

Introduction

Karen and I began selling some of our things a couple of years ago, knowing that a journey was in store. Recently, we sold five of our acres and our tractor. A couple of months ago we packed up many of our belongings and they are now in the storeroom of this building. We have not sold our house yet and we don't have a house that we are going to. We have an area that we would like to be in, but we don't have a final destination. We keep asking God to bring a buyer for our house, and to show us the house we are to buy and move to. It is a walk of faith. But, we have a general idea of where we are going. In our text today, Abraham begins his journey of faith, but he has no idea where his journey is going to take him. This week's message is called, "Abraham's Journey Begins – Part I.

For the next few months we will be looking at Abraham's journey of faith. It all begins this week, where God tells him to leave his family and relatives and that He will show him where to go as he goes. It is a journey of faith. God also promises Abraham that He will bless him. We will look at those blessings today. Next week, we will look at Part II of the beginning of Abraham's Journey and the four places that Abraham goes to on this journey of faith.

1. God's Command
2. God's Promises

1. **God's Command** (Gen 12:1)

(Gen 12:1) "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you;'"

Two weeks ago I gave an introduction to Abram, the father of faith. It is a journey of faith. In Hebrews 11:8 we read, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."

I like to plan my trips and destinations. When I am going somewhere, I have a destination in mind. Abraham left his family and went out, not knowing where he was going. What he did know was that God spoke to him and told him to go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you. Abram knew God, and he knew that God told him to leave, and that God told him that he would show him the land that he was to live in. Abram did not know where he was going, but he knew who he was obeying. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Abraham did not know where he was going, but he had an assurance and a conviction that God would direct him to that Promised Land. It requires great faith to leave your family and relatives, not knowing where you were going.

I want to make a couple of observations and applications from this first point. Abram heard what the Lord said to him. The Bible was not written yet. Moses came hundreds of years later than Abram, and he wrote the first five books of the Bible. So, God did not speak to Abram out of the word of God. We have the written word of God, and God will often speak to us out of His word. We can also use the Scriptures as a plumb line to see if what we think we are hearing lines up with it. God is not going to tell us something that is not consistent with His written word.

We don't know if God appeared and they had an audible conversation. We don't know if God spoke to Abram in a dream. We don't know if the Holy Spirit gave Abram thoughts, impressions, or a picture. God speaks in many ways to us. However God spoke to Abram, he heard what God spoke to him. It is important for us to hear what God speaks to us, so we must be open to Him speaking to us in a variety of ways.

Here are some practical things to consider about hearing from God.

- Spend time in God's word. Most prophetic people I know spend time in God's word.
- Spend time worshipping God. Most prophetic people spend time in worship when they are trying to hear from God.
- Spend time in prayer. Include some time to listen to the Lord in your prayer time. Prayer is not a one-way conversation; it is a two-way conversation between you and God. So, we should be quick to hear, and slow to speak.
- Set aside time to fast. Fasting increases our sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.
- Journal your thoughts. Many times when I begin to write, I begin to flow in the Holy Spirit.
- Ask God questions. I was reminded this week in my quiet times of how often David went and inquired of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 23:1-2, the Philistines were attacking Keilah and David asked, "should I go out to battle?" (1 Sam 23:2) The Lord told him to go ahead and attack the Philistines and deliver the inhabitants of Keilah. Afterward, in 1 Samuel 23:11-13, David and his men were in Keilah, and he asked the Lord if the people of Keilah would give him up to Saul. The Lord told him that they would, so David and his men left. In 2 Samuel 5:19, David inquired of the Lord about attacking the Philistines and the Lord told him yes. In 2 Samuel 5:22-24, the Philistines gathered to attack David, and he once again inquired of the Lord about attacking the Philistines. This time the Lord told him not to attack them directly, but to circle around them and come at them by the balsam trees. The point is that David constantly asked the Lord and sought His counsel and direction.

I also believe that it is important to check what we are hearing and sensing and get confirmation. There are a number of ways to confirm what you are hearing.

- Check it out with the Word of God. I mentioned earlier that Abram did not have the written Word of God to use. We have a great advantage in this respect. There were two families that came to a church that I was pastoring several years ago and a certain lady controlled both families. She said that Yahweh told her this and Yahweh told her that. When they wanted to join our church, the form asks if you are in agreement with the doctrines of the church. She said that she did not believe the Word of God was the final authority on our lives and practices. She picked up my Bible and threw it down on the table and said this is just a book. We have to do what Yahweh tells us to do. Yahweh's voice is the final authority. I told her that anything that we hear from the Lord needs to line up with God's word. She was not in agreement with that and they left the church. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."
- Ask God to confirm the word. It is not doubting God; it is humbly acknowledging that we are human, and can get our soulish thoughts mixed up with spiritual thoughts.

