

Abraham: The Response

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores Abram's journey of faith, highlighting the challenges of spiritual stagnation and the importance of moving forward in obedience to God's call.

Duration: 45:08

Scripture: Genesis 12:1

Topics: "Abraham"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of taking God's promises seriously. He uses the example of Abram, who initially got stuck in Haran instead of reaching the promised land. The preacher highlights that many people start their spiritual journey but fail to reach their destination due to distractions and temptations along the way. He mentions biblical figures like David, Jonah, and Peter who faced similar challenges. The preacher emphasizes that it was the vision of the God of glory and a simple command that ultimately motivated Abram to continue his journey.

Transcript

Well now, we turn tonight back again to the book of Genesis, and we're going to continue the theme that was introduced this morning. This morning we dealt with Abram trustfully setting out. It's a beautiful scene.

I'm not going over it now, otherwise we'll never get away, but it's a beautiful scene where God breaks into the pagan situation of a man who had never heard of him, never heard of God, the living God, the God of glory. Sovereignly he breaks into that man's situation, speaks to him by name and says to him, come and leave your country and go to the place that I will tell you about. And we read in the epistle to the Hebrews that by faith Abram obeyed.

And he went out not knowing whither he went. You say, what a fool. No, because as Acts chapter 7 explains to us, the God of glory had revealed himself to Abram.

And that was enough. Having seen something of the unspeakable glory of God, he needed nothing more. The God he saw was so great that he could trust him anywhere to do anything.

And he tramps for 600 miles along with a group of his family around him before he comes to the first stop. Goaded only by the fact that the God of glory, and there is only one such God, the true God, the God of glory had called him and commissioned him and sent him out. And by way of response we saw Abram

trustfully setting out.

By faith Abram obeyed. Now in a sense I wish that were the end of the story. In another sense I'm glad it isn't.

I wish it were the end of the story because if that were the only episode recorded about Abraham it would be a magnificent one without any blemish to it at all. But the Bible is a book of truth and it sometimes tells us of the blemishes of its heroes as well as of the foes of the gospel. And in the succeeding chapters it will tell us something about the flaws in Abram's faith and the flaws in Abram's character.

And how difficult Abram found it really to go on with a God with whom he had set out from home. And tonight we come to the first illustration of that. If you have your Bibles open before you you will read in verse 31 of chapter 11 this very sad statement.

But when they came to Haran they settled there. When they came to Haran they settled there. Now the point of it is of course that's not the place to which God had called him.

That was only simply a stage on the way on the route. God had called them beyond Haran but they stuck. They got stuck in Haran and they stayed there for some time.

Now I think it is necessary for us to take this seriously. We notice here a positively waning impulse. We all know do we not that it is one thing to set out upon a journey and quite another to arrive.

That is true in more ways than one. Unfortunately many set out in an automobile and they happy when they go but they don't arrive. There's a tragedy all too often on our roads and people do not arrive.

But so too is it in the spiritual in the spiritual world in the spiritual realm. You and I have seen many many people starting out taking the first step apparently hearing the voice of the Lord. Only a few years ago now since I'm going into my seventh year I feel as if I'm an old man.

I was saying this morning and just a few years ago we had cards in this congregation bearing the signature of over 500 people, young people mostly, who had made a profession of faith open on over on the stadium field here. And we had about five or six different occasions here in the church and on the campus and elsewhere to meet these people. And we wrote to them and we got some of our I would almost call them those that are idolized in our world of today to write them letters with their own signature inviting them here or inviting them to Hart House.

You know how many turned up? If I remember correctly there were seven in the first meeting and four of them belonged to Knox and were mature Christian. We saw no one after that. Apparently setting out over 500 people signing on the dotted line.

Going on showing a desire for fellowship with the people of God and instruction in the word of God. So many. God only knows.

Of course the fact that they did not come here to the training center that had been appointed doesn't necessarily mean that they're not going on with the Lord. But of any those are the facts. It is one thing to start out.

It is one thing to set out. It's another thing to go on. And it's yet another thing to reach the journey's end.

