

Introduction

Last week I asked you if you would get on an airplane without knowing where it was flying to. I mentioned that the pilot would come over the intercom at some point and let you know where you were going. Essentially that is what happened in Genesis 12:1-3. Abraham boarded an airplane, but had no idea where it was going to land. The Pilot (God) had spoken to him, and told him he needed to get on board this plane. The Pilot said He would let Abram know where they were going as they went. Abram was going to have to trust the Pilot and lean not on his own understanding. The Pilot said that if Abram would get on board, He would bless him, make his name great, and make him a blessing to everyone. The Pilot said that all the families of the earth would be blessed by him. In our text today, Abram boards that plane and they make four stopovers. Some of these stopovers are very brief. The last stopover is in Egypt, but it is not his final destination. It is just the last of four stops that we have in Genesis 12. This is only the start of Abraham's journey of faith. This is Part II of the beginning of Abraham's Journey of faith.

Abraham's Journey of Faith (Gen 12:4-20, Heb 11:8-10, John 15:14, James 2:23, 2 Chron 20:7)

1. Journey to Shechem (Gen 12:4-7)
2. Journey to Bethel (Gen 12:8)
3. Journey to Negev (Gen 12:9-10)
4. Journey to Egypt (Gen 12:11-20, Gen 13:1)

1. **Journey to Shechem** (Gen 12:4-7)

(Gen 12:4-7) "So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. {5} Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. {6} Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land. {7} The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him."

The first thing that we find in our passage today is obedience. Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him. In Hebrews 11, we see that it was by faith that when Abraham was called, he obeyed. He did not know where the Pilot was taking him, but he got on board that flight to the Promised Land.

(Heb 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."

In 1989, Larnelle Harris wrote and sang a song entitled "I Can Begin Again." In that song there is a phrase, "new beginnings are not just for the young." It was about that same time that the Lord impressed upon me that I was to go back onto the PGA Tour. I was in my mid 30's and had not played much golf for over five years. That song really spoke to me. For me I really was saying, "I Can Begin Again" and the phrase that new beginnings are not just for the young was very relevant and encouraging.

In our text, Abram was seventy-five years old and his wife, Sarah, was sixty-five. They were not young either. Larnelle's song that new beginnings are not just for the young was especially true and relevant for them. Abram departed from Haran and set out for the land of Canaan. Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot, his nephew, and all their possessions that they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran.

I asked myself, why did they go to Canaan? Did the Lord speak to them and direct them to go to Canaan? Our text does not say specifically. God may have spoken to him and told him to go to Canaan. There is another possibility also. In Genesis 11, Terah took Abram, Sarai, and Lot and went up from Ur to enter the land of Canaan. But, they only went as far as Haran and settled there. Terah died in Haran, so he never made it to Canaan. Perhaps Abram was just picking up where Terah left off, and was continuing towards Canaan.

(Gen 11:31) "Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there."

Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem. The word Shechem means ridge. (The root word means shoulder.) Abram's first stop was at a town called Shechem, and it was in a mountainous area. There was an oak tree, which was a well-known landmark in that area. It was called the oak of Moreh.

One year Karen and I stayed at the Kinhega Lodge in Tallahassee, Florida. It was owned by J.T. Williams, a prominent businessman in the area. At the Kinhega Lodge there was a large oak tree that was over five hundred years old. The Indians in that area used to go have their PowWows under that oak tree. The giant oak was a landmark in that region. The oak at Moreh was very similar. It was a landmark that people knew about. Many scholars believe that Moreh was a person who lived at that time. Scholars are not sure what Moreh means, but some believe it means teacher. Others believe it means an archer. The tree became even more renowned after Abram built an altar. In verse seven we read that God appeared to Abram by the oak of Moreh. For that reason the Jews held that site as a very holy place.

(Gen 12:7) "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him."

It was at the oak of Moreh that Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel, and called for their leaders, and they presented themselves before God. Joshua reviewed their history with the leaders and made a covenant with them. He wrote all "the words of the book of the law of God and took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord." That sanctuary was the same sanctuary that Abram built after God appeared to him.

(Josh 24:1, 26) Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel and for their heads and their judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God....{26} And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD."

