

# The Call and Faith of Abraham

Hebrews 11: 8-19.

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## Part Fourth. LATER MINISTRY.

Quite a new principle was brought to light when God began to deal with Abraham; i.e. the principle of calling out. God distinctly called Abraham. Many other things are connected with Abraham, as father of the faithful, and a pattern, model man to show forth God's dealings; but he was the first that God called forth out of his own country. One of the first principles of truth to a soul lies in the discovery that Abraham made; that is, the personal existence, of God, and an invitation from Him to keep in His company. "Come unto the land that I shall show thee." Many may not have denied the existence of God, but as to any personal connection with Him, it never would have entered their minds unless He had revealed Himself. Others had faith too, but it did not come out like Abraham's. Abel showed his by offering a lamb. Again, we get Enoch's call, but his heart was above before he went on high. Noah's lot was cast in exceedingly evil days; he believed God, prepared the ark, and was carried out of one earth to another.

Abraham is among an idolatrous people, and God comes and calls him, saying, "I have a place for you, and there I will make you a blessing in every way, and you shall know what it is to have the living God as your help in every time of need." I want you who are old and you who are young in faith to set to your seal, that God has introduced Himself as a living Person to your soul. Directly we are in connection with Jesus Christ we have God, and all our associations are connected with God. Faith produces different effects. The moment you bring in anything save God and His word, that is not faith. The path of faith is never the path of nature; nature takes quite a contrary course. "What!" Abraham's kindred might have said, "a stranger, a God we do not know, has told you to leave us all, and you are going forth in a mist, not knowing where He is going to take you?" God had spoken, and Abraham as an individual had to act on His word. It became a question whether Abraham could say, "I will put aside all the reasonings of my friends, and listen only to Thee."

When did his faith fail? When he came to a difficulty and stopped to consider for himself, and settle for himself, which way to get out of it. God had told him the way, but he got upon circumstances, and off faith. First, he had been told to leave all. If it came to that he must leave everything behind; but he did not leave all, he takes with him Terah and Lot, and the effect was that he had to stop till Terah died, and that he could not get on till Lot was separated from him. God will not give up with His people; He will have patience till they know it will not do, to depart from His word. Not until after Terah died did Abraham come to Canaan. First, he had to get rid of Terah, and then of Lot. If I interrupt the word of the Lord in any one part, it lowers the tone of my whole soul unconsciously. There was Lot, and besides a famine came; there was corn in Egypt, and Abraham says, "I will go there." The littleness of faith carries him there, and he gets into the thick of the. fight and loses Sarah. He is at his wits' end, and can do nothing. Departure from the Word has brought him into all this, and what was there to help him out of it? God's own word and again he is sent forth in the power and presence of God.

Remark in the 8th verse, when called to go out, by faith Abraham obeyed, and went forth, not

knowing whither he went. Nothing tries and searches human nature so much as uncertainty. We cannot bear suspense (there is relief in the worst certainty); but that is just God's principle of acting with us. He does not want you to know how to face famine. He does not want Abraham to know how His promises are to be made good. His seed was to be as the stars of heaven; how was this to be, seeing he had no child? God has given him everything but that, silver and gold, flocks and herds, and three hundred trained servants. He was a man most remarkable in his day, and all seemed to say to his heart, "Who is to inherit all this?" It ever seemed to be bringing to his heart the thought that he had no children; and poor Sarah tried to smuggle a child into the house, but that was not an Isaac. The question was continually raised, "Where is your city? where is your seed?" He had to wait a long time, and it came at last by a miracle wrought by God. The very prosperity of Abraham forced him to hang on God. Who is to be the heir — the manservant? No; wait, hang upon God.

