

# CHAPTER 61

## THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM

(~~SEE~~ HEBREWS 11:9, 10)

In the preceding article we considered the appearing of the Lord unto idolatrous Abraham in Chaldea, the call which he then received to make a complete break from his old life, and to go forward in faith in complete subjection to the revealed will of God. This we contemplated as a figure and type, an illustration and example of one essential feature of regeneration, namely, God's effectually calling His elect from death unto life, out of darkness into His marvelous light, with the blessed fruits this produces. As we saw on the last occasion, a mighty change was wrought in Abraham, so that his manner of life was completely altered: "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."

Ere turning unto the verses which are to form our present portion, let us first ask and seek to answer the following question: Was Abraham's response to God's call a perfect one? Was his obedience flawless? Ah, dear reader, is it difficult to anticipate the answer? There has been only one perfect life lived on this earth. Moreover, had there been no failure in Abraham's walk, would not the type have been faulty? But God's types are accurate at every point, and in His Word the Spirit has portrayed the characters of His people in the colors of truth and reality: He has faithfully described them as they actually were. True, a supernatural work of grace had been wrought in Abraham, but the "flesh" had not been removed from him. True, a supernatural faith had been communicated to him, but the root of unbelief had not been taken out of him. Two contrary principles were at work within Abraham (as they are in us), and *both* of these were evidenced.

God's requirements from Abraham were clearly made known:

“Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee”  
(<sup>12:1</sup>Genesis 12:1).

The first response which he made to this is recorded in <sup>11:31</sup>Genesis 11:31,

“And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son’s son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.”

He left Chaldea, but instead of separating from his “kindred,” he suffered his nephew Lot to accompany him; instead of forsaking his father’s house, Terah was permitted to take the lead; and instead of entering Canaan, Abraham stopped short and settled in Haran. Abraham temporized: his obedience was partial, faltering, tardy. He yielded to the affections of the flesh. Alas, cannot both writer and reader see here a plain reflection of himself, a portrayal of his own sad failures! Yes,

“As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man”  
(<sup>27:19</sup>Proverbs 27:19).

But let us earnestly seek grace at this point to be much upon our guard lest we “wrest” (<sup>3:16</sup>2 Peter 3:16) to our own hurt what has just been before us. If the thought arises “O well, Abraham was not perfect, *he* did not always do as God commanded him, so it cannot be expected that I should do any better than he did,” then recognize that this is a temptation from the Devil. Abraham’s failures are not recorded for us to shelter behind, for us to make them so many palliations for our own sinful falls; no, rather are they to be regarded as so many warnings for us to take to heart and prayerfully heed. Such warnings only leave us the more without excuse. And when we discover that we have sadly repeated the backslidings of the O.T. saints, that very discovery should but humble us the more before God, move to a deeper repentance, lead to increasing self-distrust, and issue in a more earnest and constant seeking of Divine Grace to uphold and maintain us in the paths of righteousness.

Though Abraham failed, there was no failure in God. Blessed indeed is it to behold His long-suffering, His super-abounding grace, His unchanging faithfulness, and the eventual fulfilling of His own purpose. This reveals to us, for the joy of our hearts and the worshipping praise of our souls, another reason why the Holy Spirit has so faithfully placed on record the

shadows as well as the lights in the lives of the O.T. saints: they are to serve not only as solemn warnings for us to heed, but also as so many examples of that marvelous patience of God that bears so long and so tenderly with the dullness and waywardness of His children; examples too of that infinite mercy which deals with His people not after their sins, nor rewards them according to their iniquities. O how the realization of this should melt our hearts, and evoke true worship and thanksgiving unto “the God of *all* grace” (<sup><0150></sup>1 Peter 5:10). It will be so, it must be so, in every truly regenerate soul; though the unregenerate will only turn the very grace of God “into lasciviousness” (Jude 4) unto their eternal undoing.

The sequel to <sup><0113></sup>Genesis 11:31 is found in <sup><8115></sup>Hebrews 12:5,

“And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.”

Though Abraham had settled down in Haran, God would not allow him to continue there indefinitely. The Lord had purposed that he should enter Canaan, and no purpose of His can fail. God therefore tumbled him out of the nest which he had made for himself (<sup><6521></sup>Deuteronomy 32:11), and very solemn is it to observe the means which he used: “And Terah died in Haran (<sup><0113></sup>Genesis 11:32 and cf. <sup><4074></sup>Acts 7:4) — death had to come in before Abraham left Halfway House! He never started across the wilderness until death severed that tie of the flesh which had held him back. But that with which we desire to be specially occupied at this point is the wondrous love of God toward His erring child.

“I am the Lord, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (<sup><3006></sup>Malachi 3:6).

