

Abraham's Sojourn by Faith

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Bible Text: Hebrews 11:9,10
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We read from the Holy Scriptures this evening from two passages, first from the Old Testament, Genesis 12. Genesis 12, we'll read the first nine verses. We have in this account the call of Abram to leave his country, to go to a land that God would show him. And secondly, we will read from the familiar 11th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews 11, we'll read verses 1 through 19. Our text this evening is found in Hebrews 11, verses 9 and 10, which speak of the calling of Abraham to sojourn in the land of promise.

We hear the word of God first in Genesis chapter 12.

1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. 4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. 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. 6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. 7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. 8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

Then we turn to Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11.

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good report. 3 Through faith we

understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. 4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. 5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. 8 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. 9 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: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: 19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

So far we read from God's infallibly inspired word.

As I said, our text this evening is found here in Hebrews 11:9 and 10, where we read,

9 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: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, Abraham is a very prominent figure in the list of the so-called heroes of faith we have before us in Hebrews 11. Abraham could be considered from several points of view. He was called the friend of God. God established his covenant with Abraham and his seed. But here in Hebrews 11, the emphasis clearly falls upon the faith of Abraham. Here we see that Abraham's faith was the subjective ground of things hoped for. Here it is plain that Abraham's faith was the evidence of things not seen.

Verse 8 of this chapter tells us that this faith of Abraham was manifest in obedience to the call of God. The call came first to Abram at Ur of the Chaldees and then later at Haran. That call to Abraham came very definitely as a call from God. Abraham did not leave his home because of any personal convictions or inner feelings that he may have had. This call of God was the direct word of God to him. Abraham received a direct revelation from God in whatever form that may have been and the contents of that call revealed to us, are revealed to us in Genesis 12. That call consisted of a twofold command. Negatively, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house," and positively, "and go unto a land that I will show thee, and I will make of thee a great nation. I will bless them that bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing." Included in that promise was God's word to Abraham upon his arrival in Canaan, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." And so it was that by this call, God preached the gospel unto Abraham as we read of that in the epistle to the Galatians 3 in verses 8 and 9, "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

Abraham obeyed this call. We read, he went out. He did not question God's call to him. He did not attempt to avoid that call. He did not contrive excuses not to go and obey God's call. Abraham simply went. He took Sarai and Lot and all the souls they had gotten in Haran and all their substance, and he went out. Yea, he went out, not knowing whither he went. Think of it. Abraham did not even know where he was going. God had not told Abraham the name of the country which would one day be his inheritance. God had not provided Abraham with a detailed map. God had actually told him very little about his destination but by faith, Abraham simply followed step by step the direction of the Lord. But Abraham's faith and obedience must not be understood as just a single act that was fulfilled when he reached Canaan. Upon arriving in the land of Canaan, Abraham was called to persevere in his faith. Scripture tells us that when Abraham arrived in the land of promise, he was called to sojourn there. Our text tells us by faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country. Beloved, Abraham's faith manifested in his life of sojourning is meant to strengthen our faith. Abraham's faith manifested in his life of sojourning is meant to encourage us in our pilgrimage here below and it's in this light that we consider our text this evening under the theme, "Abraham's Sojourn by Faith." We notice, first of all, the meaning; secondly, the motivation; and finally, the significance."

So what did Abraham find when he came to the land which God showed him? Negatively, he did not find a country all prepared for himself and his family. He did not find a land which he could immediately take as his own possession. He did not find a

country filled with people with whom he could have a genuinely spiritual relationship. Oh no, quite the contrary, Abraham found a land of which he could not take definite possession. He found a country which was inhabited by the heathen Canaanites. We read of that in Genesis 12 in verse 6, and the Canaanite was then in the land. And so he found a land filled with those with whom he could have no spiritual kinship.

Abraham had only the promise of God. God had promised to make of him a great nation but as yet he had no child, as yet his wife was barren. The Lord had promised to make Abraham's name great, but Abraham was a stranger in a land inhabited by heathen tribes. He had no fame or honor among the Canaanites. Jehovah had promised to give the land unto Abraham and his seed but Abraham did not own any of the land. We read in the book of Acts 7:5, "And he," that is, God, "gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child."

