

## **Abraham Goes on Walkabout.** Gen. 12:1-9, Heb. 11:8-12, Gal 3:6-8

Portions adapted from "I Will Bless You," by Melvin Newland @ SErmonCentral.Com

A pastor received a call from a church offering him a salary four times what he was currently receiving. Being a devout man, he spent much time in prayer trying to discern what God wanted him to do. One day a friend met the pastor's young son on the street. *"Do you know what your dad is going to do?"* he asked. *"Well,"* replied the lad, *"Dad's praying, but Mom's packing!"*

What would make you pick up and move out of your current home?

What could cause you to pull up roots and head out for some unknown land, especially when the journey itself could take half a year or longer of WALKING just to get there?

We are truly spoiled by modern transportation. These days, you can fly from New York to Australia in less than 24 hours and then people complain about the length of time they have to sit. Whereas our pioneer forbears heading west from the Mississippi River could expect to hike for 5-6 months before reaching California as long as the weather and local tribes cooperated and water and grazing could be found for their livestock.

### **5 to 6 months of walking!**

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Today we have come to the first of many stories about a man who at the age of 75, hearing a voice in his head telling him to go, picked up his family, his flocks, and all his belongings to then walk some 3,000 miles around the edge of the Arabian desert to a land he had never seen before, where he would spend the rest of his life camped out there in a tent – because God told him to.

Now before you brand this man "crazy" – as many of his former neighbors probably did – realize that we are talking about that person who came to be known as Abraham, not only father of the Hebrew nation but also deeply revered as a spiritual leader by all three of the world's largest religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

The 12th chapter of Genesis begins this story of Abraham's life and travels. Up until now we have been dealing with Adam & Eve, Cain & Able, Noah's flood, and the Tower of Babel – events buried in our cultural memory from far distant pre-historic times, perhaps countless of thousands of years ago. But Abraham is actually locatable within our current dating system at approximately 2000BC just a little over 4,000 years ago.

So what makes Abraham so special?

1. He had the most dramatic personal relationship any man has ever had with God.
2. As we already mentioned he was both the founder of the Hebrew nation and the first identifiable ancestor of Jesus of Nazareth – the man who changed world history for all time.

3. Also, only second to Jesus of Nazareth, Abraham is the most written about person in our Bible with a little over 1/4 of the book of Genesis dedicated to telling the story of his life. While our N.T. refers to Abraham or uses him as an example another 246 times.
4. And what is it that Abraham was known for? ***That Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*** Also that through Abraham God, specifically began working to birth the nation of Israel and eventually that singular person who could fulfill His original promise to A&E of crushing the serpent's head, thus breaking the ancient satanic hold on both our planet and the entire human race.

So who was this man, first known as Abram, born over 4,000 years ago near the bottom of the fertile crescent, in the ancient city of Ur in what is now the nation of Iraq?

Abraham wasn't what you would call a great leader. He wasn't the ruler of any town. He didn't have any followers or disciples. He didn't write any books that we know of. He wasn't a great teacher or politician or warrior. He was a shepherd. While Abraham and his sons did grow quite rich in their lifetime – you might call them "sheep ranchers" – the only real claim to fame Abraham had was that God chose him & made special promises to him.

In Genesis 12:2-3 God promised Abraham...

1. I will make you into a great nation
2. I will bless you & make your name great,
3. I will bless those who bless you  
& curse those who curse you.
4. In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.
5. To your offspring I will give this land.

Genesis 12:2-7

What God was telling Abraham was: *"I want a relationship with you. I will be with you - to listen to you, to walk beside you, to guide, guard, and protect you and be there for you both in times of trouble or fortune."* Even more than that, God was promising to make Abraham a blessing not only to all who knew him but to everyone in the entire world, who was born after him; all the way up to today. **You are blessed because a little over 4,000 years ago, a man named Abraham went on a walkabout with God.**

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But why?

Why did God pick out a fairly obscure man like Abraham to give all these blessings to?

Like I said earlier, he wasn't a man of great accomplishments, renown, or power. As far as we can tell, he was probably an older, moderately successful herdsman that may have lived with his dad!

Why would God choose him? The only reason that makes any sense is that God saw what was in Abraham's heart. God knew his potential. As God later told the prophet Samuel: "*Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*" (1 Samuel 16:7).

At one point in his sojourn in this promised land, God even prophetically told Abraham of the next four hundred years of his descendants' history, meaning that God had also already looked down the line of Abraham's future children – Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and brothers, through their 400 year enslavement in Egypt until Israel finally came forth to inherit this land; as God had promised Abraham that they would (Genesis 15:13-15). Meaning that God had chosen Abraham long before Abraham ever chose God; which remains true for all of us as well. Like Abraham, God knew and loved us long before we knew and loved Him – this is certainly something to think about.

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The book of Joshua (24:2) tells us that at first Abraham had worshiped idols in his hometown of Ur. Yet Abraham eventually rejected the idolatry that surrounded him and set off on a lifelong journey to a foreign land where he worshipped the God who personally spoke to him through dreams and visions.

