself and realised who and where he was. He was the father's son, and yet and yet: his own state spoke to him and an inward voice spoke to him. His father spared him nothing whether of goodness or of remorse, until at last he was brought to nothingness, folly, poverty, desolation and squalor. At last he could bear it no longer and he rose and, as voluntarily as he left, went back to his father and home. The amazing thing is that he repented himself; no one tried to renew him to repentance; certainly his father did not, neither did his own brother; the prodigal in the story, like Abraham in real life, came back of his own free will. When no one else can renew us to repentance we can of our own selves arise and go back and find a welcome from our Father.

There are two men mentioned in scripture whose lives stand out as memorials of the path we must shun: one is Judas Iscariot and the other is Esau. The stories of these two men are so well known to us that we need not linger long on the details of the particular incidents in which they were involved. Judas sold his Lord and Esau sold his birthright. When at last Judas saw what he had done he repented himself and went out and committed suicide. What a tragedy, and what a pity; had he gone out and found his Lord -- if repentance had led him to Jesus -- it might have been a different story. Esau, though not so tragic a figure, similarly realised eventually what he had done, and tried to gain that primary blessing which went with the birthright, but he utterly failed, for, like Judas, he did not find the place of repentance either. He sought the inheritance of blessing carefully with tears, he may also have sought the place of repentance, but if so he did not find it; perhaps the reason for this is not hard to find: his heart was full of bitterness and revenge and murder. No heart that harbours anything evil will come to repentance or ever find forgiveness from God. When dealing with souls we must beware of trying to apply to men's needs the policies of men, however finely they may be framed and expertly applied. When counselling individuals biblical principles must be applied and righteous paths followed, but all mechanistic application of policies must be avoided; there are no party lines to follow. Broad lines of procedure may be discovered in scripture, and as we have seen with Abraham, when seeking to help men and women into or back into fellowship with God, we do ill if we ignore these.

The simple thing spoken of Abraham in the beginning is profoundly true, and is of such great importance that we must not fail to notice its significance: Abraham 'was called to go out into a place'. The 'place' of faith must be reached by everyone; with us though 'the place' is not a geographical location as in Abraham's case. Strange though it may seem, though it was bound up with another land, it was not primarily so with Abraham either. The place of faith is a heart condition and to reach it a man has to go out into it -- that is, he must respond to what God says and launch out on it without reservation. When a man does that, he and the word God has spoken become one; the man then becomes an epitome of that word and the rest of his life becomes a fulfilment of it; in other words he inherits the place. This is that place of

faith which Abraham reached; he found it was the place where all God's unspoken intentions, as well as His stated promises, were abundantly fulfilled. Until he reached it and obeyed God completely, what God said lay dormant in his heart. It is said of Abraham's descendants, 'These all died in faith'; it is a remarkable assertion, unique in scripture, and who can rightly say how much credit for that is due to their father Abraham? What a pioneer he was, this one man's act of obedience affected them all; far beyond Israel it has affected every one of us also. It is said of him that 'he is the father of us all', and before God so he is. God's demand of all these children is that each should have the same kind of personal faith as father Abraham.

As we have already seen there are different kinds of faith: natural and spiritual. For our purposes here it has been necessary to point out this difference, but there is a sense in which all faith is spiritual, in that it is of spirit in whichever of those two realms it operates. This is not to say that because a man exercises natural faith he is a spiritual man in the sense in which the word spiritual is used in scripture. When a man operates natural faith he is a natural man; when he operates spiritual faith he is a spiritual man. The difference between these two states lies in this: spiritual or saving faith comes to a man when God speaks to him and he believes Him; faith of whichever order operates spontaneously. Before that he operates by natural faith and lives by it, for instance as when he eats food and drinks water, believing them to be wholesome and good. Because this latter order of faith is possible to every man he is expected by both God and man to eat and drink and live, therefore every man is held responsible to do so. Somewhat similarly the same is expected when God speaks to a man: he should (because he can) believe Him without question, as did Abraham.