So what was Abraham now to do? Was Abraham to turn around and return unto the land from which he had come? Verse 15 in Hebrews 11 appears to suggest that that might have been possible and truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned but Abraham did not and could not go back. Well, was Abraham to take possession of the land by force? After all, God had promised that the land was to be his. But Abraham was not to raise up his own arm of flesh against the inhabitants of the land. Was Abraham to become a citizen of that land, a permanent inhabitant? Perhaps he could have moved in with some of the wicked descendants of Ham. Or maybe Abraham could have built his own fine city there in the land of Canaan. But Abraham, believing God's promise, could not do that. Abraham was called to exercise his God-given faith. He simply had to believe the promise of God. He had to wait for God himself to fulfill and realize his promise. He knew by faith that at the proper time God would give him the land.

Abraham was therefore required to sojourn in the land of promise. Literally, this word sojourn means to dwell beside or to live in one's neighborhood. It means to dwell in a place as a stranger, to dwell as a visitor in a place which is not one's home. And this Abraham did by faith. He dwelled as a stranger in the land of promise. He did not mix and mingle with the Canaanites. He did not conform to their idolatrous ways. He remained separate from the wicked inhabitants of the land. He was an outsider, a foreigner in the land which would one day be his. The text emphasizes that he sojourned there as in a strange country, literally, as in a land belonging to another. Abraham lived in a land conscious of the fact that not one square foot of that land belonged to him.

Abraham never made himself at home there. Our text emphasizes that Abraham's sojourn was shown, manifest by his dwelling in tabernacles and the word tabernacles refers here simply to tents. As you children know, a tent is always a temporary dwelling place. A tent can be easily packed up and carried away. A tent is always a very weak and frail abode. It offers little, if any, defense against attack. A tent has no real permanence and stability. It is without a strong foundation. A tent is always a movable abode. A tent may be pitched today in one place and tomorrow in another. A tent is the proper dwelling

place for a nomad, a wanderer in a land not his own. And so a tent is the symbol of what is temporary and Abraham's tent life pointed to the fact that he sojourned there in the land. By his dwelling in tents, Abraham manifested himself as a sojourner, a stranger in the land of promise. That Abraham sojourned dwelling in tabernacles meant that he stood in stark contrast to the inhabitants of the land. He was a stranger there, a foreigner, and it was obvious to all. Abraham took no part in the political or social affairs there, had very little social interaction with the Canaanites. Abraham built different altars and worshiped a different god. Abraham wore different clothes and spoke a different language and sang different songs. Abraham had different attitudes and goals.

As a tent dweller, Abraham was a person upon whom everyone looked as a stranger. Abraham did not buy a large tract of land. Abraham did not build a fine house or a palace. Abraham did not live in a city, did not become a citizen of the land. In all of his life, Abraham conducted himself as a foreigner, a sojourner in a land not his own and the scriptural account of Abraham's life testifies to the truth of all this. Notice Abraham's attitude at the time of the separation of his nephew Lot from him. At that time, it was abundantly clear that Abraham was willing to remain a pilgrim and stranger in the land. Abraham had a right to the land, he had the promise of God, but his attitude was one of self-denial and the whole incident leaves Abraham a lonely sojourner in the land.

It's significant that at the time when Abraham fought and gained the victory over Chedorlaomer and his allies from the east rescuing Lot, he was known by the Canaanites as the Hebrew. The Hebrew and that name means from the other side, referring either to the other side of the Jordan River or perhaps the Euphrates. This name given Abraham by the inhabitants of the land pointed to the fact that he was known as a stranger. In addition, when the Lord appeared to Abraham at Mamre in Genesis 18, we read that Abraham sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. There too, Abraham appeared as a sojourner. The very fact that Abraham sat in the door of his tent constituted a confession that he was a stranger in a strange land. Notice also Abraham's words to the sons of Heth at the time of his purchase of a burial place for his wife Sarah. Abraham said, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you. Give me a possession of a burying place with you that I may bury my dead out of my sight." That's Genesis 23 verse 4. That entire incident points to the fact that even in death Abraham was a stranger in the land. And finally, that Abraham was a sojourner in the land is evident from the very fact that Abraham sent his servant to Abraham's own kindred back in Haran to obtain a wife for his son Isaac.