In verse 1, the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country...to the land which I will show you.’ At the oak of Moreh, the Lord appeared to Abram again, and this time He tells him, “to your descendants I will give this land.” To your descendants sounds futuristic. Abram did not have any descendants at this point. If I am Abram, I am wondering, what land are you giving me? Abram has a prophetic word about his descendants and their land, but he still does not know exactly where he is going.

What was Abram's response? He built an altar and worshiped the Lord. The word for altar is *mizbeach*, which is translated as altar. The root word is *zabach*, which means to slaughter for sacrifice. When Abram built this altar, he built it to present an offering or sacrifice to God. Many people today go to a church to “worship” where they like the music ministry, children's ministry, or they like the preaching. Abram created an altar to worship the Lord. To Abram, worship was presenting a sacrifice to God. Worship was about honoring God and giving to God. It was not about receiving something. It was about rendering thanks to God. It was about giving Him honor and glory. He did not come before God empty handed; he brought his very best animals and sacrificed them at the altar he built by the Oak of Moreh.

2. **Journey to Bethel** (Gen 12:8)

Next, Abram proceeded from Shechem to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent. He had Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.

(Gen 12:8) “Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.”

The book of Genesis was written by Moses while he was in the wilderness. Moses calls said that Abram proceeded from Shechem to the mountain on the east of Bethel. At that time it was not called Bethel. The name of the city when Abram went there was Luz, which means almond. Apparently, there were good almond trees and so it was noted for its almonds. In Genesis 28, Jacob was traveling from Beersheba to Haran, and he stopped there and spent the night. He had a dream about a ladder that went from earth to heaven, and there were angels ascending and descending on that ladder. Then, the Lord stood above the ladder and said, “*I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and your descendants.*” (Gen 28:12-13) When Jacob awoke, he said, “*Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.*” He was afraid and said, “*How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*” So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “*If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. ‘This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.’*” (Gen 28:16-22)

So, the city of Luz was renamed by Jacob as Bethel, which means the house of God. God gave the same promise to Jacob that He had given to Abram. He was going to give this land to his descendants. Jacob took the stone that he had lied on and made a pillar. Then, he made a vow to the Lord to begin tithing. He was going to give God a tenth of everything that God gave him.

Notice that the first thing that Abram did was build another altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. We have another element of worship introduced. The altar or mizbeach was for offering sacrifices to the Lord. Abram did more than offer sacrifices in his worship of the Lord; he called upon the name of the Lord.

There are hundreds of names of God in the Bible. For many years I kept a journal of all the names of God that I came across. I recorded the specific name of God and right beside it I put the verse where it was found. Many years later I wrote a prayer manual, and I was able to take all the notes that I had been taking for many years and insert them into the manual.

When the twelve apostles asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He began with, "Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name." The word, hallow, means to make holy, sanctify, or to consecrate. God's name is holy because He is holy. We can't make it holy; it already is holy. I believe that when we hallow the name of God, we treat His name with reverence because His name is holy. In Revelations we see the angels, elders, and multitudes in heaven hallowing the name of the Lord by singing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, who was, who is, who is to come." We see them singing, "worthy is the Lamb." We can hallow the name of God in our songs, and we can also hallow the name of God in our prayers. In Matthew 6 and in Luke 11, where we have the parallel accounts of Jesus teaching the disciples to pray, they are hallowing the name of the Lord in prayer. We begin our prayers by hallowing the name of God. One of the reasons that we move from our time of worship into our prayer time is that we have begun our prayers with hallowing His name. It is a Scriptural pattern that we are following.

(Matt 6:9) "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.'"

We also see in Revelation 5:8 that the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. The harp obviously represents worshiping the Lord with music and songs. The very next verse, Revelation 5:9, we find them singing a new song to the Lord. The bowls of incense represent the prayers of the saints. Worship and prayer go together. Our prayers should include times of hallowing the name of the Lord, which can be in the form of songs or prayers.

(Rev 5:8) "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

In my message last week, I mentioned that God blesses us so that we can bless others. God blessed Abram and said that he would be a blessing to all the families on earth. I gave you several examples, one of them being from 2 Corinthians 1, where God comforts us so that we can comfort others with the same comfort that we have been comforted with. It is the same principle. In that same passage we find that God is the Father of Mercies and the God of all Comfort. Those are two names of God. These specific names of God have significance. We can call upon these names in our hallowing. Father, I praise You because You are the God of all Comfort. I praise You because You are the Father of Mercies. Your mercies are new every morning. I thank You for Your mercies every day. I thank You for comforting us. We can use these names in our hallowing of God's name.