Behold then the wonder of God's love that He should send Him who is The Word of God into the world that in the closing days the marvellous age of grace should be brought in and Christ be preached in all the earth for all mankind to hear and believe. The wonder lies in the simplicity of it all; God in grace has simplified His ways with mankind. Not now do we depend upon a special word to Abraham, or a special word to Moses, or an Isaiah, or a Samuel, or a David. There is no man who, above another, has the special word for this day; that has already been spoken. This Word is everything God has to say to mankind; it is extra special because it was clothed in flesh and was born a man to live out in this world the true life of faith before all. This word was from the beginning, it was, and is now, and is yet to come; only once incarnated, that word was naturally entirely spiritual both before and following the incarnation. Because of this it is more important than any other word ever spoken in this world; it is the divine, direct and eternal word of God to every man. This word was borne forth from God to Mary by an angel, that through her the Word should be born to mankind as the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Word, that Word which was ever with God and was God, which, says John, 'we have heard ... have seen ... have looked upon, and ... have handled, of the Word of life' it is the word which was lived and thereby spoken.

Therefore the writer tells the Hebrews that the days in which God spoke by the prophets are past; quite noticeably he does not mention judges or kings, though both often spoke God's word. This is not to say that what they spoke was not prophetic, it often was, but to show that by far the most important office is that of the prophet. In this connection it should be noted that when Peter

quotes David on the day of Pentecost he quotes him as patriarch and prophet, and not as king. The fathers to whom God spoke are passed away, and so has 'that which was in part', (to borrow and adapt Paul's words); all that has been done away. God ended all of it simply because it was only in part, and very limited in its effect. The partial light which broke into the darkness of the world through many lights

has gone, it has been eclipsed by the true Light which is now come. The darkness is past, so has partial light; God has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. To use two biblical words very much in vogue throughout Christendom in these days, in Christ the Logos and the Rhema are one; God's personal thought, as well as His life, has been fully expressed by Him, manifested in flesh and blood.

The purposes for which God has done this are phenomenal in contemplation. 'Beloved', says John, the great apostle and prophet of the new creation, 'now are we the sons of God'; no prophet of the Old Testament ever said that of himself or of anyone. Only the prophets of the superior New Covenant spoke like this. Simply because men of the world do not know these things, they do not know us. When Christ was here the world did not know and would not recognise Him as the Son of God; they could not know it because they would not believe it. Similarly, (though by a different kind of miracle, and to a lesser degree than He), we are the sons of God now. This is so certain that we are called the sons of God by God Himself. So close is the likeness of our birth to His that we are known in heaven, (and should be known on earth also) as the sons of God. As He is known as the Son of God because of His miraculous incarnation and life and death and resurrection, so do we become known as the sons of God by an actual miraculous spiritual and individual birth; by no other means could God make us His sons. It is He, not we, who has to say we are His sons, and He has to say so in our hearts; He would not say that we are if we are not.

Taking this truth even further John says, 'as He is, so are we in this world'; John was not speaking this prophetically or hopefully or presumptuously, he knew that he was a son of God. Though not equal with Him, here and now in our flesh and blood state we are the sons of Jesus' Father just as He. Upon this solid foundation we take our stand by faith, this is our place, and hopes arise in our hearts that when at last the Lord Jesus appears we shall be like Him. Nothing in scripture could be put more plainly than this. Our wondering hearts shall be the more convinced of it when we do see Him, for then we shall be as completely like Him as it is possible and suitable that we should be. Then, although to a lesser degree, we shall undeniably be seen and known as manifestations of God's word by His Son and by His Spirit, even as He in His day was the original manifestation of The Word by the Spirit.

Understanding of this may be slow to dawn upon us, and when it does, faith's grasp may be so weak that it may take a lifetime to reach fullness in us. When through grace it does, by comparison with our Lord Jesus, knowing ourselves to be utterly unworthy of it and seeing so little likeness to Him in ourselves, we cry out for more grace. The fact of it is made no less true by that though; faith is to no degree lessened because of our own or other people's opinions of ourselves. As He is The Word spoken by God for all time and peoples, so are we the word spoken by God in our time for people of our day. Paul even went so far as to say that he and his fellow-labourers were also epistles. The Lord Jesus who was and is the 'Logos' and the 'Rhema', is the Alpha and the Omega too; in fact He is both the whole alphabet of God and all the words constructed from it by God also. Well does Paul say, 'in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily', and tell us that in Him we are complete. As surely as Paul says this, so does John tell us to abide in Him and sin not, and adds an injunction to abide in Him and obey the unction which is within ourselves. This unction being an implantation from God, when obeyed develops every regenerate person's new spiritual nature in conformity to His will and in His likeness.