Further, our text points out that Isaac and Jacob also sojourned dwelling in tents. We read dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. Our text emphasizes that Isaac and Jacob possessed the same promise of God. That's clear, first of all, from the fact that God, in speaking of the promise to Abraham, includes Abraham's seed. After Abraham had arrived in Canaan, the Lord appeared unto him and said, as we read in Genesis 12:4, "unto thy seed will I give this land." After Lot had chosen to go towards Sodom, the Lord spoke unto Abraham, "for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed. forever." At the time of the establishment of the covenant with Abraham, as we read of it in Genesis 17, God said unto Abraham,

"And I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

That Isaac and Jacob possessed the same promise of God is also clear from the fact that that promise was repeated unto them. In Genesis 26:3, we read that when Isaac was in Gerar because of the famine, the Lord appeared unto him and said, "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father." When Jacob was at Bethel fleeing to his uncle Laban, in his dream he heard the Lord say, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac, the land whereon thou liest. to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." Because Isaac and Jacob possessed the same promise, we read that they were heirs with him, literally co-heirs of the same promise. Therefore, they, too, believed the promise of God. They, too, sojourned in the land of promise. They dwelled in tents as strangers and pilgrims in the land. Jacob confessed that fact when before Pharaoh of Egypt, he said, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are 130 years."

All this emphasizes the fact that these patriarchs had to live their whole lives by faith as sojourners in the land of promise. Abraham didn't merely have to sojourn in the land, say, for a couple of years. He was already an aged man, 100 years old, before he even received the promised son. The only parcel of land Abraham ever possessed was the cave of Machpelah, which he bought for a cemetery. Abraham sojourned his whole life without receiving the land of Canaan. And the same is true for Isaac and Jacob. They lived that same sojourner's life, dwelling in tents. Never did they receive that land of Canaan as their inheritance. So it is that we see that by faith, Abraham 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.

Understand, beloved, Abraham's sojourn was possible only by faith, by faith which is the gift of God. Without faith, Abraham would not and could not sojourn in the land of promise. By nature, Abraham might have been inclined to return to Ur. By nature, Abraham might have attempted to conquer the land and set himself up as Lord in Canaan. By nature, Abraham might have built a fine city there and amalgamated himself with the Canaanites. Humanly speaking, the life of sojourning was impossible but Abraham did all this by faith. Abraham believed the promise of God, believing he was content to sojourn in that land.

But we might be inclined to ask then, did not Abraham then die sorely disappointed without any hope of the realization of the promise? God had told him that he would receive the land, but he never did. All his life, he merely sojourned in the land of promise. He was a stranger there. Abraham saw hardly a glimmering of fulfillment. Was not his faith in vain? Oh, no, for Abraham's faith looked for the heavenly. Our text tells us, "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Abraham knew that God's promise did not refer ultimately to that earthly land of Canaan. By faith, Abraham knew that when God said, "I will give you this land and to thy seed forever," God was not merely promising an earthly land. By faith, Abraham knew that the

promise did not refer simply to that land in which he sojourned. Abraham knew that the earthly Canaan was only a picture, a type of the heavenly land of Canaan. Abraham realized that the promise of God went far beyond that earthly land. In that earthly Canaan, Abraham saw only a shadow of the much more glorious heavenly inheritance and because of that, he could sojourn in the land of his inheritance, because of that, he could persevere in his faith.