We can also use these names when we are in need of Comfort. If you are going through a tough time, or have suffered loss, it would be good to do what Abram did, and call upon the name of the Lord. Don't call on any name; call on the Father of Mercies and the God of all Comfort.

If you are in need of provision, call upon Jehovah Jireh, which means the Lord will provide. Call upon Jehovah Rohi, which means the Lord God is our Shepherd. As our Shepherd, He makes us lie down in green pastures. He leads us beside still waters. He prepares a table in the midst of our enemies. Our Shepherd makes sure that we are not in want or lack of anything. If you are in need, call upon Jehovah Jireh and Jehovah Rohi.

If you are in need of peace, call upon the God of all peace. Call upon Jehovah Shalom, which means the Lord is our peace. Call upon the King of Salem, which means King of Peace. Call upon the Prince of Peace. We not only hallow the names of God, but we call upon the names of God because they reveal who God is. They also reveal His character and His nature.

Another aspect of calling upon the name of the Lord is authority and power. As the CEO of Murchison Drilling Schools, I sign checks bearing our name. Not everyone can sign those checks because not everyone has authority to represent the name of Murchison Drilling Schools. As Christians, God has given us authority to use His name. The seven sons of Sceva tried to cast out demons because they saw the Apostle Paul casting out demons in Jesus' name. The evil spirit said to them, "I recognize Jesus and I know about Paul, but who are you?" The spirit leaped on these seven sons of Sceva, subdued them, overpowered them, and they left the house naked and wounded. They did not have the authority to use the name of the Lord. Paul was in a covenant relationship with God, and he had authority to use the name of the Lord.

(Acts 19:13-16) "But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." {14} Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. {15} And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" {16} And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."

In John 16:23-24, Jesus is teaching the disciples about praying in His name. He told them that if they asked the Father for anything in His name, He will give it to them. There is power and authority praying in the name of Jesus. When we pray in the name of Jesus, it is not just a phrase at the end of a prayer. It means that we are representing Jesus' interests, and are acting as His agents or representatives. Paul was casting out evil spirits in the name of Jesus, because he was Jesus' representative. You and I have been given all authority in Matthew 28 to use the name of Jesus. There is power and authority when we pray in the name of Jesus.

(John 16:23-24) "In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. {24} "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full."

At the altar that Abram built between Bethel and Ai, Abram called upon the name of the Lord. We do not know from our text if he was just calling on the name of the Lord to hallow His name,

or to present a need or request from God. In Proverbs 3:5-6, if we want God to direct our paths, we are to trust God, lean not on our own understanding, and to acknowledge Him in all our ways. I believe that Abram was between Bethel and Ai, and he is acknowledging God by calling upon His name. I believe that Abram is at a crossroads, and is calling upon the name of the Lord because he wants to know which way to go.

3. **Journey to Negev** (Gen 12:9-10)

(Gen 12:9-10) “Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev. {10} Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.”

After calling upon the name of the Lord, Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev. The name, Negev, simply means the south country. The Negev is the parched land to the west and to the south of the Dead Sea. It is bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea. It is a very sparse land with very little rainfall. In the early months of the year, when it gets what little rain it gets, there is vegetation there for goats, sheep, camels and other livestock. During the other times of the year, animals must be grazed on the mountains where there is more abundant rainfall and vegetation.

Negev was just a temporary stopover. There was a severe famine in the Negev so there was nothing there for Abram and his livestock to eat. As any of us would do, we sought God's provision for us, and it was not in the Negev. So, he looked elsewhere, and decided to go to Egypt. So, God used circumstances to lead Abram to Egypt.

A number of years ago, there was a family in our church. The man could not find a job anywhere in town. Finally, he found a job in Connecticut, so he and his family moved to Connecticut. That was God's provision and leading for him. Sometimes God speaks to us and gives us clear direction. He spoke to Abram and said, This land is for your descendants.” That was clear. Sometimes, we don't have a clear word, and we are between two places, like Bethel and Ai, and we call on the name of the Lord and ask for direction. Sometimes, God will lead through circumstances. God is not limited in the ways that He can direct our paths. Abram continued on towards Egypt to sojourn or dwell there.