- Check it out with trusted spiritual advisers. David went to Nathan, the prophet. When David wanted to build a house for the Lord, he went to Nathan. Nathan's first reply was to go ahead and do what is in your heart, but then the word of the Lord came to Nathan that David's son was to build the temple. We need Nathans in our lives to run things by. Karen and I share with one another. I also run things by other people in my life. Before we started meeting at this location, I shared the vision that I had about this property with Karen, Tom, and Pamela. We need to be humble and recognize that we can miss it at times.
2. **God's Promises** (Gen 12:2-3, Gal 3:14, 3:29, Eph 1:3, 2 Cor 1:3-4, Ps 67:1-2)

(Gen 12:2-3) "and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; {3} and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

After God tells Abram to leave his family and relatives, God makes some promises to Abram. He tells him that He will make him a great nation. Second, God tells him that He will bless him. Third, God promises to make his name great. Fourth, God tells Abram that he will be a blessing to others. He will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. God also said that He would bless those that bless him and curse those who curse him. One of the reasons it is important for America to bless Israel is these are the descendants of Abraham. We are blessed by blessing the descendants of Abraham.

There are different kinds of promises in Scripture. God promised Noah that He would never again destroy the whole earth with a flood. This was an unconditional promise. No matter how wicked the earth becomes again, God will not destroy the whole earth with a flood. He tells us in 2 Peter 3:7-10 that He will destroy the present heavens and earth with fire, but the promise to destroy with water is an unconditional promise.

Then, we have conditional promises. Conditional promises have requirements that have to be met. I call Proverbs 3 the Promise chapter. God gives lots of promises to us, but we have to meet those conditions before we see the promises fulfilled. For example, he tells us in Proverbs 3:1-2 that if we do not forget His teaching, but let our hearts keep His commandments; He will give us length of days and years of life, and peace.

In Proverbs 3:3-4, we are promised favor and good repute in the sight of God and man, but the conditions are that we must not let kindness and truth leave us. We must bind kindness and truth around our neck and write them on the tablet of our heart. To see this promise fulfilled, we must do our part.

In verses 5-6, God promises to make our paths straight. I like that promise, but there are conditions. We have to trust in the Lord with all our heart. We cannot lean on our own understanding. Third, we must acknowledge Him in all our ways. Those are conditional promises.

God made some promises to Abraham, but they were not without conditions. Abraham had to leave his family and relatives. Abraham had to trust in the Lord with all His heart. Abraham could not lean on his own understanding. Abraham was going to have to acknowledge God in all His ways, because God was going to show him the promised land in the future, not right now.

When we see a promise from God, we need to find out if there are conditions or requirements on our part in order for that promise to be fulfilled. When my daughter was in the hospital with leukemia, the doctors told us that she had Acute Myeloma Leukemia, or AML, and that they had no cure for it. They said she had three to eight weeks to live. They offered to put her on an experimental program of chemotherapy, which we agreed to. As I prayed and sought the Lord, I saw a promise in Psalm 41. It contained a promise with some conditions.

(Psalm 41:1-3) “How blessed is he who considers the helpless; The LORD will deliver him in a day of trouble. {2} The LORD will protect him and keep him alive, and he shall be called blessed upon the earth; and do not give him over to the desire of his enemies. {3} The LORD will sustain him upon his sickbed; in his illness, You restore him to health.”

I looked at the conditions. Kathleen was constantly taking care of the helpless. We were taking care of foster babies, and they were known as crack babies because their mothers were crack addicts. It took at least six months to flush out most of the effects of the crack that was in their bodies. These were helpless little babies that needed constant TLC. Kathleen considered the helpless.

I also saw the promises. God would deliver Kathleen in the day of trouble. God would protect her and keep her alive. God would sustain her on her sickbed and restore her to health. Those were a lot of great promises and Kathleen was certainly in need of all of these promises. I said to the Lord, “Kathleen has met the conditions of Your promise, and I am not going to ask You to fulfill Your promises to my daughter. I am trusting You to do this because You always keep Your word.”

In Romans 4:20, we read that with respect to the promises of God, Abraham did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. I was pretty assured from that point on that Kathleen was going to be restored. God was fully able to perform what He said He would do, and God was going to get the glory for restoring her to health. God did restore her to health, and she did not die in three to eight weeks. She is now twenty-five years old, and I gave her hand away in marriage several years ago.

(Rom 4:20-21) “yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, {21} and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.”