We have an unction from the Holy One. Given by our Father, it is a kind of second nature within us. It must not be confused with the conscience which is part of the nature of every human being's spirit, dead though he may be. Conscience is one of the many involuntary functional powers of the human being; it is one of several proofs that man is basically (a) spirit, quite distinct from the unction from the Holy One. The

unction is one of the many involuntary powers of the divine nature of which Peter speaks, that is, the nature imparted to us by new birth which alone constitutes us sons of God. Man's conscience was designed by God to be the natural functional ability through which the unction should operate in him: by new birth it is adapted to become the functional vehicle of the unction. As with the human body itself, everything of human nature was designed and made by God for God Himself. Therefore, having fashioned the conscience for the unction, He made the Holy Spirit the unction unto us. The unction is the means whereby the voice and word of God is inscribed into our new nature, and is intended by Him to impart to us certainty of knowledge about all things vital to eternal life. God uses it as the instrument of His thought, that thereby the rhema, if obeyed, should become the logos within us; thus we are enabled to co-operate with Him unto the development of the full stature of Christ in us. Because of this the sons of God can live at rest and not be forever straining to know God's will, and to catch His voice, or to hear His word, or understand His meaning, as the case and needs may be. Then, as of nature, men may become the manifestation of God's word and the demonstration of His will before all men and, as of nature, effortlessly do what He says and means.

The 'land of promise', that place of faith which we all must enter (attain to), is where we must live as pilgrims and strangers on the earth. In this place all the promises of God will be fulfilled to His obedient children, that they should enjoy the inheritance which was and is in Christ for us all. The obvious sure mark of these children is that, as He Himself does, they also should live the eternal life naturally, without struggle and inward conflict; this is what God and the writer intended by the statement, 'the just shall live by faith'. The life of faith should be steady, calm, progressive and inwardly peaceful; most of the time it should be unremarkable too.

Very little is said about any of the men so far named in this chapter. From what is recorded we cannot form any kind of picture of their day to day living. We ponder with amazement the major events of their lives, the great crises, their wonderful achievements and extraordinary heroism, but, except in the case of Noah, these achievements with their attendant trials were of short duration; the rest of their days lie in the obscurity of history, unmentioned. For every extraordinary day or event there were hundreds of ordinary days when nothing remarkable happened, humdrum, repetitive, perhaps by some people's estimation even boring. The emphasis being made is that they were living by faith rather than on what they were achieving by faith, (which is not to suggest that living by faith is one whit less ignoble than working by faith). All we know about Abel is that he made an offering to God in process of time, or 'at the end of days' -- just one event in a lifetime. Of Enoch we know little more than that he was a prophet and had a good testimony, but he achieved nothing which may be considered great or spectacular; it was God who did the spectacular thing, and no one but angels (and perhaps devils) observed the spectacle.

Noah built the ark; though fearful he enjoyed doing that no doubt, and it was a great and noble work worthy of unstinted praise, but think of thirty six thousand and five hundred days of monotonous toil! None of us have lived that long! How would we like to live every day of our life in total application to just one thing? Some might have called it slavery! And how about Abraham? The endless search for what was not there. He trekked, he pitched his tent, he struck his tent, he tramped to the four points of the compass, he marched to the borders of his land, he went everywhere. Day after day of disappointment; save the same old repetitive things of life nothing changed, it went on for years. Abraham was always looking for something he could not find -- it did not exist -- not on this earth. It was not as though he went alone either, because his heart was fixed on this and could not be diverted from it: his whole family, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, plus his entire entourage of some hundreds of persons, had to go with him. Whatever they thought

and however they felt about it they just had to go; there was no restraining him; he was relentless. The search never ceased; they stayed nowhere for long, there was no final settling down. Abraham believed, therefore he hoped, and therefore he searched, believing that his hope justified all he did; to him that kind of life was the natural outcome of faith.

