

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 12:1-9

Topic

Abraham begins his lifelong pilgrimage
in response to God's call

Title

"God's Pilgrim vs. the World"

Introduction

The year was 1678 when John Bunyan found himself in the Bedfordshire county jail for breaking the law which prohibited the holding of religious services outside the authority of the Church of England.

Bunyan put pen to parchment and began to write. The result was the Book *Pilgrim's Progress*, whose formal title is, *The Pilgrim's Progress From This World to That Which Is to Come*.

It is regarded as one of the most significant works of English literature, has been translated into more than 200 languages, and has never been out of print.

Pilgrim's Progress follows the main character, called Christian, as he journeys from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Along the way he visits such locations as the Slough of Despond, Vanity Fair, the Doubting Castle, and the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Characters include: Obstinate, Pliable, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Much Afraid, Mr. Ready-to-Halt, and Mr. Stand Fast.

It is an allegory of your Christian life. **You are 'Christian.'** **You are the pilgrim journeying through life to Paradise.**

How should I approach my life as a pilgrim? There's no better example of the pilgrim on his way to Paradise than Abraham. We may as well learn from the best!

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Must Look Beyond His Promises To The Promiser, and #2 You Must Look Beyond Your Pilgrimage To Paradise.

#1 You Must Look Beyond His Promises To The Promiser
(v1-4)

There is a famous exhortation pastors sometimes quote that says, "Are you standing on the *promises* or just sitting on the *premises*?"

It's a reminder that we are a people who live by the promises God has made us. According to one person's count there are 3,573 promises in the Bible.

I don't know how many there are. I do know this, and so do we all. A promise is only as good as the Promiser.

We're coming into an election year in 2012. We are going to hear a lot of promises. We already know most of them will be broken.

On a more personal level, you and I have broken our promises to others. And folks have broken theirs to us.

The key to promises is the trustworthiness of the one doing the promising. In our case, it is God, the Creator of Heaven and earth. We can stand on His promises because God is the Promiser.

As important as it is to stand on God's promises, there is something even more important. Abraham looked beyond the promises, behind them, to the Promiser. He went out as a pilgrim not because of what he would gain but on account of Who he was going with.

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Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.

"Abram" is Abraham. God is going to change his name in just a little bit to reflect the promises He makes to Abram.

We talk often about the new glorified bodies we are going to have after the resurrection and rapture of the church, when we are in Heaven. Do you realize that you will also receive a new **name** in Heaven?

Revelation 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, **and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.**" '

I wonder if I already have my new name waiting for me, or if it is being formed as I cooperate with the Lord along my pilgrim path homeward? Looking back on my life, will I be Mr. Ready-to-Halt or Mr. Stand Fast?

We assume God appeared to Abraham as the Angel of the Lord, an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ to mankind before He was sent to earth as the God-Man.

We learn later that Abraham believed God and was saved. God declared him righteous. It's how everyone has always been saved - by grace through faith in the Lord.

Told specifically "get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house," Abraham only partially obeyed. He took his family and settled short of the Promised Land.

Here in chapter twelve, five years have elapsed since that initial call and calling. God was patient with the man He would later call His friend forever.

Take a look at the first promise we encounter. It was "a land that [God would] **show** [Abraham]."

What do you mean, “show?” Isn’t God going to *give* Abraham the land? Yeah, but He only promised to “show” it to him at first. Still, Abraham set out.

I suggest to you that Abraham, from the start, was captivated with God Himself, with the One making the promises, rather than the promises. He set out as a pilgrim, on a lifelong pilgrimage, because it was God he was going with.

Indeed, in the New Testament Abraham is described as looking for the city whose builder and maker is God. The land of promise, per se, never excited him the way that future city did.

That’s not to take anything away from the reality and the importance of God giving Abraham the land that we know today as Israel.

God was calling Abraham to leave both *family* and *familiarity* behind. Did he do it for real estate? For livestock? For the prospects of being prospered?

No. He did it because he’d had an encounter with the living God.

So, too, with us, we must live by the promises of God by looking beyond them, behind them, to the One Who promises. Only then can we hope to put into perspective some of the sacrifices along the way. Only then will I, if called upon, leave everything - family and familiarity - in my pilgrimage.

Genesis 12:2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.

God had a very definite plan in mind for Abraham. He would be the father of the Hebrew people.

It’s so hard to believe that God’s plan for my life is every bit as involved and important as was His plan for Abraham... Or Moses... Or David... Or the apostle Paul. God was not closer to Abraham or these other heroes of the faith because their earthly paths were more important to furthering His

kingdom. He is just as intimate with each of His pilgrims as we want Him to be.

Don't confuse God's plan for you with His passion for you as His friend.

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This is a Messianic prophecy. Through Abraham would come Jesus Christ Who would bless all the families of the earth by providing mankind with a universal offer of salvation for the universal problem of sin.

Also tucked away in this promise is the understanding that Abraham's descendants, the Hebrew people, would be at the center of world politics. God would and will judge all other nations based upon their relationship with Israel.

Genesis 12:4 So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

After a five year delay, and at the age of seventy-five, Abraham set out to fulfill his calling.

Right now, right where you are, you can move forward in your walk with the Lord. If you've been faithless, He has remained faithful.