Blessed, thrice blessed, is this. Though the dogs are likely to consume it unto their own ruin, yet that must not make us withhold this sweet portion of “the children’s bread.” The immutability of the Divine nature is the saints’ indemnity; God’s unchangeableness affords the fullest assurance of His faithfulness in the promises. No change in us can alter His mind, no unfaithfulness on our part will cause Him to revoke His word. Unstable though we be, sorely tempted as we often are, tripped up as may frequently be our case, yet God “*shall* also confirm us unto the end... God is faithful” (<sup><4008></sup>1 Corinthians 1:8, 9). The powers of Satan and the world are against

us, suffering and death before us, a treacherous and fearful heart within us; yet God *will* “confirm us unto the end.” He did Abraham; He will us. Hallelujah.

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (verse 9).

This verse brings before us the second effect or proof of Abraham’s faith. In the previous verse the apostle had spoken of the place from whence Abraham was called, here of the place to which he was called. There he had shown the power of faith in self-denial in obedience to God’s command, here we behold the patience and constancy of faith in waiting for the fulfillment of the promise. But the mere reading of this verse by itself is not likely to make much impression upon us: we need to diligently consult and carefully ponder other passages, in order to be in a position to appreciate its real force.

First of all we are told, “And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.” Unless a supernatural work of grace had been wrought in Abraham’s heart, subduing (though not eradicating) his natural desires and reasonings, he certainly would not have remained in Canaan. An idolatrous people were already occupying the land. Again, we are told that

“He (God) gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on” (~~406~~ Acts 7:5).

Only the unclaimed tracts, which were commonly utilized by those having flocks and herds, were available for his use. Not an acre did he own, for he had to “purchase” a plot of ground as a burying place for his dead (Genesis 23). What a trial of faith was this, for ~~8108~~ Hebrews 11:8 expressly declares that he was afterward to “receive” that land “for an inheritance.” Yet instead of this presenting a difficulty, it only enhances the beauty and accuracy of the type.

The Christian has also been begotten “to an inheritance” (~~1004~~ 1 Peter 1:4), but he does not fully enter into it the moment he is called from death unto life. No, instead, he is left here (very often) for many years to fight his way through an hostile world and against an opposing Devil. During that fight he meets with many discouragements and receives numerous wounds. Hard duties have to be performed, difficulties overcome, and trials endured,

before the Christian enters fully into that inheritance unto which Divine grace has appointed him. And naught but a Divinely bestowed and Divinely maintained faith is sufficient for these things: that alone will sustain the heart in the face of losses, reproaches, painful delays. It was thus with Abraham: it was “by faith” he left the land of his birth, started out on a journey he knew not whither, crossed a dreary wilderness, and then sojourned in tents for more than half a century in a strange land. Rightly did the Puritan Manton say:

“From God’s training up Abraham in a course of difficulties, we see it is no easy matter to go to Heaven; there is a great deal of ado to unsettle a believer from the world, and there is a great deal of ado to fix the heart in the expectation of Heaven. First there must be self-denial in coming out of the world, and divorcing ourselves from our bosom sins and dearest interests; and then there must be patience shown in waiting for God’s mercy to eternal life, waiting His leisure as well as performing His will. Here is the time of our exercise, and we must expect it, since the father of the faithful was thus trained up ere he could inherit the promises.”

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country.” The force of this will be more apparent if we link together two statements in Genesis: “And the Canaanite was then in the land” (<sup><01126></sup>Genesis 12:6)

“And the Lord said, unto Abram... all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it and to thy seed forever” (<sup><01134></sup>Genesis 13:14, 15).

Here was the ground which Abraham’s faith rested upon, the plain word of Him that cannot lie. Upon that promise his heart reposed, and therefore he was occupied not with the Canaanites who were then in the land, but with the invisible Jehovah who had pledged it unto him. How different was the case of the spies, who, in a later day, went up into this very land, with the assurance of the Lord that it was a “good land.” Their report was

“the land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we *saw* in it are men of a great stature. And there we *saw* the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (<sup><04132></sup>Numbers 13:32, 33).

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country.” As it was by faith that Abraham went out of Chaldea, so it was by faith he remained out of the country of which he was originally a native. This illustrates the fact that not only do we become Christians by an act of faith (the yielding up of the whole man unto God), but that as Christians we are called upon to *live* by faith (<sup><4820></sup>Galatians 2:20), to walk by faith and not by sight (<sup><4807></sup>2 Corinthians 5:7). The place where Abraham now abode is here styled “the land of promise,” rather than Canaan, to teach us that it is God’s promise which puts vigor into faith. Note how both Moses and Joshua, at a later day, sought to quicken the faith of the Israelites by this means:

“Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do, that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers *hath promised thee*” (<sup><6818></sup>Deuteronomy 6:3).