Truly, Abraham's faith was the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. He looked for that heavenly city. Literally, the idea is that he awaited it or expected it. Abraham knew that the object of his expectation would truly be his. Abraham could not see that heavenly city. It was unseen. Only insofar as the earthly Canaan pointed to it, could he visualize the heavenly. Abraham could not see heaven from this side of the grave. Yet Abraham hoped for it and here the expectation, the element of expectation is on the foreground. He looked for that city. He expected it. He looked toward the future, anticipating it. Abraham was confident that that expectation would be realized. His looking for this city was not characterized by any doubt. He was certain that that city would be his and Abraham also longed for that city. It was not a mere wish on his part, but throughout his life of sojourning, he ardently desired that city. He had an intense longing for it.

Bearing all this in mind, consider the sharp contrast we have before us here. On the one hand, Abraham's sojourn in the land of promise, dwelling in tents, that life was characterized by loneliness. Abraham pitched his tents only temporarily, ready to leave, move to another location. Always he was a stranger, a foreigner in the land. Never did he possess the land or have a permanent abode there. But on the other hand, he looked for a city that hath foundations. There he was not a stranger but a citizen. There he could make himself at home. That city was something permanent, an abiding dwelling place. While his tent had no foundations whatsoever, this city had firm and enduring foundations.

What was this city? There are some who maintain that this city which Abraham expected was only the earthly city of Jerusalem. They want to say that Abraham couldn't really know anything of the heavenly. They insist that Abraham was merely looking forward to the time when he would no longer have to live in a tent, but he could live in the earthly city of Jerusalem. But certainly this cannot be the case for then, of course, Abraham's faith really was in vain, for he never personally lived in Jerusalem. In addition, the whole epistle to the Hebrews exactly repudiates the idea of an earthly Jerusalem and an earthly temple, pointing us to the better things that are spiritual and heavenly. Further, Abraham and all of God's people of the old dispensation surely lived and died in the hope of everlasting life and salvation in heaven. And finally, according to the last part of our text, God is the builder and maker of this city, and that was certainly not literally the case with the earthly Jerusalem.

This city for which Abraham looked was a city with foundations. That implies that this city was not something temporary or frail. It is the incorruptible inheritance of which the Apostle Peter speaks in 1 Peter 1. That implies that this city is permanent. It knows no fluctuations, feels no changes. It implies that this city never fears an assault. It can never

crumble and fall as do the cities of man. This was a city whose builder and maker was God. Literally, we read, whose artificer and builder is God. God is its artificer, that is, he designed it. He was its sovereign architect. And God was also its builder, the artisan, the one who actually framed the city. And that is, of course, the deepest reason for its abiding character.

This city, therefore, is the New Jerusalem. It is the heavenly city. That's the city whose builder and maker is God. And the city of the new Jerusalem is, of course, in a word, the church. The church is called the new or heavenly Jerusalem in scripture. In Galatians 4:26, we read, "Jerusalem, which is above, is free, which is the mother of us all." In Hebrews 12:22 and 23, Scripture tells us, "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly," notice, "and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." That's also playing from the amazing description of the New Jerusalem set before us in Revelation 21. There in the vision, the Apostle John was given to see the holy city, New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride, and the point is that the city is not a number of houses and buildings, but it is the living citizens, the people, who constitute the city; the church depicted as a city emphasizes the idea of communion and fellowship, something quite different from Abraham's lonely life of sojourning. The picture there in Revelation of this city presented in symbolic language still gives us only a glimmer of the true glory and splendor of it. That this city has foundations means, therefore, that it is a city founded in God's eternal decree. God's decree is the foundation of this city. Sovereign election makes this a firm and abiding city. God, as the architect, designs it in his eternal decree. God, as the builder, builds that city through Jesus Christ. Christ, after all, is at the heart of the promise. He is the chief cornerstone in that city and the work of regeneration in our hearts by his Spirit makes us citizens of that city, living stones of which the city is built.