The strange thing about the city that Abraham was looking for was that it had no name, which, to say the least, seems fairly unusual. For a man to be looking for a city and not to be able to name it to anyone must have seemed strange to everyone of whom he may have inquired, but that is how it was with Abraham. He knew who it was that created it, of that he was sure, it was God, and because he knew that, he knew that the city would have foundations, it must have, but where it was he had no idea. He felt pretty positive he would find it in the land of promise -- the land of promise -- what vast possibility for faith to explore and hope to flourish. Abraham felt sure that, once in the city, he would enjoy many things of which the Lord had not yet spoken and had not specifically promised him. That they were included and intended in the promise he had no doubt; they must be, though not specified they were implied by what God said and he could expect them; the fact that he had the land assured him of that. He realised that there must be many cities there and he was determined to have a good look at every one of them. What would he find? Would it be the one? He only wanted that one, the city built by God and in which He lived. Abraham wanted to come to it at last, find out its name and live there himself and perhaps see God; he felt he belonged there. Never would he move from it again, nevermore would he pitch and strike camp; his pilgrimage would be over, finding God he would get to know Him; that was all he wanted.

He was the man to whom God had spoken; how blessed he was, it was wonderful. Imagine! A city full of people to whom God's word was law and His every wish a command. The first time God spoke to him he was thrilled; because of that he was willing to leave all, go anywhere. That was only a beginning, though; God spoke to him again and again; He had to if He wanted His will done. Abraham also knew that by reason of His original promise God must speak again, He simply had to. God had committed Himself to things which necessitated much further clarification. Abraham waited in patience looking for the word to be spoken again, and the years went by. Then one day God's priest came and spoke to him, and Abraham realised how much more there was to know. The priest of the most high God? It was astounding! Abraham realised he was only at the beginning. Here on earth Melchizedek had come to find him to speak and minister to him! Where had he come from? Where did he live? What was his name? Melchizedek? He was a king. God's priest a king? Then whatever was God like? If His priest was king of righteousness and king of peace how wonderful must God Himself be? Glorious, unimaginably so: he must be King of kings. God's city must be the ultimate perfection unto which all men should seek and find that they should enter it as their final home. In lowly reverence Abraham bowed to receive the royal blessing bestowed upon him by the heavenly priest in the name of the King of kings. Rising to watch Melchizedek depart Abraham knew in his heart that he had been made rich beyond all earthly riches. Of the spoils of battle he wanted none; plunder taken at the point of a sword meant nothing to him. The blessings of the city had been brought to him before he had reached it, he could want no more. But where did Melchizedek live and what was the name of the city he came from? Was it Salem? Would he please direct him? He wanted to come there. But Melchizedek had gone.

If the desire to search for the city sprang up in Abraham's heart the day God first spoke to him, the appearing of Melchizedek strengthened it more, and till the day he died he went after it with all his heart. The God of the city had called him, the priest of God had visited him to give him bread and wine, to commune with him; it fed his soul. Surely the purpose of the visit was to strengthen his resolve: he was on

track -- now for the city. Praise God for such a husband Sarah; praise God for such a father Isaac; praise God for such a grandfather Jacob; praise God for such a master Eliezer; let all men praise God for such a leader. Blessed be God for such a man. The secret of the Lord was with him, the mystery of God and of His city was revealed to him, the knowledge of the gospel was being imparted to him, he was walking in the vision and light of a new day and another world. Later, when he was able to bear it, the mount of the Lord and the death and resurrection of Christ would be disclosed to him also. Sarah and Isaac and Jacob and Eliezer and the host of men who served him were safe with the patriarch; he brought them into the covenant and led them in the lifelong search. It was not to be wondered at if they all wondered at him. Who of all those who knew him could have failed to be influenced by him and who would not have followed him? Only they who do not love righteousness and who hate peace, who want cities of their own or of other men's design and building, men who wish to abandon their pilgrimage and settle down and make their home in this world.

What a distinguished person Abraham was; the Father intended him to be distinct from everyone else mentioned in the chapter. When God called him to go out into an earthly place He also set him apart in a spiritual place of honour above everyone else and quite unique in scripture. Abraham was predestined to represent God the Father unto men, pointing forward to the manifestation of His Fatherhood planned by Him centuries ahead. Paul was very aware of this and says of Abraham that 'before God he is the father of us all'. Abraham is not the heavenly Father of us all, but before God he is our human father in that, by two promises to him, God said that on the human side both the earthly and the heavenly host of sons, should proceed from him; Abraham believed God and what He said, so Abraham became the father of the faithful. But the excellence of Abraham is greater than that: he not only believed God for multitudes; he believed Him also for one, which is often a far more difficult thing. He believed against hope, against himself and against the combined sterility of himself and his wife, and particularly against her unbelief. Abraham believed for her when she would not believe, and because he believed, through his faith God was able to reveal His own faithfulness. How immeasurably great Abraham was; he believed for heavenly things and earthly things, for multitudes and for one, for life, for death and for resurrection: herein lay his election to his own fatherhood, and to be the sign of God's Fatherhood. Others before him had believed God and had achieved great things; many also would come after him and believe God for great things, but not in such fullness -- almost completeness -- or for such consummate things.