“And the Lord your God, He shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the Lord your God *hath promised you*” (<sup><6238></sup>Joshua 23:5).

“As in a strange country.” This tells us how Abraham regarded that land which was then occupied by the Canaanites, and how he conducted himself in it. He purchased no farm, built no house, and entered into no alliance with its people. True, he entered into a league of peace and amity with Aner, Eshcol, and Mature (<sup><0143></sup>Genesis 14:13), but it was as a stranger, and not as one who had any thing of his own in the land. He reckoned that country no more his own, than any other land in the world. He took no part in its politics, had nothing to do with its religion, had very little social intercourse with its people, but lived by faith and found his joy and satisfaction in communion with the Lord. This teaches us that though the Christian is still in the world, he is not of it, nor must he cultivate its friendship (<sup><5044></sup>James 4:4). He may use it as necessity requires, but he must ever be on his prayerful guard against abusing it (<sup><4073></sup>1 Corinthians 7:31).

“Dwelling in tents.” These words inform us both of Abraham’s manner of life and disposition of heart during his sojourning in Canaan. Let us consider them from this twofold viewpoint. Abraham did not conduct himself as the possessor of Canaan, but as a foreigner and pilgrim in it. To Heth he confessed, “I am a stranger and sojourner with you” (<sup><0234></sup>Genesis 23:4). As the father of the faithful he set an example of self-denial and patience. It was not that he was unable to purchase an estate, build an

elaborate mansion, and settle down in some attractive spot, for <sup><0132></sup>Genesis 13:2 tells us that “Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold”; but God had not called him unto this. Ah, my reader, a palace without the enjoyed presence of the Lord, is but an empty bauble; whereas a prison-dungeon occupied by one in real communion with Him, may be the very vestibule of Heaven.

Living in a strange country, surrounded by wicked heathen, had it not been wiser for Abraham to erect a strongly fortified castle? A “tent” offers little or no defense against attack. Ah, but “the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.” And Abraham both feared and trusted God.

“Where faith enables men to live unto God, as unto their eternal concerns, it will enable them to trust unto Him in all the difficulties, dangers, and hazards of this life. To pretend a trust in God as unto our souls and invisible things, and not resign our temporal concerns with patience and quietness unto His disposal, is a vain pretense. And we may take hence an eminent trial of our faith. Too many deceive themselves with a presumption of faith in the promises of God, as unto things future and eternal. They suppose that they do so believe, as that they shall be eternally saved, but if they are brought into any trial, as unto things temporal, wherein they are concerned, they know not what belongs unto the life of faith, nor how to trust God in a due manner. It was not so with Abraham: his faith acted itself uniformly with respect to the providences, as well as the promises of God” (John Owen).

Abram’s “dwelling in tents” also denoted the disposition of his heart. A life of faith is one which has respect unto things spiritual and eternal, and therefore one of its fruits is to be contented with a very small portion of earthly things. Faith not only begets a confidence and joy in the things promised, but it also works a composure of spirit and submission to the Lord’s will. A little would serve Abraham on earth because he expected so much in Heaven. Nothing is more calculated to deliver the heart from covetousness, from lusting after the perishing things of time and sense, from envying the poor rich, than to heed that exhortation,

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”  
(<sup><5102></sup>Colossians 3:2).

But it is one thing to quote that verse, and another to put it into practice. If we are the children of Abraham, we must emulate the example of Abraham. Are *our* carnal affections mortified? Can we submit to a pilgrim's fare without murmuring? Are we enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (~~STB~~2 Timothy 2:3)?

The tent-life of the patriarchs demonstrated their pilgrim character: it made manifest their contentment to live upon the *surface* of the earth, for a tent has no foundation, and can be pitched or struck at short notice. They were sojourners here and just passing through this wilderness-scene without striking their roots into it. Their tent life spoke of their separation from the world's allurements, politics, friendships, religion. It is deeply significant to note that when reference is made to Abraham's "tent," there is mention also of his "altar":

"and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west and Hai on the east, and there he builded an altar unto the Lord" (~~OTB~~Genesis 12:8);

"and he went on his journeys... unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, unto the place of the altar" (~~OTB~~Genesis 13:3,4);

"Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mature, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord" (~~OTB~~Genesis 13:18).

Observe carefully the *order* in each of these passages: there must be heart *separation* from the world before a thrice holy God can be *worshipped* in spirit and in truth.

"Dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." The Greek here is more expressive than our translation: "in tents dwelling": the Holy Spirit emphasized first not the act of dwelling, but the fact that this dwelling was in *tents*. The mention of Isaac and Jacob in this verse is for the purpose of calling our attention unto the further fact that Abraham continued thus for the space of almost a century, Jacob not being born until he had sojourned in Canaan for eighty-five years! Herein we are taught that "when we are once engaged and have given up ourselves to God in a way of believing, there must be no choice, no dividing or halting, no halving; but we must follow Him fully, wholly, living by faith in all things" (John Owen), and that unto the very end of our earthly course.

There does not seem to be anything requiring us to believe that Isaac and Jacob shared Abraham's tent, rather is the thought that they also lived the same pilgrim's life in Canaan: as Abraham was a sojourner in that land, without any possession there, so were they. The "with" may be extended to cover all that is said in the previous part of the verse, indicating it was "by faith" that both Abraham's son and grandson followed the example set them. The words which follow confirm this: they were "the heirs with him of the same promise." That is indeed a striking expression, for ordinarily sons are merely "heirs" and not joint-heirs with their parents. This is to show us that Isaac was not indebted to Abraham for the promise, nor Jacob to Isaac, each receiving the same promise direct from God. This is clear from a comparison of <sup><0135></sup>Genesis 13:15 and <sup><0170></sup>Genesis 17:8 with <sup><0208></sup>Genesis 26:3 and <sup><0283></sup>Genesis 28:13, 35:12. It also tells us that if we are to have an interest in the blessings of Abraham, we must walk in the steps of his faith.

Very blessed and yet very searching is the principle exemplified in the last clause of verse 9. God's saints are all of the same spiritual disposition. They are members of the same family, united to the same Christ, indwelt by the same Spirit.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (<sup><4042></sup>Acts 4:32).

They are governed by the same laws:

"I will put My laws into their mind and write them in their hearts" (<sup><5810></sup>Hebrews 8:10).

They all have one aim, to please God and glorify Him on earth. They are called to the same privileges: "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us" etc. (<sup><6101></sup>2 Peter 1:1).

"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God" (verse 10).

Ah, here is the explanation of what has been before us in the previous verse, as the opening "for" intimates; Abraham was walking by faith, and not by sight, and therefore his heart was set upon things above and not upon things below. It is the exercise of faith and hope upon heavenly objects which makes us carry ourselves with a loose heart toward worldly comforts. Abraham realized that his portion and possession was not on

earth, but in Heaven. It was this which made him content to dwell in tents. He did not build a city, as Cain did (~~30047~~Genesis 4:17), but “looked for” one of which God Himself is the Maker. What an illustration and exemplification was this of the opening verse of our chapter: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

That for which Abraham looked was Heaven itself, here likened unto a city with foundations, in manifest antithesis from the “tents” which have no foundations. Various figures are used to express the saints’ everlasting portion. It is called an “inheritance” (~~30048~~1 Peter 1:4), to signify the freeness of its tenure. It is denominated “many mansions” in the Father’s House. It is styled an “heavenly country” (~~30116~~Hebrews 11:16) to signify its spaciousness. There are various resemblances between Heaven and a “city.” A city is a civil society that is under government: so in Heaven there is a society of angels and saints ruled by God: ~~30222~~Hebrews 12:22-24. In Bible days a city was a place of safety, being surrounded by strong and high walls: so in Heaven we shall be eternally secure from sin and Satan, death and every enemy. A city is well stocked with provisions: so in Heaven nothing will be lacking which is good and blessed. The “foundations” of the Heavenly City are the eternal decree and love of God, the unalterable covenant of grace, Christ Jesus the Rock of Ages, on which it stands firm and immovable.

It is the power of a faith which is active and operative that will sustain the heart under hardships and sufferings as nothing else will.

“For which cause we faint not: but though our outward man perish, yet the inward is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (~~30416~~2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

As John Owen well said,

“This is a full description of Abraham’s faith, in the operation and effect here ascribed to it by the apostle. And herein it is exemplary and encouraging to all believers under their present trials and sufferings.”

Ah, my brethren and sisters, do we not see from that which has been before us *why* the attractions of the world or the depressing effects of suffering, have such a power upon us? Is it not because we are negligent in the stirring up of our faith to “lay hold of the hope which is set before us”? If we meditated more frequently upon the glory and bliss of Heaven, and were favored with foretastes of it in our souls, would we not sigh after it more ardently and press forward unto it more earnestly?

“Abraham rejoiced to see Christ’s day, and he saw it, and was glad”  
(~~186~~ John 8:56);

and if we had more serious and spiritual thoughts of the Day to come, we would not be so sad as we often are.

“He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (~~186~~ 1 John 3:3),

for it lifts the heart above this scene and carries us in spirit within the veil. The more our hearts are attracted to Heaven, the less will the poor things of this world appeal to us.