Why did Abram settle down in Haran? What happened to him? Well now we can suggest many things but I'm afraid it'll be purely my suggestion here because the scriptures don't tell us. Some things are hidden from our view. I wonder I wonder whether it was whether it had anything to do with the fact that the distance was becoming larger and larger between the place of the original vision and the destination that God had in mind for him.

You see he traveled nearly 600 miles to Haran and the place of that original vision of the God of glory was back 600 miles. And perhaps in the meantime the sense of communion with God had not been as real and as deep as it might be. I don't know.

Or could it be that that that he was challenged by the sheer danger for a man without faith. And if his faith is wilting a little he might have been in this situation. The sheer menace the sheer challenge of crossing at long last the major divide between the old country and the one to which God was calling him the River Euphrates.

You see Haran was on the same side of the River Euphrates as Ur of the Chaldees. But now having come to Haran Abram must cross the river the great river the great river Euphrates. And this is virtually a matter of moving into an entirely different territory.

It's a kind of breaking literally breaking the bridge behind you. Now one wonders whether some of these things had anything to do with it. But I'll tell you some something that did influence Abraham.

It is very clear from the narrative that there were certain worldly influences that had something to do with his settling down in Haran. Now as I explained this morning we take the view that since scripture nowhere condemns Abram for accepting responsibility for his aging father and his fatherless nephew Lot we must not do so either. Even so even so we cannot be blind to the evil influence that they might have had upon this man of God from time to time.

You see they had neither seen the Lord of glory nor heard him Abram had. Apart from their attachment to Abraham they had no real interest in this unseen country that Abram was talking about. None whatsoever.

It was all secondhand to them. It was something something talked about by someone alongside of them that they loved dearly and their only interest in that country was that Abram was interested in it and they were interested in Abram. But you see Abram had seen the Lord of glory the one who promised the one who called.

Abram believed but as far as they were concerned they were quite different. Their hearts were set more and more on the people and the things that were behind than upon the things that were yet before Abram and themselves. Abram's heart more and more upon the things that were before him because God had made certain promises.

Their treasures were largely behind them. Abram's treasures were largely ahead of him. Every time the sun set it took them further and further away from the things that were nearest and dearest to them in life.

But it brought Abram that much nearer to the fulfillment of the pledge purpose and the promises of God. And you see they're so different. They belong to two different worlds.

Now the miracle is that they've come 600 miles not flying in a jet but they've come 600 miles on foot along the Euphrates valley. That I can at least use my imagination here. I can overhear some conversation many

a day and many a morning many an evening perhaps many an afternoon too when some of them would have turned to Abram and said where are you taking us Abram? Just as the Israelites talked to Moses in the wilderness.

Where are you taking us to? Who is this God that's appeared to you? Where is this land of promise? We're on the go. We're on the go. We're on the move.

Can't we stop? And at last Abram gave in. Some of you know something of friends and relatives of that spirit and told you many a time that the hour has struck when you should pack it all up, throw the sponge in, turn back. Where are the promises? Where are the fulfillment of the promises? But the question comes now why Haran? Why Haran? What was the particular significance of Haran? Well I don't know whether I'm right here.

I throw out this suggestion to you. I believe it makes sense. Haran was also a center of moon worship.

Now Ur of the Chaldeans was a center of moon worship and modern books on archaeology will show you all kinds of things that point to this. This is conclusively established. As I mentioned this morning, Terah's own name, but not only Terah's name, the names of Laban, Sirai, Milca, all point to a sphere of or an interest in moon worship.

Now my guess would be this, that the old man Terah you see found in Haran the kind of spiritual atmosphere that he was leaving behind. Here were people who worshiped the moon. Here were people of his own spiritual kind.

Here are people that he knows their language. He can talk with them and they can bow together in the same way they belong to one another spiritually in their paganism. Oh my good friend, these are some of the things that always and invariably bring men and women to a spiritual standstill.

We have worldly friends that we allow to come too near into our lives and to become so intimate with us that we hear their words louder than the words of anyone else. And their influence sometimes silences the word of God and we don't hear the voice of God because we're too near to the voice of carnal, unbelieving men and women of this world who can't see beyond the end of their noses, to whom spiritual things and eternal are totally unreal. And yet we listen to them.