Whether, or in what form, God may have manifested Himself to Adam and Eve in the garden we do not know; what we do know is that He planned to appear later to Abraham in triune form when He came to him to announce the promised seed, for that is precisely what He did. Abraham and Sarah saw three men, entertained three men, fed three men -- God was determined to reveal or to manifest Himself as a trinity. This may have surprised Abraham greatly. It certainly would have done, unless knowledge that God was triune had been preserved from the beginning of time, handed down by men of faith like Noah. Certainly Moses believed it, for it was he who wrote of this incident; but because he also wrote to Israel that 'the Lord our God is one Lord', the Jews in Christ's day did not believe that He was the Son of the Father and that God is triune. How can God beget a son? they ask, it is not possible. That is exactly what Abraham thought about himself -- impossible! To such an one God came as a trinity and told him that he could and would -- and he did -- have a son. It was all very simple for God, but it was a mighty step for Abraham -- hence his greatness. But great as it was, he was to discover it was as nothing compared with what it led to, and to what he was heading through the years ahead.

The most outstanding thing of all in which Abraham most clearly represented God the Father and became most nearly like Him happened in the hour of his greatest trial. So severe was the test that no man would have blamed him if he had failed to go through with it. God's test was so extreme and inhumane that it is almost impossible that He would make such demands -- nothing could have been harder. Yet God had planned it from the very beginning and made everything work together to its accomplishment. From the very first moment he responded to the call God had led up to this; it was the prize of his high calling: everything before this had been preparation for this moment. The Lord had never told Abraham that He had chosen him to be the great father-figure of all history and to such a degree. Abraham knew he would have a son because God told him so; indeed during this period he had two sons, but the first was not the son promised by God; he was born as the tragic result of Abraham's collusion with Sarah in her faithless scheming to have a son. But Isaac was conceived by a miracle wrought by God in both Abraham and Sarah, and when he was born they knew he was the promised seed. On his birthday they rejoiced, not knowing that they were beginning to see Christ's day, nor how much more of that day they were destined to see later. Abraham begat the son by his faith and by God's power, and through grace the word of the promise became flesh; at the same time by the same power Abraham became the father.

It was a wonderful prophetic occasion, but it was only a beginning; as the years went by the day drew nearer and nearer when Abraham must fulfil his representative fatherhood to a far greater degree. Had he known it, God had changed His friend's name for this very reason. When God first called him his name was Abram; Terah his father had given him that name when he was born and who can say what was in that father's mind when he chose that name for his son? It means, 'father of a multitude'. Possibly his father had visions of Abraham begetting many sons and daughters who in turn would beget or bear many more. Certainly the name is full of hopefulness and desire, if not faith, and how unexpectedly prophetic it was! But God had other ideas for Abraham, better and higher ideas altogether, so He called him out into the place where He would bring those ideas into being. Strange as it must have seemed to Abraham at the time, this involved the changing of his name.

As far as we can tell this had not been done to anyone before; it was most unusual and of great significance. However, God did not do this until Abraham had first met Melchizedek the king, the 'priest of the most high God', who brought to Abram bread and wine and ministered it to him. 'The Most High God' had plans to bring Abram's name into line with His own, and more suited to all He had in mind for him to be and do. He did not do so upon that occasion though, but reserved it for a later time when He would bring Abraham into covenant with Himself. When this covenant of circumcision was established in the flesh of Abraham and his family, God announced to him that he was altering his name: no more would he be called Abram, 'father of a multitude', but Abraham, 'high father of a multitude'. The Most High God called His friend 'high father' because already in His heart He had made him that; it was his calling: God literalised his calling into a name. Among men Abraham became known as 'the high father of a multitude'; he was not the highest father -- God was that: God is the High Father of the multitude of heaven. He called Abram and changed his name to Abraham that he might represent Him by being that to men on earth.