The secret to Abraham's blessing was that when God spoke, Abraham believed him and went where God told him to go. As the Apostle Paul loved to repeat: Abraham believed God and his **FAITH** was reckoned to him as righteousness (Romans 4:9, Gal. 6:6).

In fact there are 4 events in Abraham's life that our Bible holds up as examples of his great faith. In Hebrews chapter 11's Hall of faith we are told that

**BY FAITH ...**

1. Abraham went when he was called.
2. he lived in the land that was promised to his descendants
3. he received the power of procreation even as an old man
4. he offered Isaac up as a sacrifice

Hebrews 11:8-19

The letter to the Hebrews goes on to tell us that since Isaac was his promised heir, Abraham believed that – had God let him go through with the sacrifice – HE would then have raised Isaac back to life.

But what you don't know from such a quick summary is that there was a 40 to 50 year span of time from the date when Abraham first started walking to this promised land to when God stopped him from killing his only son (*Isaac would have been somewhere between 14 and 20 years of age – I have always wondered what Isaac thought of his near sacrifice at the time, but that is a story for another day*).

Today let's focus on Abraham's faith – asking the question, "**what is sufficient faith to please God?**" Because when you look at his life close up, yes by faith when told to do so, Abraham went. But all along the way he often displayed very little faith in God's ability to bless his life in those places where God had told him to go.



For instance, when he first got to the promised land, since it was experiencing a famine Abraham kept on walking down into Egypt. There in Egypt, fearing for his own life, Abraham passed off Sarah his wife as being his sister – which allowed Pharaoh to pay him a sumptuous bride price and to claim Sarah as his own. But God then intervened by warning Pharaoh of Sarah's weddedness to Abraham. At which point Abe had to endure a lecture in honesty from Pharaoh and was then kicked out of Egypt, but he was allowed to keep the wealthy bride price that had been paid... thus many years later causing his son Isaac to attempt the same scheme in a different kingdom only to once again be lectured on his lack of honesty and faith by a pagan. From these instances there is a good lesson in **honesty** which we both need to teach and then live out in front of our children – but that again is for another day.

Also, depending upon how you read some verses before Genesis 12, it appears that while God had told Abram to go. He didn't start the journey until he had convinced his entire extended family to come along. And then when his father Terah, grew tired of the traveling and settled down in a city about halfway there... Abraham also stopped, waiting for dad to die before finishing the journey. Now on one level this sounds like a devoted son caring for his the needs of his aged parent. But on another level it appears that Abram was hesitant to go until he was able to convince others to go with him. Abraham believed in both strength and faith in numbers.

Then in the twenty five years from when God first promised him an heir to the actual day of the miraculous birth of Isaac, apparently Abraham kept complaining to God about not yet having an heir. So much so that God had to repeat his promise three more times in the coming years; one of those times cutting an official contract with Abraham concerning the birth of this promised son.



After which, Abraham and Sarah still tried to make an end run around the promise by having him conceive a son – Ishmael – by way of her Egyptian handmaiden Hagar which would cause the family endless heartache for the rest of their years and continuing troubles for the nation Israel right up until today -- which is another story we will get to later.



Finally one day after Abraham had lived 24 years in this foreign land, while God was sitting under the palm trees having lunch with him, God informed Abraham that by this same next year they would have their promised son. And when God then heard Sarah, in the tent, laughing in unbelief He informed her that "Laughter," in the Hebrew language "Isaac," would be the name they were to give their miraculous son. One year later, as promised Isaac was born which moved the story of Abraham to its next chapter.

So what can we learn from all this. **If FAITH is what made Abraham and Sarah righteous before God and what qualified them as the founders of the nation Israel, realize how shaky, how timid, how little faith Abraham actually displayed much of his life.** Being hesitant to start out on this journey and while on this walkabout with God constantly trying either to protect himself by himself or to outguess God's plans, and yet Abraham came to be known as the father of Faith – and a shining example for us to follow ???

So by Abraham's example, I have learned that God is happy with even the tiniest bit of faith we are capable of expressing. God will take us right where we are at if we at least step out in faith to begin the journey with Him. God will then continuously nurture and assure our faith all along the way until we reach our promised land.

Jesus once told his disciples that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed they could move mountains. Both Abraham's example and Jesus' pronouncement let me know how precious my faith is to God. And how patiently He will wait for me until I have grown up enough to begin my walkabout with him.

Did you know that the word "**walkabout**" refers to a spiritual journey, a rite of passage towards maturity, undertaken by a young Australian Aborigine – going out to live by himself/herself in the bush all alone for six months or longer. After which when they return to the village they are considered an adult. For the Aborigines this usually happens around the age of 12. For Abraham it didn't happen until he was 75 and even then it took him over 25 years to complete.

So when you are finally ready to go on walkabout with God, know that He has always been ready and waiting to go with you. That is what Scripture wants you to learn from Abraham our great father in faith.



*Just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness', so, you see, [all] those who believe are descendants of Abraham.*  
*Galatians 3:6*

*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.' For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed. Galatian 3:6-9*

Fellow believers, fellow children of Abraham, let us thank God for the faith of this ancient wanderer who has by his example encouraged us to join with him in trusting our entire life to the God who loves us and longs to prove it with us as we go on walkabout with Him.