Do you know anything about the impediments of the pilgrim way? Have you also come under the spell of the unsanctified and settled down short of God's appointed location for you? Brothers and sisters, I ask you with all sincerity of heart this evening, where are we tonight? Is there a harren to which you've come and settled down? It is a peril not confined to any one man or to any one age. There is a harren that casts its spell over far too many of us. Some of us may have managed to extricate our feet from the clods and the sinking sand by the grace of God, but who is it here tonight who doesn't know something of the attractions, the glaring attractions of a harren on the way and we get stuck in the mud.

Now lest you think I'm exaggerating, I'm referring of course to the kind of experience that so many men of God had in the Old Testament and in the New. We often think of, for example, of men like David or Jonah or Job or John Mark in the New Testament or Demas or even Simon Peter at certain stages. Oh, they had their harrens all right, but what I want you to notice is that they were not the same in each case, not the same.

The list I've just quoted is suggestive, but it's not exhaustive. One man's harren may be the place of sensual gratification like David, and there have been saints who have settled down in that dark dismal place. Another's is the point of spiritual dislocation from God like Jonah, and a man deliberately rebels against doing the known will of God and obeying his call and he becomes dislocated and loosed as it were from fellowship with God and he goes into his wilderness alone and he sulks there.

Another's is personal self-pity in the firmness of affliction like Job. I'm sure many of us know what this is. I'm having it far worse than anybody else.

My burden is far heavier than anybody else's. I can hardly smile. It's difficult for me to say this is the day the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Somebody else's day but not mine. I don't see the sun when it shines.

Do you know anything of that spirit? The curtains are always drawn. The lights are always out. God is dead, practically, not theoretically.

Our doctrine is correct, but our experience is dismal. Poor Job. Yet another's is a moral imperfection like John Mark who was not strong enough, who didn't have the grit, who didn't have the tenacity of purpose to go on perhaps, if that's what it was, or a material attraction that must have deemed us.

Or it may be something of the arrogant self-willed experience of a man like Simon Peter. You know there are people who become absolutely stuck in the Christian life because they're too self-willed to hear what God is saying to them. The Lord has to deal radically and drastically with us people who are fallen into sin, who are the dupes of Satan.

And the point is, you see, we're so full of arrogance, self-pleasing, self-will, self-righteousness. The very Word of God is not allowed to come near us. We've already made up our minds what we want.

Before I leave this point, before I leave this point about this temporary settling down in Haran, let me give you one bit of good news. I love bringing good news. Listen my friend, all those that I've mentioned apart from Demas were turfed out of their particular Harans.

I don't know what happened to Demas, the Bible doesn't tell us. The last view we have of Demas is in Thessalonica, in that center of trade. Whether it is faintly suggested that he got mixed up in the business affairs of the day and lost his spiritual vision, I don't know.

But of the others, they were all rescued. They were turfed out of their Harans. David was brought back.

Job was brought back. Simon Peter was brought back more than once. So was John Mark and he became the very writer of the gospel that bears his name as probably Peter's amanuensis.

The same God who brought Abram out of Haran and brought these men out of their Harans is able to come into your life and mine tonight and extricate our feet from the clay, the clay that clogs us as we try to get out of Haran. God help me. But now there's another picture that I want to leave with you and I'm glad I haven't got to stay there.

There's a way out of Haran. Oh may the God of glory appear to us in his word and by his spirit and to our consciences and to our minds. May we see something of the greatness of God and of the wonders of his word and promises that will simply, simply dynamite us out of the mud and out of the mire where we've got

stuck if we have.

But now the last picture here is of Abram tenaciously going on and I like this picture. Abram got out of Haran and then he started, he started on the move and if you notice in this, in this last part or should I say in the first nine verses of chapter 12 we have, we have a remarkable picture of Abram on the move. Abram going on.

Listen to these words. Listen to the beginning with verse six. Abram traveled through the land as far as the sight of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem.