The Lord Jesus said to the Jews of His day, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day'; He would have spoken just as truly if He had said, your father Abraham rejoiced to see my Father's day', and what a day that was. It was because God had planned the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus that He first called and then renamed the man Abram. When Abraham first looked upon his son Isaac, although he did not know it, he began to see Jesus' day; more than that, he also caught a glimpse of the Father's day, though he would have recognised that even less. Thousands of years later Jesus said, 'he that hath seen me hath

seen the Father', but they who heard it did not understand; they saw, but they did not see. Understanding comes so slowly, and to some when it comes it stays long in the state of dawning.

On a night that must have seemed endless to Abraham the most high God and Father of heaven came to the highest of all earth's fathers and in the darkness demanded of him his son: the supreme test had begun. Before the day dawned he had responded to it exactly as God knew he would. Abraham's answer was, 'Yes', Isaac was God's. How well God had chosen His man. He had watched over him and trained him for this moment. To be a true father he must beget a son; to be true to the Father he must offer up his son; to be truly like the Most High FATHER of multitudes and be the high father of a multitude he must receive his son back from the dead. Whether or not Abraham understood all those things who can tell? He was God's friend -- He might have told him. Abraham certainly fulfilled the conditions; he even believed he would welcome his son back from ashes, and in the figure of resurrection he did so. He did not know it was all only to be a figure, or that he would rise to heights of obedience and faith unknown before or since, except on Calvary. Moriah was the most marvellous of places; it was the highest place of his life. Speaking of all that happened there he said 'in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen'. He saw and -- O, who can tell what emotions filled his heart? From start to finish it was the father's day. The son was involved too, he had to be. Counting ten years for a day perhaps the three days' journey to the place represented the human life span of the Lamb of God. They had a little further to go together to 'the place' where his father, acting as a god, built the altar for him. With all its human limitations what that father and son enacted during those days was prophetic to a degree, an almost wordless parable of unspeakable love, utterly godlike. Between them Abraham and Isaac went through and worked out the heart-rending of God at 'the place of a skull' centuries later. No human eye saw into the secret sacrifice there, and only God's saw into all the wonder of Abraham's great sacrifice on Moriah. Did He say, 'O man great is thy faith'?

God saw it, Abraham saw it, both fathers saw it; the One saw comprehensively without limitations, the other saw only partly; Abraham had all the limitations of our common humanity, but O how phenomenally he saw. Moriah was the mount of God; God had shown it to him, He had shown him Himself too; he had to climb the mountain to catch the vision though. What he witnessed was wonderful, and what he saw through the obedience of his own faithful heart was more wonderful still. What he entered into must have been most wonderful of all though, for through his own agony he entered into fellowship with the Father and the Son. Abraham knew the faith and the fatherhood and the feelings of God. He was the high father, he must have been, for he was one of the most humble men that ever lived. When he left the mount with his son his elation must have been impossible to express in words. Yet thoughts and promises born of conviction inwrought by experience were running through his mind: the future was wonderful. Had he been an ordinary person, or a general kind of prophet, or a normal man of faith the experience might have ruined him; pride might have said, 'I have seen it in the mount of God', or 'I went up the mount of God and saw it', but he was not a proud man. He was the greatest man on earth and surely the humblest. It was a very singular and absolutely exclusive experience and he could have boasted of it, leaving no one else the slightest hope of ever seeing it or of finding faith to attain unto it, but he was earth's high father -- he said, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen', and left the hope and faith of a humble man as a heritage for us all. How a man's language reveals him.

Abraham did not ascend Moriah to see anything; there was nothing to see, and if anyone afterwards climbed the mountain to see what Abraham saw they would have seen nothing. The remains of an altar perhaps, blood-stains perhaps, but it was unlikely -- a few ashes left by the wind, but that was doubtful, a thicket with some strands of wool twisted on its branches maybe, or a twig or two scattered around,

nothing else though. Traces, indications that something had taken place there sometime, that is all, but what could they have made of the things they saw? They would only have been scraps of fast-disappearing evidences of things not seen; they would not have seen the trial of Abraham's faith, nor have experienced the test of his love. Abraham went up the mountain to do something, there was nothing to see until he did it. True he expected a miracle, and what a miracle it would have been if it had happened; his Isaac would have come back to him from the smoke and the flames and the ashes, a living sacrifice. But it was not to be; his son did not die; it only happened in a figure, not in reality. Had it happened it would have been the greatest miracle of all time, greater than the death and resurrection of Christ, for He was God's Son, but Isaac was not; he was a mere man. Knowing the Lord, we are not surprised that he rose from the dead; it was not possible for the grave to hold Him, but Isaac was not God in the flesh. Had he come back from ashes it would have been the miracle of all miracles, but it was not.