This, beloved, was the motivation of Abraham's sojourn by faith. He looked for the everlasting glory of the church in the new heavens and the new earth, and with that faith, Abraham was content, perfectly content to sojourn all his life in the Promised Land. So what is the significance of Abraham's sojourn by faith? This is the calling of all God's people. We might be inclined to ask, why? Why did God require Abraham to sojourn his entire life? Why did God not immediately give him the land? Why did not God immediately fulfill his promise to Abraham? And correspondingly, why does God require us to sojourn here below? Could he not immediately give us our inheritance? Could he not immediately bring us to our heavenly home? And the answer is that God wanted Abraham and wants us to live by faith. God has determined every step of the way to our inheritance. Of course, in the days of old, Christ had to yet come and now we wait for his return upon the clouds of heaven. God will not bring about the final fulfillment of his promise until all the elect are saved. So what does it mean that we are called to sojourn? That we are called to sojourn here below does not mean that we must become isolationists. We are not to separate ourselves physically from all the inhabitants of this earth, perhaps on some distant island or in some corner of the Upper Peninsula. Abraham didn't do that. And that we are called to sojourn here below does not mean that we may not use the things of the world. We are not to separate ourselves from the things of the

world as such, the modern conveniences, for example. Abraham did not do that. But for us to sojourn means that we dwell beside, that we live in the earth as a stranger. We live as foreigners in this earth. We live here not as citizens spiritually of this world, but as citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

We live in the midst of this world just as Abraham lived in the midst of the land of Canaan, but we are not of the world. This means that we will live antithetically here below. Again, it doesn't mean that we turn our backs on the things of this world. Things in themselves are good creatures of God, but we would strive to use all things in the service of God and unto his glory and we would strive to walk in holiness, seeking that which is good and hating and fleeing from that which is evil. More specifically, that we sojourn here as strangers in the land means that we are different, just as Abraham was different. We are not conformed unto this world, but transformed from it. We, too, speak a different language, spiritually speaking. We sing different songs, the songs of Zion. We worship a different God, the God of scripture, not the idols of pleasure, of sex, of sports, of fame, of wealth. We have different attitudes and goals than does the unbelieving world and that must be seen by everyone around us. Can your neighbors, do your co-workers see the difference? The world must see that we are spiritual tent dwellers. In our day, camping is extremely popular. As you no doubt know, the campgrounds are filled with tents and trailers of campers. The question is, are we spiritual tent dwellers? The world must see that we are not citizens here, this is not really our home. Is that true of us? Does the world call us Abraham, the Hebrew, the man from the other side? Do people take note of us as was done with respect to Peter and John in the early church and perceive that we have been with Jesus? Do we live in tents spiritually or in houses with foundations?

Beloved, for us too, only by faith can we sojourn here below as spiritual pilgrims and strangers. By nature, we don't sojourn. We're inclined by nature to conform with the world around us, and we would speak their language, and we'd sing their songs, and we'd join in their entertainments, we'd worship their gods and have their goals, pleasure, mammon. By nature, we'd be citizens here below, and we'd build our houses and cities, make a name and a place for ourselves here, we'd mix and mingle with the world of unbelief. But by faith, we too take hold of the promise of our God; that promise which is essentially Christ, becomes the important thing. Yea, with Paul, we count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, our Lord. By God's grace, through faith we receive all the benefits of salvation. We are made sojourners here below, citizens of the kingdom of heaven. By his grace, we too look for that city which hath foundations. We expect it. We know that it's ours as his children. We are certain we shall receive it. We live in anticipation of that day. So let us walk as pilgrims in the spirit of contentment day by day. In true faith, may we strive to be manifest as strangers, counting our days in true faith. Let us look for that city which hath foundations. May our confession be that of Hebrews 13:14, "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." And in that faith, we shall surely receive our glorious inheritance. Amen.

Most merciful and gracious heavenly Father, we come unto thee mindful that we are yet so carnally minded, inclined to love this world and the things of this world which are passing away. Be merciful unto us. Work by thy Spirit that more and more we may be

conformed to the image of Christ and seek the things which are above, that city that has foundations, whose builder and maker thou art. May thy kingdom come. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.