God's promises are great in and of themselves, but beyond them is a revelation of God Himself - His nature, His character, His passion for intimacy with you. He's given you things and is going to give you more. But His real delight is **showing** things to you; it's being with you to see the expression of your heart at the revelation of Himself.

Yesterday the ladies had their Secret Sister Reveal. You should have seen the expression on their faces when the time came to open the envelope and find who had been blessing them the past nine months. The expressions were priceless.

God is blessing you daily as you stand on His promises. But in each of them there is a kind of 'reveal' of Who He is. Look for Him.

#2 You Must Look Beyond Your Pilgrimage To Paradise
(v5-9)

"Pilgrim" is one of those words that is loaded with images for us. I can't help but think of a guy dressed all in black with a big hat with a buckle on it. There's a turkey in there somewhere about to become Thanksgiving dinner. A little farther back in my image is a boat, the *Mayflower*.

Those are the symbols I associate with the word "pilgrim" as an American. *Either that or John Wayne movies!* In the 1962 classic, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, he used the word 23 times.

The word "pilgrim" should evoke other images for us as believers. The symbols of a God-pilgrim, on a spiritual pilgrimage, are two: the altar and the tent. Watch for them in these remaining verses.

Genesis 12:5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.

This was Abraham 2.0. He may still be traveling with too much baggage, but at least he was moving forward. Charles Swindoll once described this kind of progress as taking three steps forward and two steps backward.

We all carry too much with us along our pilgrim journey heavenward. Especially here in the West where we are prosperous in comparison to the rest of the world. But rather than rebuke everybody for being so materialistic, I think it better to simply encourage everyone to move out, to press forward. Because as you serve the Lord, if you are really listening to Him, you'll come to points where certain baggage must be left behind. It will prove too heavy if you want to keep making spiritual progress.

Genesis 12:6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.

There were some people, lots of them, living in the land God was showing Abraham. He'd have to coexist with the Canaanites and their barbaric, godless practices. The Promised Land was not necessarily better, but it was where God would reveal Himself further and that made it wonderful.

Genesis 12:7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

The 'giving' of the land would be to Abraham's descendants. In fact, we will see at the end of Abraham's life that the only land he ever owned was a family burial plot that he purchased.

Think about what this meant on a practical level for Abraham. He was being tasked with raising a godly offspring in the midst of a godless society. He was being asked to make sacrifices in order for God to bless future generations.

God's promises are not easy. We don't just pull them out of a promise box and magically possess them. There's a cost involved; there's a sacrifice somewhere along the way that makes them active.

Abraham acknowledged that he understood he was being called to a life of sacrifice by constructing an altar. One commentator noted, "It has been said of Abraham that one could trace his paths by the altars he built."

There's a lot of things we could say about altars and their significance. If you look at all the altars that were built by Abraham and his descendants you'll find they were places of intercession, of forgiveness, of worship, and of encountering God. The constant is that a blood sacrifice was involved.

"Altar" is translated from a word meaning *place of slaughter*. These Old Testament guys sacrificed animals. The sacrifices didn't save them. It hearkened back to God sacrificing animals in the Garden of Eden when He promised Adam and Eve He would send a Savior to die, to shed His blood, that mankind might be saved by believing.

Every lamb that was killed pointed forward to the Lamb of God Who would take away the sins of the world.

The altar reminded Abraham that his Savior would be the ultimate pilgrim. God would leave Heaven for earth. He, too, would seek, as it were, the city whose builder and maker is God. He would look beyond the suffering of the Cross upon which He would offer Himself our sacrifice for sin to the joy of our salvation.

What or where is our altar? Is it my prayer closet? Is it my devotions?

The apostle Paul tells us in Romans to offer *ourselves* as living sacrifices to the Lord. In other words, my life itself is to be understood as constantly being on an altar, as a sacrifice. A living sacrifice dies to himself in order to live for God. Daily I ought to be discovering new ways to die to self and live for my Savior.

Simple question: What is dying right now, if anything, that I might live unto the Lord?

Genesis 12:8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he 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.

Another commentator stated, "It is often said of Abraham and the patriarchs that they built altars to the Lord; it is never said they built houses for themselves."

Indeed, Abraham lived in a "tent." The tent is the other outstanding symbol of pilgrimage.

Tent camping can be fun... But you look forward to a shower and some real comfort.

Your whole time as a Christian is one long tent camping trip. You are to be looking forward, looking beyond, to your home that is being built even as we speak by Jesus.

There is no real standard of living given to us in the Bible.

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- We are not called to communal living, where everyone has an equal share.
- Nor is there value in poverty for its own sake.
- The wealthy are warned about the use of their money, but the very warning itself indicates there will be rich believers.

The tent, then, is an attitude I adopt that makes me more interested in Heaven than earth. If I adopt such an attitude I will want to further the kingdom of God by supporting the work of evangelizing the lost and edifying the saints.

Again this becomes an individual question only I can answer for myself. Whatever my status financially, are my life and lifestyle choices consistent with giving to further the kingdom of God?

Genesis 12:9 So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

You want it to be said of you that you “journeyed, going on still.” You don’t have to be physically moving all the time, but spiritually speaking you need to be making real progress as a pilgrim.

Are you - making real progress? Are we - as a church?

God the Holy Spirit is speaking to our hearts, through this text, so we might ask and answer those questions.

Let’s do what He shows us and be able to say “Yes” to our pilgrim’s progress.