When Abraham had carried through his intention as far as he was allowed to go, God intervened: He called to him again and said, 'now I know'. At the same moment Abraham's eyes were opened and he saw. The high father of a multitude was not permitted to slay his son -- only the most high God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ did that. Abraham saw into something of the invisible thing that was accomplished at Golgotha, and understood at least in part what no one else, not even those who stood closest to the cross saw or understood, namely the sacrifice which both the Father and the Son made. Everybody else saw the crucifixion, but they did not understand even that. As far as humanly possible in all but the final step Abraham had been allowed to enter in to the Father's feelings; to a measure he understood the involvement of God's heart in the mysteries of the crucifixion. The sufferings of the Son are much talked about; they should be: all may be made conformable unto His death and enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, but not much is said about the sufferings of the Father. This may be because there have been very few who have climbed their Moriah; just a few sightseers perhaps, or some servants who stay afar off 'with the ass', watching father and son dwindling away into the distance and up the mountain arid out of sight. Only a percentage of men reach even the foothills of the mountain of mystery and suffering which rise from the plains of rest and lead on to the heights, and then mount to the peak of fellowship with the Father and the Son. The challenge of Abraham is a challenge to every man's faith. His last message is both a spur and an encouragement, holding promise without definition in a world of understanding without bounds. Every man who ascends to that summit will realise why he was born, and why he is called and what life is all about. He will not see what Abraham saw though; he will certainly see anew the land of far distances and all that God wants him to see after he has done the will of God. This is the object of the call -- that place within the place which only the faithful see.

Surely it is a strange thing that so little is made of Isaac's part in all this. He is referred to, and the question he asked, together with Abraham's answer to it, is recorded, but beyond this he seems to have filled a minor, even a passive role. Throughout his entire life from his birth to his death, as well as through this particular period, the son was completely overshadowed by the father: Abraham towers over everything and everyone, and justly so. It is obvious that the writer intended that the father, not the son, should be seen. This may be because, although both of them occupied focal positions of great typical significance, Abraham more nearly represented the Father than Isaac did the Son, for, although he was the seed promised to Abraham through Sarah, he was not 'the seed of the woman' promised by God in the beginning. After all, great though he was, Abraham was only a man, and miraculous as Isaac's birth was, his mother was not a virgin; neither was Moriah Golgotha, nor the altar the cross; Isaac did not die, neither did he rise again. Though the Bible episode was traumatic and dramatic, it was only figurative. But figurative of who and of what? The accepted answer to that question is, 'of Christ and of His death and

resurrection'; but perhaps this may not be so, or perhaps not in quite the same way as may be thought. Consideration of a few scriptural comparisons may serve to give us clearer view and help us to fuller understanding of these things.

New Testament writers assure us there was nothing figurative about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He was so dead that He was hastily embalmed and buried and, without ceremony, sealed in a borrowed tomb (although the owner of the tomb did not loan it -- he gave it -- afterwards he realised that he had in actual fact only loaned it for the Lord's temporary burial). Quite contrary to this, and as already pointed out, Isaac the son did not die; there was no resurrection on Moriah; he was not buried, there was no tomb; only in a figure did the father receive him from the dead. Considering this the inquiring mind may ask, 'if Isaac did not truly represent Christ, who did he typify, and where does he fit into the New Covenant?'

Isaac does have his counterpart in the New Testament, but it is not one man, it is a company of people. Of these it may be as truly said as it was of Isaac, that in a figure the Father received them from the dead: this company is called the Church. This is a great mystery and wonderfully true, that on the day the Father received His Son from the dead He also received the whole Church, every member of it bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. All that was accomplished by the resurrection is matched by what was involved in it. The actuality of it, namely that Christ rose from the dead bodily, is equalled by the fact that, figuratively, with Him, the Church which is His body also rose. This unity, this oneness, this togetherness with Christ was taught by Paul and revealed most plainly in his Ephesian epistle. When Christ was crucified, at the same time and on the same cross, every member of the Church was crucified, and when He rose all rose with Him.