The Canaanites were then in the land but the Lord appeared to Abram and said to your offspring I will give this land. So he built an altar there for the Lord who had appeared to him. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. Abram is on the move now you can't get him stuck.

You know he's a blessed soul who's on the move like Abram. Believing that God has called him and you can't get him stuck in the mud. The man or the woman who is in touch with the God of glory ought to be a man like Abram as he is there depicted.

Now let's look at this picture. How did Abram get moving again? Now we mentioned this morning that the thing that really got Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees was basically the vision of the God of glory. Now that doesn't come out in the record in Genesis.

That's why it is important alongside the record in Genesis to read what Stephen the first martyr tells us in Acts chapter 7 and he puts it all apparently down to this. The God of glory appeared to Abram. The God of glory appeared to him and God said to him get out of your country to the land that I will show you.

That's all. The God of glory and a simple command and a promise. How will God get Abram out of Haran? Well my friends let's look at it.

Let's look at it. It's a remarkable picture really. It's a tragic picture looking at it from one point of view but the divine intervention is very real here.

Dare I say in certain respects somewhat ruthless. Is that a right word to use of God? There is a tenacity about our God. A tenacity of purpose.

You know our God never gives up. Francis Thompson who wrote that to me very delightful poem The Hound of Heaven had that thought haunting him for days and weeks without end before he finally had courage to write it. The tenacity of God.

When God is at your heel he does not easily give up. He comes into all places. He comes everywhere.

He follows you. He pursues you. He speaks through this means and that means until at last he's cornered you and he's got you.

Ours is a sovereign God you see. I notice first of all that the vital hindrance was eventually removed from Abram's life. Terah died in Haran.

Now I have not the time to dwell on this but I think that there are so many things here that deserve meditation when you have the time to do so. I will simply make this kind of statement. It is extremely sad when a parent's death must take place before a child can press on in the will of God.

Where a parent's givenness to idolatry could hold back a child from entering into the fullness of the eternal purposes of God. And my dear people that is happening in this world from time to time. There are parents that have to be removed before God's will is done in the lives of their children.

And sometimes of course the boot is on the other foot. There are parents that find it difficult to do what they believe God requires them to do because of the rebellion of their children. But here it is this.

It is it is the older man. It is the father Terah who's the problem. And he had to die before Abram could leave this halfway house where he got stuck.

And leave this land where they were worshiping the moon again and get on with God wherever God is taking him to. A vital hindrance was eventually removed. The other thing is the initial call was repeated.

Look at the first verse. The Lord said to Abram leave your country your people and your father's house and go to the land that I will show you. Now this morning I referred to the fact that you shouldn't have in the English there the Lord had said which is a pluperfect verb.

There is no pluperfect verb in Hebrew. And that is an interpretation of the Hebrew rather than a clear-cut translation. The translation should be simply and the Lord said to Abram where not in Ur of the Chaldees but in Haran.

Well then what is the sum and substance of it? What what difference does it make? This my dear friend and it's a very precious one. You see God repeats his promises when he sees us getting stuck. And this is part of his strategy.

If I didn't know that I wouldn't be so dogmatic in saying it. But I know that it is nothing short of God's coming graciously alongside of me to repeat his promises in my years over and over again that has kept me going. And if I were to dare to open my mouth and say of what I've heard from the lips of others that I've tried to counsel I believe that a vast myriad other saints would say exactly the same thing.

But now having said that let me add something to it. God never exactly repeats himself. He always adds something to what he said before.

So that we don't simply have a repetition in verses two and three of what God said a way back in Ur of the Chaldees to get Abram out from there. There's much more here. So we have the actual nature of God's provision for Abram largely revealed.

Let me read to you these words. Look at verses two and three. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.

I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Now you see what's happening.

The God of glory who made the original promise that got him from Ur the same God of glory comes to him now in Haran and says this to him. Abram listen to me I've got something to tell you. And what he does is

to spell out and enlarge the original promises and he cuts the jewel into seven pieces as it were.