4. **Journey to Egypt** (Gen 12:11-20)

(Gen 12:11-16) “It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; {12} and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. {13} "Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you." {14} It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. {15} Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. {16} Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.”

As Abram got near to Egypt, he acted out of fear. He was fearful that the Egyptians would kill him so that they could have his wife. So, he told Sarai to tell the Egyptians that he was her

brother. Technically, she was his sister. In Genesis 20, Abram does the same thing with Abimelech. When confronted, Abram explains that he and Sarai had the same father, Terah, but that they had different mothers. Ancient Hebrew writings record that Terah's first wife was Yona, and his second wife is Tehevita, by whom he had Sarah.¹ We do not know if Terah had two wives at one time or if his wife died and he remarried. But, in any case, Terah had children with two different wives and Abram married one of his half-sisters.

(Gen 20:12-13) “Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife; {13} and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, ‘This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother.’”

There are lots of things in the Scriptures that I do not understand, and this is one of them. I believe that a man should love his wife like Christ loved the church. He should lay his life down for his wife. I believe a real leader of his family would not give his wife to another man to save his own neck. I think Abram was wrong in what he did. Initially, it appears that his scheme worked. Pharaoh's officials saw that Sarai was beautiful, even at the age of seventy-five, and brought her to Pharaoh's house. They treated Abram well for her sake, and gave him sheep and oxen and donkey, and male and female servants. Everything looked great, except that Abram had given up his wife to save his own neck and to be treated favorably. But, let's continue on.

(Gen 12:17-20) “But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. {18} Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? {19} "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go." {20} Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.”

God is God. Even when we make mistakes in life, God is still God. God intervened and struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. Many times we blame things on chance, but Pharaoh knew this was of God, and why God was striking them with plagues. He called Abram and said, “what is this you have done to me?” I think it is a fair question. Pharaoh continued, “Why did you say, ‘she is my sister?’” God was using Pharaoh to rebuke Abram for what he had done. Pharaoh restored Sarai to Abram, and then sent him away. Pharaoh had his men escort Abram away, and all that belonged to him. Abram went up from Egypt back to the Negev.

(Gen 13:1) “So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him.”

It is one thing to leave a land because God tells you to leave. It is another thing to leave a land because you are thrown out. Abram was thrown out of Egypt. His deception was not appreciated by Pharaoh. I believe if God's hand and protection had not been on Abram, Pharaoh would have put him to death. I believe that God struck Pharaoh and his house with these plagues and they had such a fear of the Lord that they did not dare lift their hands against Abram. Pharaoh restored

¹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on Genesis 20:12

Sarai to him, and then made sure they got out of Egypt. I see God's sovereign protection, and His intervention.

God had made a promise to Abram. He promised that He would make his name great, and bless him so that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. God had great plans for Abram. Abram could have very easily missed out on those plans and those blessings by his cowardly actions. If it were not for God's grace and intervention, the life and heritage of Abram could have ended there. It is only by the grace of God that any of us are here. All of us have made mistakes. All of us have made some poor choices. All of us must humbly give thanks that God is a God of mercy and He gives us second and third chances in life. Abram was thrown out of Egypt, but he is being given a second chance.

Conclusion

This morning Abram began his journey of faith. He was obedient to the Lord, and left his family and relatives. He took his wife, Lot, and all their possessions and began his journey. He did not know where he was going, but he stepped out in obedience. He was led to go to Shechem, where the Lord spoke to him and said he would give the land to his descendants. He did not stop there; he went between Luz and Ai and built an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord. Then, he went to the Negev, but there was a severe famine in the land, so he journeyed on to Egypt. He misrepresented Sarai as his sister and he was escorted out of Egypt.

Abram was on a journey of faith. All of us are on a journey. Usually don't know all the details; that is why it is a walk of faith. Like Abram, we are trying to be led by the Lord to the place that He has for each of us. In our journey, we try to honor God with our sacrifices. We try to honor God by calling upon His name. We try to honor God with our lives. Sometimes we mess up, like Abram did. The good news for all of us is that God is the Father of Mercies. He gives grace to all of us. He gives second chances and third chances.

Perhaps this morning you need a fresh start. Maybe Larnelle's song is for you this morning. It is time for a new beginning in your life. It begins by returning to the Lord with your whole heart. Have you given your heart to the Lord? This morning, I encourage you to give your heart to the Lord. Ask Him to give you a fresh start. Let's pray.