Paul wrote, 'I am (was) crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live', and completed the truth in another place, 'If ye then be risen with Christ ...'. It would have been of no more use to God to have actually slain every member of the Church on crosses and raised them up again from the dead than it would have been to Abraham if he had slain and raised up Isaac (had it been possible for him to do this latter). Had Abraham attempted it, it would have been his folly: that he was willing to have done so was his virtue. Everything which took place on Moriah, historical and actual though it was on Abraham's part, was figurative and prophetic on God's part, even to the provision of the ram caught by its horns in the bush, provided for the ultimate burnt offering. In itself the ram was no more than an animal, yet at that time it died in Isaac's place, a substitute for him even as Christ was a substitute for us. Surely this is the truest interpretation and deepest meaning of that word of Abraham to Isaac as they approached the mount, 'God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering'; the son must have pondered that most deeply. All that Abraham 'saw' by faith that day is not easy, perhaps not possible, to define. Was that word to his son a promise of life by substitution? Was it a prophecy? Was it the word of a seer? Or was it all three? He used the future tense, 'will' -- had he used the past tense, 'has provided' it could be thought he had already 'seen' the ram caught in the thicket awaiting their arrival -- but then the whole enactment would have been a charade.

When together father and son left the ass and the men that day Abraham was prepared in heart to slay his son, but he did not lie to his servants when he said that he and his son would 'go yonder' and worship and come again, he knew that they would. Nothing could be a clearer declaration of faith; he was absolutely certain that God would provide. Abraham offered up his son to God; it was the supreme test and God took him to the extreme point -- he stood, knife in hand, over his son, poised to deliver the death-blow when God stopped him.

He had passed the test, he had proved that all his faith and his hope and his love were in the God who gave him his son, not in the son God gave him. Abraham had been given every reason by God to believe that in his son lay all his future hopes of being the father of nations and the progenitor of kings, and he had centred all his love in him. It was because of this that God put him through the test, making special emphasis on love, 'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest', it was his faith and hope and love that was being so severely tested.

How could it be? Isaac was the fruit of all his faith, the ground of all his hopes, the object and purpose of his love, the answer to his prayers, the embodiment of God's promise, the reward of his labours, the end of his long weary pilgrimage, a compensation for the great disappointment that he never found the city of God. Why Isaac? Was it just to make him a type of Christ? Did God do such things just for that? No, He did not, He did it partly for that. He did it: (1) to know whether Abraham loved Him more than anyone or anything else; (2) that Abraham may prove himself to be 'the high father of a multitude' indeed; (3) that Abraham should enter into some knowledge of God's own Fatherhood and its cost. Abraham only received his son back from the dead in a figure, but it was counted to him as though it had all been actual; only God prevented him from slaying his son. Abraham was intent to receive Isaac as a double gift, both of them miraculous, given from barrenness and given from death. Isaac was the miracle child given to him by God, but the faith that received him was greater than the gift. We all have so much yet to learn about this faith, chiefly perhaps that the faith by which we are given life and by which we maintain it, that is, the faith by which we live, works by love. Had Abraham not loved God supremely he could never have done what he did for Him that day -- namely give Him back His son. Abraham knew that Isaac his son was God's son; that is why he could not withhold him. Abraham loved God supremely. We say, and rightly so, that Abraham did it by faith, but only because he loved God so much. It was love that demanded he slay his son and his faith rose equal to it, and in the sight, as well as in the reckoning of God, he did so. Thereby he doubled the gift and multiplied the blessings he first received, for he received his son back again from God. By faith Abraham was overwhelmed with God's love and by the gift of God was filled with it: 'The greatest of these is love'.

Had Abraham in reality slain his son and burned him to ashes, and Isaac had come back from that nothingness, a completely new relationship would have commenced between them -- life would have changed totally. Nothing could have been quite the same again between them. Such an extreme and unthinkable experience would have changed everything utterly and permanently. Only the Father and the Son could have gone through such an unimaginable experience and retained sanity and not have been rent in two. Only that degree of unimpartable love which has bound them together from all eternity could have outlived that -- and it has.

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