So you have a seven fold jewel in the end and these seven magnificent promises. Let's just look at them and we can say little about them. But you see these are the levers whereby God gets this man out of the slough of despond, out of the mire and the clay.

He levers him out and he sends him on his way. Our God is a gracious God and mighty. Now look at this.

The first part of the promise is this. I will make of you a great nation. Now let not our familiarity with these words blind us to their significance.

The promise of a family was the most precious prospect that could be given to an ancient Semite. Yes lands and possessions were very attractive but they were unworthy of comparison with the posterity that would perpetuate the family name and the family honor. To be told by the God of glory that he would become the progenitor of a nation was something of a wholly extraordinary nature to Abram and especially so when his wife was not only childless but barren.

But the God of glory said it you see and Abram believes it. You've only to pause and momentarily consider the matter in order to see how necessary that early appearance of the Lord of glory was to all this. See if somebody else said this to Abram.

If somebody else said to Abram I will make of you a great nation and he knows that his wife is not only childless but barren. He would have said instinctively the man or the person who is talking is a fool. But the Lord of glory said it you see and he had seen the vision of the Lord of glory and the Lord of glory is no fool.

And because the Lord of glory said what he could not comprehend or understand he nevertheless believed. See this is faith. He will never promise what he will not perform.

The performance is as sure as the promise itself because it is the promise of the God of glory. Come again I will bless thee. Not only will the God of glory make Abram father of a nation he will also personally bless the man Abram.

Now this is a most intimately personal word. It is conceivable that we should be blessed in the issue of our lives in terms of a large family or a large fortune without ourselves being really blessed. I have known people who have had large fortunes but they themselves have never been blessed.

Only with fortune and in the midst of plenty they have acknowledged that they were very poor and very miserable. Unblessed in the midst of plenty. God in glory and in grace takes a grip upon the one-time worshiper of idols and says to him I will bless you.

You man in your soul you yourself. I've got something for your children your inheritance unborn unseen unheard of. Nobody's called them by their names yet they're unformed in the womb.

But I've got something for you Abram and I will make your name great. Abram was not now looking for fame. You see when once you've seen the God of glory then the craze for fame and personal glory correspondingly wills.

You can always judge a man by this test. If a man is itching for preeminence, if a man is itching for prominence, if a man is itching for personal glory, you may say immediately without any hesitation that man has yet to see God in his glory. He may have seen his skirt.

He may have seen a shadow of the almighty but not in his glory he would have been humbled. When the great God of glory reveals himself to us we hide our faces. We shut our eyes and we shut our mouths.

We talk and talk and talk and argue and quibble until we see God. But when once we see him we don't ask for anything for ourselves. Woe is me for I am undone.

I am a man of unclean lips. The man who has seen God is a man who looks for nothing for himself. Blessed says Jesus are the poor in spirit.

But this is the very man that God will bless. When a man has seen himself in this light God says all right ma'am I'll give you the whole vast promises and the content of my covenant grace and purpose I'll fulfill in you. You can take it.

I can trust it in your hand. Neither was this a false promise. We can read the scriptures and see how this was fulfilled.

But I can't do that tonight. Look at the next aspect of this word to Abram and Haran. So that you will be a blessing.

I will bless you so that you will be a blessing. Actually the Hebrew is more definite than that. Pardon me for referring to this.

It's not a show off my little bit of Hebrew. But I think it's important. You see the previous verbs were imperfect.

Hortative. Whereas this verb is imperative. Commanding Abram to be a blessing.

I don't know whether we've ever got the thought of this from our New Testament teaching. It's there all right. But it's right here in the old.

The blessings of God upon his people are so great he commands his people to be blessings. His grace is so sure. His mercies are so adequate.

His provisions are so amazingly adequate for all God's children. He commands us to be a blessing. I have no right not to be a blessing.

Neither of you. Begin being a blessing he says to Abram. I think that's the sense of it.

I'm giving you the promise now. Start he says. Be a blessing.

See yourself not as a receptacle simply to receive. But as a channel through which the blessing must pass. And I will bless those who bless you.

And I will curse him who curses you. Now this is wonderful. Are any of you afraid of anything here tonight? Is there anybody here overwhelmed with fear? Well now listen to this.

