

Abraham's life of faith 2 - 6

2. Faith starts with God's personal call

2. Next, we see that **faith is intensely personal**. 'Get yourself away from your country' (the Hebrew emphasizes Abram's personal responsibility). Abram must think for himself and act for himself.

"Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house..." ^{▣1}

The word 'you' is a singular word; it refers to Abram only.

"...Go forth...to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; 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 shall be blessed." ^{▣2}

^{▣1} 12:1

^{▣2} 12:1-3

• Each person has to believe for himself

Actually hundreds of people went with Abram. He had flocks of sheep and employed herdsmen ^{▣1}. He could raise a private army ^{▣2}. Abram's people were like a small tribe. He had a wife, who travelled with him; and Lot went also ^{▣3}. Yet God spoke to Abram very personally. Each person has to believe for himself. Each person has to hear God's voice for himself. It is true that faith leads us into fellowship with others who also take God at His word. But there is a personal and individual side to the matter as well. Each person has to be 'convinced in his own mind' ^{▣4}.

^{▣1} 13:7

^{▣2} 14:14

^{▣3} 13:1

^{▣4} Romans 14:5

3. Faith focuses especially on the promises of God

3. **Faith focuses especially on the promises of God**. When God spoke to Abram there were many promises which were given to him. There are eight phrases which have promises in them. We have reference to (i) '*...the land which I will show you...*'. God says (ii) '*... I will make you a ... nation*' (iii) '*... I will bless you*' (iv) '*... I will make your name great*' (v) '*...you shall be a blessing*' (vi) '*...I will bless those who bless you*' (vii) '*...the one who curses you I will curse*' (viii) '*... in you all the families ... shall be blessed*'.

God's Word has testimonies, precepts and promises. God testifies to the truth. He tells things the way they really are. His Word has 'testimonies'.

God gives commands. He gives orders and lays upon us what is good and right for us. His Word has 'precepts'.

God gives declarations about what God will do, He tells us what it is He wishes to do for us. His Word has 'promises'.

Testimony to facts, words requiring obedience, promises concerning God's will for the future – all of these are to be found in God's word to us. But faith especially focuses on God's promises. *There are 'very great and precious promises'* ^{☞1}.

^{☞1} 2 Peter 1:4

4. Faith requires patience

4. **Faith requires patience.** All of these promises of God to Abram will require patience. The future tenses, 'I will ... I will...', do not refer to the immediate future. They do not mean 'I will instantly...'; they mean 'I will eventually...'. It is by faith and patience that Abram will inherit the promises.

5. Faith gives hope

5. This means too **that faith and hope are closely linked.** 'Hope' – in the way the Bible uses the word – is faith looking forward. '*Faith is being sure of what we hope for*' ^{☞1}. Abram from this point onwards was expecting certain things to happen. God has spoken; Abram has believed Him.

^{☞1} Hebrews 11:1

6. Faith may have to surmount great obstacles

6. **Faith may have to surmount great obstacles.** God has told Abram that he will have a land and that he will have descendants. Yet we have already been told '*Sarah was barren*' ^{☞1}; and '*The Canaanites were in the land*' ^{☞2}. The land is occupied by wicked people.

^{☞1} Genesis 11:30
^{☞2} 12:6

Interlude – God's sevenfold promise to Abraham

Let us turn aside for a while and take a closer look at these promises which were given to Abram. In one way or another all of them can be taken to heart by the Christian. All Christians are '*Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise*'. What is promised to Abraham is promised to his seed. What he inherits, we shall inherit.

The promises to Abram really amount to seven: (i) land, (ii) multiplication into nationhood, (iii) personal blessing, (iv) a name, (v) usefulness to God, (vi) significance, (vii) international impact. All of them depend on faith. '*Go forth...*', says God, '*and I will...*' do this and that. If Abram does not 'Go forth', there will be no inheriting the promises.

• The promise of Abraham for the Christian

The New Testament says that the Christian, when he comes to salvation, receives 'the promise of Abraham'. Supremely, the 'promise of Abraham' is the gift of the Holy Spirit, as Galatians 3:14 goes on to say. Yet, actually, all of the promises of Genesis 12:2–3 apply to the modern Christian in one way or another.

• Supremely the gift of the Holy Spirit

PROMISE 1: LAND

Think of the various ingredients in the promise that was given to Abram. One of them concerned **land**. '*Go forth... to the land which I will show you*'. Abram was being offered physical territory; 'the land' would later be called the land of 'Israel'. Yet the promise is a full and rich one. Actually Abram never did get much territory during his lifetime. A burial ground for his wife was all he ever got.

Abram got the enjoyment of the land. He spent the rest of his life (apart from one disastrous trip to Egypt) in Canaan. He may not have owned it but he lived as if he did!

• A realm to occupy for God

He got a spiritual work to do for God while he was in the land of Israel. He pioneered a nation for God even before his family owned any land. There was a 'territory' for him to conquer, a realm which he had to occupy for God. The literal possession of land would

come later, but the task, the area of work into which he was called, was there from the beginning.

Abram received a heavenly kingdom. Hebrews 11:16 says he was looking for a heavenly country.

One day Abram will inherit the earth. Romans 4:11 is right to say that Abraham had a promise that he would 'inherit the world'. Actually words like this are not explicit in Genesis, but Paul is drawing out the full implications of what the promise of 'land' involved.

• "The Land" for the Christian

All of these things apply to the Christian also. The Christian in a sense 'gets land' even in this world. Although he may not own any physical territory, God sees to it that as we live by faith we enjoy God's world. 'Blessed are the meek', said Jesus, 'for they shall inherit the earth'. It starts even in this life.

• A calling

The Christian also has what we can call a spiritual 'territory', a realm which we have to occupy for God, a calling.

• A spiritual kingdom in this world

The Christian inherits a spiritual kingdom. As he moves around this world he has the presence of God with him. The Spirit is at work in his life. He inherits joy and peace, liberty and boldness. There is a spiritual kingdom at work within him as he serves God in this world. He is 'inheriting the earth'.

• Ultimately – a resurrected glorified body and a new heavens and earth

One day the Christian will inherit the earth, quite literally. There will quite literally be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. The ultimate inheritance is that every Christian will enjoy a resurrected glorified body, and will walk around in God's glorified world. In that day 'the land that I will show you' will truly have arrived and we shall have arrived in it.



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