What are the promises that you need in your life? Do you need provision? God says in Matthew 6:33 that we need to seek first His kingdom and all these things will be added to us. Are you seeking first the kingdom of God? Is Jesus, the King of Kings, on the throne of your life? Have you received Christ into your life? Is He Lord of your life? Does your daytimer and your activities reflect that you seek first the kingdom of God? Does your checkbook reflect that you are seeking first the kingdom of God?

Do you need peace in your life? God promises in Isaiah 26:3 that He will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are stayed on Him. Is your mind stayed on Him? In a similar promise for peace in Philippians, God says that His peace, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard our hearts and minds. The conditions are three-fold. We must refuse to be anxious. Second, we must

pray. We must pray about everything with thanksgiving. Third, we must think about things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good repute, excellent and worthy of praise. We have to discard any thoughts that do not line up with these things. When we do that, God promises to give us peace.

(Is 26:3) "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You."

(Phil 4:6-8) "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. {7} And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. {8} Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

Maybe you need direction in life. I mentioned Proverbs 3:5-6. Are you trusting in the Lord with all your heart? Are you leaning on your own understanding? Are you trying to find out His direction for your life, or are you trying to get God to give you what you want? Are you acknowledging Him in all your ways? Those are conditional promises.

God promises to bless Abram. I want to look at those blessings for a few minutes. First, God wanted to bless Abram so that he would be a blessing to all the families of the earth, or all nations. Today, we have lots of people teaching on the blessings of God. If you give money to God, He will bless you so that you can be wealthy. The emphasis is on our getting wealthy. God's emphasis on blessing Abram was so that he could be a blessing to others. Abram was not going to be blessed so that he could live in a bigger house, drive a bigger car, or live a more extravagant life. Abram was going to be blessed so that all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Notice the same principle is prayed in Psalm 67:1-2. "*God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us. Selah. That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.*" God blesses us so that His ways and His salvation would be made known among all nations. The blessings in our lives are to bless all families of the earth with the good news, the gospel, that all people might be blessed. The Psalmist did not pray that God would bless him so that he could live in a palace. He prayed God's blessings so that the whole earth would be blessed. This is exactly what God promised Abram.

Another example of this principle is in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. In this passage, God promises to comfort us in all our afflictions. "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*" Why does He comfort us? The first reason is obvious. God is identified as the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. God wants us to be comforted. But, He wants us to comfort others with the comfort that we have received. God wants us blessed so that we can be a blessing to others. He wants to bless all the families of the earth through us.

I want to look at another aspect of the blessing of Abram, but I want to start with Christ. In Ephesians 1:3, Paul writes, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*" He goes on to mention

some of the various blessings that we have in Christ. How do these blessings tie in to Abram? That is a good question. Let's look at how Paul answers that question in Galatians 3:13-14.

(Gal 3:13-14) "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"— {14} in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Paul wrote that we have been redeemed from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. Why? He took the curse for our sins so that we could receive the blessing of Abraham and receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. It is our faith in Christ that we become the sons of Abraham. It is our faith in Christ that we receive these same blessings that were given to Abram.

Notice that Paul goes on to say in Galatians 3:29, "*And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*" Do you want the blessing of Abram in your life? Do you want to be a blessing to all families? The question that must be asked is, do you belong to Christ? Have you received Christ into your life?

Conclusion

This morning we have been looking at how God spoke to Abram. He told him to leave his family and relatives and that He would bless him. We looked at some of the ways that God speaks to us. We also looked at the promises that God gave to Abram. These promises were conditional. They required Abram's obedience. In Hebrews 11:8, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." We need to hear God and then we need to respond in obedience to what the Lord tells us.

This morning, has the Lord been speaking to you? Has He spoken to you about spending time listening to Him? Or, has He spoken to you about His promises to us about peace, provision, or direction? Has He given you some practical things to do in response to those promises?

Or, has God spoken to you about a relationship with God. We receive the blessings of God and of Abram through our faith in Christ. Have you placed your faith in Christ? If you have never received Christ into your life, let me encourage you to begin your own journey of faith this morning. Our journey of faith begins by placing our faith in Christ.

In 1 John 5:12-13, the Apostle wrote, "*He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*" Have you received the Son of God into your life? Paul wrote in Romans 10:9-10 that if we believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, and confess with our mouths that He is Lord, we will be saved. This morning, if you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died and rose again, you can receive Him by confessing Him as Lord. It could be something simple like, "Jesus, I do believe that You are the Son of God. I believe that You came and paid the price for my sins, and then rose from the dead. This morning I want to start my journey of faith with You. Please come into my life and be the Lord of my life. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.