Remark that in verse 9, we have the pilgrim and stranger character kept up: dwelling in tabernacles was the mark of a stranger and a pilgrim. Tents were made for Israel in the wilderness; they did not have houses till in the land of Canaan. God's dwelling in the wilderness is a tent, in the land a temple. Abraham dwelt in a tent. Lot did so, too, at first, but he did not keep up the pilgrim character. First, he pitched his tent towards Sodom, then sat in the gate, and had a house in Sodom. Abraham kept his tent; for he looked for a city (he knew there was such a city), and the Holy Ghost adds, "whose builder and maker is God." Remark how this man's faith was sustained. He can look above everything, counting on the promised blessing. It was a faith sustained by God's word. As heavenly pilgrims we cannot yet say we have got what we hope for; but the time is coming when we shall go right into heaven, and cease to be strangers and pilgrims down here. Is our faith set above? If God and you are keeping company, do you think He will let you have a single need unsatisfied? Oh, what a jealous God He is! What a wall of fire round about us! When He separates anyone to Himself, He plants the blood of Christ right behind them. If He has spoken to us of His glory, and told us not to mind earthly things, should not our associations be, not of ties of nature down here, but of His company, His country, His interests waiting as people that do want to keep up their character of strangership, plainly confessing, by their walk and ways, that they are pilgrims on their way to a better country?

Even poor Jacob could not help being a pilgrim. How came Jacob to be in a condition to receive wages of Laban? Because he got off the ground of a pilgrim. He had a deal to say at the end of how long and how dreary his life had been; whilst Abraham's whole pathway is strewed with blessings, having God with him all the way through. Jacob, too, dwelt in a tent. If God has revealed Himself to your heart, and spoken to you of future glory, separating You unto Himself, He would not like you to be passing through the wilderness "hardly bested;" not with Jacob's experience, talking of the great things you have to give up. He does not like that. He wants you to be like Abraham, saying, "Look at all my blessings; look how close God has set me to Himself; and see how He is going to fill all my circumstances to make me rise over all my difficulties, and make His own presence so sweet to me, that I would rather be in difficulties with Him than out of them without Him." We learn what God is by Abraham's walk.

Look, too, at Paul when moved out of everything, when in difficulties of all kinds he always had a song to the praise of God's grace. What a difference between God saying, "Here is something good for you," and your holding out your hand and taking it, and your saying that you are not good enough for what God gives you. Christ would not give Himself to us in resurrection till He had ascended to His Father. He must come down to us as the Father's gift. We can say to everything else, "That is not good enough for me." Did God's people lack power in His company to feel that He was their portion? What you must be looking out for is His gift at the present time. If anything bright offers itself (not God's

gift) do not take it; it will not have sweetness; you will not find God in it. Let Him be first, and you keep behind Him. If a pilgrim, you will not be thinking of settling in houses; you will hang all your hopes on the place where the Son is. But do not take anything but God's gift to you at a moment like this. If God has prepared a city for me, should I like my mind to be absorbed by anything else down here?

Abraham refuses to touch a single thing, and the moment after God says, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." We never read of His being the God of Lot. He promised to be Abraham's God to Lot, and fetched him out of Sodom; but Lot was not in the way to talk of Him as "my God." What! the God of a man settled in Sodom? No; but the God of pilgrims and strangers. The same unerring grace and love; but God could not blazon it abroad that He was the God of Lot in Sodom. There was no planning with Abraham. When we deal with God we cannot make a plan; we get our feet entangled. You and God must go together; there can be no planning if with God. The trial God puts Abraham to in regard to offering up Isaac is very remarkable. God tries hearts often in the same way. I do not know anything more heart-searching than this that Abraham had put before him, but he left it all with God to settle all his difficulty. It was just the test whether he was hanging on God or not. Yes, he was, and he gives up Isaac His hand was stretched out to slay him, but God came in. It was not in the heart of the Father to let that father slay his son. Oh! what a feeling must there have been in Abraham, the feeling of all blessing, from first to last, being in the approbation of God Himself. Now God does try our faith in many ways. Do you know what suspense is? Do you know what it is not to see your way, and if you put forth a single thing to help yourself, does He not move it out of His way? We are kept in suspense that we may be content to wait upon God; to look to, to hang upon Him, to be so satisfied with God as to leave all to Him. To be in suspense is to pilgrim and a stranger, not to take anything, but to wait till God gives it. Oh! a man walking with God will have a happy, a blessed experience; otherwise there will be only sorrow and disappointment, as Lot and Jacob found.