How can we put it in a nutshell? God says I will bless those who bless you. Those who are friendly to you will be my friends. I will reckon them as my friends.

And those who will be your foes I want you to know Abram that they will be my foes. So you see Abram could set out like this. Recognizing that his friends Abram's friends were God's friends.

And his foes were God's foes. So that he's absolutely safe. Those that are kind to him will be rewarded.

And those who are unkind to him will be suitably dealt with. Because God and his servant are so united. Whilst the servant walks in communion with his master.

And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Some translations understand the verb reflexively. In thee shall all the families of the earth bless themselves.

Grammatically of course that is evidently permissible. But the inspired writers of the new testament did not thus understand it. They understood it passively in this sense.

And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. What is this referring to? Surely it's referring to nothing other than the coming of the Messiah in the fullness of the time. In you says God to Abram stuck in Haran.

In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Now mind you God was taking a big broad sweep of history within his view at that moment. He was looking down the ages of time.

Down as far as the 20th century. And he said to Abram all the families of the earth in you shall be blessed. How can God affect that in one way? Through his blessed son.

And when the ages have run their course. And the trumpet shall at last sound. And the voice shall raise the dead and wake them.

You remember what will happen at last. The new testament is clear. Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

They shall be gathered whose robes have been washed in the blood of the lamb. A seed of Abram. Oh precious promises.

Now let's get the point and I must finish I suppose. Why all these promises? Are they just something to talk about or to read about or to listen to? No. The man let me repeat is stuck in Haran.

Abram's tempted to stay short of the goal to which God was calling him. What will God do to him? The God who has already revealed himself to him as the Lord of glory. The living God.

And the God of glory will now come and elucidate and enlarge the original promise that brought him from Ur of the Chaldeans. And will feed his soul with more and more precious truth concerning his purpose and his provisions to this very man. And to his seed and to posterity.

And Abram begins to take it in. Oh I wish I could have heard what Abram said in his heart that night. What? God is going to give me a seed father of a nation and in me all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Does the God of glory have a purpose such as that for poor wee Abram who used to worship the moon? Will he do that for me? Is there a God who can, who will, whose word I can trust? And the next thing I see is Abram's leaden feet loosed again. And he crosses the Euphrates and those that were with him. And with the souls that he had gotten in Haran.

And with the possessions that he got because he got very rich there. They're on their go. And the next place you find them is, oh my friends this is precious.

I can't leave you without giving you this. You know where we find, where we find him next is in Shechem. Why Shechem? I'll tell you.

It's in the heart of the promised land. Right dead center. In Shechem.

And then God says to him there, this is the greatness of it. This is the wonder of it. These themes are inexhaustible.

The same Lord of glory that brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and revealed himself to Abram there. Then revealed himself to Abram in Ur. Now reveals himself again to Abram in Shechem.

And the Midianites were in the land. The enemies were in the land. The people were in possession.

But God revealed himself to Abram in the heart of the promised land. As if to say, oh Abram, Abram, Abram you don't need to worry I'm with you. I was able to come and find you in Ur of the Chaldeans 1,000 miles back now.

And to communicate with you there. And you followed me. You knew me.

You recognized the reality of my being. And something about my promises. And you stepped out.

And you got stuck. And I still was able to come to you and communicate with you in Haran. The petty deities around there could not disturb, could not frustrate my coming to you.

I was able to communicate with you. And now you're out. Now you're in the land.

This is the land that I will give to your children. And I can communicate with you here. Don't be afraid Abram.

You only need me. Brothers and sisters, in Christ I ask in his name are you stuck? Are the wheels clogged? Oh let the promises of God and his covenant faithfulness get you out of it tonight. On the move again.

Until you come to the center place of his will. The place where you were meant to work from all eternity. Where you were meant to be.

Which was to be the scene of your toil. And the scene of your descendants. And the place where he would fulfill all his promises.

And there are things that eye has not seen. Nor mind imagined. That await the men and women of God.

Who get out of their Harans. And march forward with God. To the Shechem of the promised land.

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